

# Cancun, Mexico

By Amy Henderson, Willamette International Travel

April, 2008

The first four nights we stayed at Paradisus Riviera Cancun Resort, a luxury 5-star all inclusive resort with all the bells and whistles, absolutely gorgeous and accommodating. We were met on arrival at Cancun by Hotel Beds the ground operator for Happy Vacations. A very friendly young man with Hotel Beds walked us to where the van would pick us up, gave us a coupon booklet and wrote down the name/phone number of a guy to call for transfers or tours, although we didn't use him. The drive to Paradisus, located in Puerto Morelos is about 20mins. The resort is beautiful, tons of marble, huge floral bouquets and very well laid out with good signage. We barely heard a sole when we were in our room, not even a door being shut or faint voices. The beach fronting the resort is absolutely dreamy with ultra soft white sand and turquoise water. From the reading I did ahead of time I was expecting a lot of sea grass in the water and on the beaches in Puerto Morelos but I was pleasantly surprised that was not the case. From Paradisus you can walk on the beach forever in each direction and hardly come in contact with anyone. For how huge the resort is and the ones all around you'd think there would be more people on the beach, but I found that the pool areas are where everyone gather and hang out for the day, not the beach. Paradisus offer those Bali Beds around the pool which are very popular so people were out bright and early to 'claim' their Bali bed or lounge chair with their stuff before continuing into the restaurant for breakfast.

For breakfast your options are room service or the Caribbean Market Place buffet. We ate in the Market Place every morning and found a variety of good food and Mimosa's (refill please)!. For lunch the options are room service, Caribbean Market Place buffet or The Reef Grill with table service. There was always more than enough to choose from in the Market Place buffet. The Reef Grill is an outside venue overlooking the beach/sea serving appetizer type food from a small menu, unfortunately the same items everyday. You have to make a reservation for lunch at The Reef Grill, but this can be done the same day you'd like to eat there, no advance reservation necessary. For dinner, reservations are not required in the Caribbean Market Place serving buffet style but to experience the a la carte restaurants; Sumire (Japanese), The Reef Grill (steak and seafood), L'Hermitage (French), Capri (Mediterranean) and Tequila (Mexican Specialties) reservations are required and should be made ASAP to get the restaurants you wish. We made all of our dinner reservations on Wed morning (we arrived just Tue night) and had to take what was left as the restaurants we chose were all booked. But with that said, ALL food was superb and presentation amazing. The service was above and beyond in each restaurant including the buffet. For dinner we experience the Caribbean Market Place buffet, L'Hermitage French food and Capri Mediterranean dishes plus one night we ate at the Mexican show/buffet.



Beach at Paradisus, Puerto Morelos

Wed & Thur were complete R&R days, we did not leave the resort.

I had reserved the car ahead and there was a Europcar desk right at the resort so pick up was easy. There was a minimum 3 day rental so they delivered it to us on Thursday afternoon. Friday we drove the Cancun resort strip, Kukulcan Blvd. It's very congested in this area, all the resorts seem to be right on top of each other, lots of traffic and noise, I'd much rather stay out of Cancun. Puerto Morelos, where Paradisus is a good location where you're just 20 mins from Cancun should you wish to take advantage of the nightlife/shopping. Speaking of shopping Paradisus provided a free 'shopping shuttle' to Cancun in the am and would pick up in the afternoon. We did stop and chat with a representative at Dreams Cancun and took a tour of the property. Good location on the Cancun strip at the bend so the resort has two beaches, one has heavy surf crashing onto the beach, not swimmer friendly and the other is VERY swimmer friendly but on a skinny beach with rows of lounge chairs which made it feel crowded. Delphinus (swim w/ dolphins) is located on-site. So for those who wish to swim with dolphins will appreciate it being right on site and as a bonus you get to see dolphins everyday at the resort in their own saltwater lagoon/pool. Beautiful spa.

After returning to our resort for lunch/swim we set out for Playa del Carmen just 30 minutes or so South of Puerto Morelos. I found Playa del Carmen to be very laid back and I liked the pedestrian only streets which there are three and they go on forever with shop upon shop upon restaurant upon bar upon hotel. It seemed to me a bit of hippy/artsy community with people who stay long periods of time. We spent a couple hours walking around and on the beach and I really liked the feel of the area.

We did rent a car and drive to Chichen Itza early Saturday morning. We got up and out of the resort about 7am for the 2.5hrs drive to Piste, where Chichen is located. There are 2 tolls between Cancun and Piste. One is currently 202pesos and the other is 50pesos so roughly \$25USD one-way in tolls, \$50 round-trip. There is also the option of taking the old highway for free (no tolls) to/from Chichen but it takes twice as long because you go through numerous towns and over many speed bumps.

Be sure to have a full tank of magna as gas stations are very scarce once out of Cancun. When we arrived Chichen around 930am we immediately toured the site to beat the heat of the day and the crowds of tourists that we had heard come in by the bus loads around 10-11am. It took us a few hours to walk the entire complex, read all the plaques, take pictures etc. We did not hire a



Chichen Itza

guide, but there were plenty of them offering their services for a fee at the entrance. A guide is absolutely not necessary if you've done a bit of reading before hand and follow the map that's provided. There are a few gift shops with beverages and snacks throughout the complex should you need. There are plenty of handicrafts for sale throughout the complex. There is a Sound and Light show at 8pm each evening included in the cost of your ticket which we took advantage of. The show was about 30mins or so and they rented out headphones for approx. \$2 so you could understand the commentary.

After touring the complex we drove just a couple miles to Villa Arqueologica for our last night. Villa Arqueologica is located in Piste near the back entrance to Chichen Itza. Until last November this property was used by Club Med We enjoyed our stay here a lot. It's was very charming with a friendly staff and great food. Villa Arqueologica was very quiet compared to the huge Riviera/Cancun resorts most would be coming from. Rooms were very much Club Med style still with just two beds (one twin, one slightly larger both connected to walls) no TV or phone but good a/c, safe, huge walk in shower with new tiles. The center of the property has a very inviting pool, restaurant, bar and leftover from the Club Med days a biblioteca with tons of ready material on Mexico. All the rooms open up to this center courtyard.

The property is within walking distance to a back entrance to Chichen which is where we re-entered later in the afternoon to do some shopping and then re-entered again that night for the sound and light show. We very much enjoyed this property. I would not hesitate encouraging folks who visit Chichen to stay the night so they can take advantage of the sound and light show. The complex can be easily viewed in 3hrs or so but if you stay the night then you can go back your hotel to relax/eat lunch/swim then return to take pics or do some shopping. I think the complex closed between 5-8P then re-opened for the sound and light show.

The weather was hot, but there was a nice cool breeze most days, not unbearable at all.