



HISTORY & OVERVIEW

Cozumel (co-zoo-MEL), Mexico's largest inhabited island, is also one of the country's biggest paradoxes. Serene, laid-back and somewhat undiscovered by Mexico's 20 million annual visitors, Cozumel rivals many Caribbean island destinations for visitor facilities, activities, and stunning beauty.

Yet until recently, the island has been best known as a cruise ship port-of-call and mecca for hard-core scuba divers. Cozumel is now shedding some of its "divers only" reputation and making strides in attracting more mainstream international guests. The majority of the island's 300,000 annual visitors are now families, ecotourists, honeymooners, and Yucatan-bound visitors that find nearby Cancún a bit overwhelming.

Cozumel's appeal lies with its combination of the best of Mexico (friendly people, affordable prices, great dining/shopping, interesting cultural sightseeing) with the allure of vacationing on a Caribbean island. This mix makes Cozumel one of Mexico's most unique destinations, offering a hard-to-find vacation duality.

In the last five years, the island benefited from improved air service (both charter and scheduled), a tremendous increase in cruise ship visits (bringing 1.2 million annual day-only visitors), a bevy of spiffy new resort developments, and a robust assortment of dining, shopping and sports options. Cozumel now has world-class facilities to complement its legendary beauty and laid-back atmosphere.

The jewel-shaped, flat-as-a-pancake island lies just 19 km off the Yucatán Coast, and measures 48 km long and 16 km wide. Its jungle-clad interior and ivory white beaches are girdled by one of the most spectacular ensembles of coral reefs in this hemisphere. The island's limestone shore is surrounded by temperate, crystal clear waters which range from stunning turquoise to deep indigo.

The area's diving and snorkeling are legendary. Following a 1961 documentary by Jacques Cousteau, Cozumel earned a worldwide following of divers who ranked it one of the top five scuba diving and snorkeling sites on the planet. The island's surrounding sea is teeming with undersea life, colorful reefs, and the slumbering hulls of Spanish galleons.

For non-divers, the island has something for everyone (in fact, only 30% of visitors are divers). Sightseeing includes over 35 archaeological sites (only a few of which are accessible and worth seeing), and the charming city of **San Miguel** (population 70,000). The town is a hodgepodge of cafes, restaurants, and attractive boutiques. It encircles the main plaza, and extends several blocks along the city's breezy seaside promenade.

Nature lovers come to Cozumel to see giant sea turtles laying their eggs (May to September) and to observe the island's variety of exotic migratory bird life. Visitors are only a 40-minute ferry ride from the incredible Riviera Maya region of the Yucatán Peninsula (see **Riviera Maya** chapter for details), brimming with hidden beaches, secluded resorts and archaeological treasures.

Large numbers of daytrippers from Cancún and cruise ship passengers sometimes overtake the city proper, only to retreat a few hours later. (Cozumel is the world's 7th most popular cruise port. Wednesday is busiest; Sundays there are no arrivals.) Cozumel really shines after this retreat, as the island's bountiful man-made and natural attractions can be leisurely explored.

Cozumel's history is a unique collage of epic episodes of outside confrontation interspersed with long periods of total obscurity. The island boasts a rich Mayan heritage, and was settled as early as 300 A.D. It later flourished as a commercial port for Mayan sea trade and as a ceremonial center. Cortés landed here in 1519 en route to his conquest of the Mexican mainland. Later, the island's coves provided sanctuary for marauding pirates.

Interestingly, the growth in popularity of chewing gum in the U.S. led to the island's resurgence in the 19th century. Cozumel was a port-of-call on the chicle (gum) export route from Central America. During WWII, a U.S. Air Force base was built from which the Allies launched aircraft to hunt for German U-boats.

The island's lodging (around 4,150 total units) has been significantly upgraded in the last five years. While there is still a wide assortment of budget 3-star properties and rustic bungalow-style hotels, the entrance of Allegro Resorts, Meliá, Plaza Las Glorias and

others has put a new gleam on the island's once bohemian veneer. Several resorts have recently converted to the all-inclusive theme.

Hotels and resorts are scattered along Cozumel's long western coastline with San Miguel near the midpoint. In the town there are a few two- and three-star properties, catering mostly to budget travelers and divers. Fortunately, massive resort development is limited by a lack of potable water and a desire to protect the island's delicate ecosystem. This helps keep island life simple, while somewhat limiting the island's land-based activities. Note: An 18-hole golf course/residential development is underway near the Paradisus Resort.

While Cozumel pre-dated Cancún as the Yucatán Peninsula's first resort area, and rests a mere 56 km from its big sister resort, it can't hold a candle to Cancún in terms of grandiose development. However, the island has nothing to apologize for, and is the hands-down favorite for vacationers seeking a serene Caribbean island vacation.



TRANSPORTATION

ARRIVING & DEPARTING

Airport Name:

Cozumel International Airport; code CZM.

Location:

3 km northeast of San Miguel.

Facilities:

The airport has an upstairs restaurant/bar, souvenir shops, and rental car/tour counters.

GETTING AROUND

From the airport, frequent **van transfers** are available at reasonable rates. **Rental cars** are also available at the airport and at many hotel locations.

Airport Transfer Rates to most hotels:

\$8.50 US per person. The return trip to the airport will cost about \$12 US per vehicle.

To get around the area, affordable taxis run regularly. Average fare from the hotel zone to San Miguel is about \$4 US. The entire island has essentially one road. It stretches from the northern tip of the island and hugs the western shore before looping around the southern tip and returning to San Miguel. Consider renting a car, since cab fares add up quickly.

Extensive road construction was undertaken in '99. By year's end a new highway will lead south from San Miguel, while the old road will be used exclusively for pedestrian, bicycle, and moped traffic.

Since most hotels are strewn several miles to the north and south of town, you may want to consider renting a **car** or **moped**. mopeds can be rented by the hour or day (\$25-30 US per day). There are also bikes

for rent by the hour, either in town or at the cruise ship pier south of town.

FERRIES

☛ **Cozumel / Playa del Carmen**

45 minute ferry crossing 8-10 times daily; fare is \$73 pesos/person, each way. Hourly departures from 4am to 11pm.

☛ **Cozumel / Puerto Morelos**

A car ferry operates once daily to this port 36 kilometers south of Cancún. Fare is \$735 pesos per vehicle, 55 pesos per person. Tel. 9-872-0827.

There is also inexpensive, frequent AIR SERVICE between Cozumel and Cancún via **Aero Cozumel** and **Aero Caribe**. The flight takes just 18 minutes. Contact Mexicana Airlines for details. Aeroferinco offers flights to Chichén Itzá, Flores, and Palenque. Tel. 9-872-1781. ☛

EXCURSIONS

Beyond the island's waterside activities (diving, snorkeling, swimming, windsurfing), there's plenty to see and do away from the shore. Since only about 6% of Cozumel's territory has any development, exploration centers on natural attractions (beaches, lagoons, jungle-like forests), Mayan archaeological sites, and the relaxed city of San Miguel.

The island's Mayan archaeological sites and beaches can be seen easily in a day. There are also some "must-see" attractions on the mainland across from Cozumel. (See the Riviera Maya chapter in this Guide for details.)

SAN MIGUEL

This colorful, relaxed town is the island's center of attraction. Its classic grid layout makes navigating easy. People congregate around the **Plaza del Sol**, the city's seaside main square. The square, surrounded by pedestrian-only walkways, has benches, shade trees, a stone gazebo and a tall white clock tower with turquoise accents.

The usual assortment of T-shirt shops, cafes, jewelry stores, arts and crafts shops fan out from the Plaza. Most of the island's eateries are here, offering something for every taste and budget. Several well-stocked duty-free shops line the *malecón*, Cozumel's seaside promenade. The malecón makes for pleasant morning or evening strolls past fountains and statues. By midday the town is brimming with cruise ship passengers and sightseers from Cancún.

Evenings, the city comes to life once again when town residents and visitors shop, dine and stroll. Sunday evenings are extra special. The city's families congregate around the main square for casual conversation, people watching, and an occasional children's skit or musical performance. Mornings tend to be a quieter time, when day-to-day village life unfolds. The island's residents, most of

them born and raised here, are cheerful, friendly and easy going. A subtle indigenous flair drapes the city, as many residents are of Mayan descent.

MUSEUM OF THE ISLAND OF COZUMEL

Located in downtown San Miguel, this attractive two-story museum is housed in a former turn-of-the-century hotel. It offers a complete overview of the island's anthropological and cultural history. Dioramas portray the island's wildlife, native vegetation, reefs and undersea critters.

More than a museum, the facility serves as the island's cultural center, offering Mayan language instruction, artisan demonstrations and live drama. Admission is 30 pesos; open 8am-5pm daily except Saturdays. (Tel. 9-872-1434) An upstairs cafe offers sweeping views of the Caribbean.

CHANKANAAB PARK

Completely rebuilt and restored in 1996, this beachfront park, just 9 km south of San Miguel, offers diverse attractions in a lovely setting. The main beach is studded with palapas for sunbathers, while just off shore there's outstanding diving and snorkeling

COZUMEL INFO

State Tourism Office,
San Miguel

Tel. 9-872-0972

Fax. 9-872-0972

Hotel Association

Tel. 9-872-3132

Fax. 9-872-2809

www.islacozumel.com.mx

www.cozumel-hotels.net

www.cozumel.net

EXCURSIONS CONTINUES

(equipment rental and dive shop available). Back from shore is a fascinating Archaeological Park, complete with winding jungle trails, replicas from sites throughout Mexico, a typical Mayan village, mini-golf, and free guided tours. There's also an excellent Botanical Garden with over 300 plant species from 22 countries. Topping things off is the site's beautiful lagoon - a sinkhole filled from the sea by underground tunnels. A dolphin encounter program and a new sea lion discovery program is here, along with a new sea lion show (tel. 9-872-6605; www.dolphin-discovery.com). Enjoy lunch at La Laguna restaurant. There are several shops, snack bars, and a Mayan museum. Open daily. Admission is \$10 US (children are free).

PUNTA SUR

Continuing further south from Chankanaab, you'll pass several idyllic beaches en route to land's end (see below). Take a short detour off the main highway (at the Punta Sur sign), past a guard post and into this beautiful **ecological reserve**. The dirt roads runs for 4 km past deserted beaches (swimming conditions can be hazardous), mangroves, and even a small Mayan temple (Templo del Caracol). The road ends at a tall slender lighthouse. Just beyond the lighthouse is **Laguna Colombia**. This little-visited saltwater lagoon is stunningly beautiful. The Punta Sur Ecological Reserve opened its second phase in March 2001. The facility features a new, 30-foot observation tower. Visitors interested in learning more about turtles and their nesting season can visit Punta Sur's South Point Camp, which opened in May 2001. Punta Sur also offers learning programs for \$25 per person; it's free for children under age 8.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

The island's scattered, crumbling sites are testimony to Cozumel's role as a Mayan ceremonial and commercial center. Most sites are small, low-to-the-ground square buildings (don't expect giant pyramids).

☛ **EL CEDRAL:** Just beyond Playa San Francisco, a paved highway heads inland 3.5 km. to this, the oldest structure on the island. Traces of original Mayan wall paintings are visible.

☛ **SAN GERVASIO:** the island's best- preserved, most-visited site. The site is a group of

small shrines and temples honoring Ix-Chel, the Mayan goddess of medicine, corn, weaving, love, and fertility. Take the trans-island road heading east from San Miguel. Turn left at the small sign and head north about 9.5 km

OTHER ACTIVITIES

☛ There are **catamaran cruises** on board the El Zorro, a 48-foot long vessel, tel. 9-872-0725, sail with Fury Catamarans, tel. 9-872-5145; glass bottom boat tours, tel. 9-872-1379; or the Sub Sea Explorer, tel. 9-872-1210.

☛ **Jungle Safari Jeep Tours:** backroads tour of the island's lesser known beaches, jungles and archaeological sites. Tel. 9-872-6579.

☛ A new day spa, the **Spa Caribbean Massage**, tel. 9-878-7228, offers massage, manicures, sauna/steam, facials, wraps and full wet-spa treatments. American owned and operated; open daily from 9am-8pm. (Located at the Allegro Resort.)

☛ **Tarzan Tours:** jungle, beach, and eco-tours with dune buggies. Tel. 9-872-0788.

☛ **Atlantis Submarines:** dive in safety and comfort to depths of 150 feet! A rare underwater treat for non-divers. \$70 US per person for a 45-minute ride.

☛ **Ecotur Caribe:** offers a variety of interesting adventures - jungle tours, camp outs, and other informative excursions. Tel. 9-872-1750; www.ecoturcaribe.com

☛ **Aquaworld:** Cozumel's "water kingdom" has submarine rides, diving, yacht charters, and parasailing. Tel. 9-872-1210; www.aquaworldcozumel.com

OFF THE ISLAND

If you want even more activities, or island fever puts you in the mood to look around, head to the mainland via a 40-minute ferry ride to Playa del Carmen. From there you can rent a car and head out exploring the area's sites and hidden beaches. You are within an hour's drive of the amazing archaeological site at Tulum and Cobá. (See Riviera Maya chapter for details.)

SPORTS & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Water sports dominate the scene here, as there are no golf courses, and only a few tennis courts. Some change is inevitable, however: A new Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course is under development for a 2001 debut.

GOLF

ClubCorp is again leading the pack by bringing the best names in golf to Cozumel Island. ClubCorp (CCLA), The Nicklaus Design Group and Diamond Golf Construction are literally chiseling a championship golf course from the rock and coral that is Cozumel. Cozumel Country Club, a \$12 million project, will be the ecological model for all future golf development in the Yucatán. From pulverizing rock into bunker sand to hewing trees into lumber for a bridge through a mangrove swamp, this project is an environmental gem. The course should be open Fall of 2001. It will be 6,847 yards, contain a large pro shop. Green fees are expected to range from \$85-110 U.S. Tel: 9-872-6360 or cozumelcc@sybcom.com

BEACHES

Cozumel's beaches vary from scalloped bays and inlets to wide wind-swept swathes of powdery sand. The calm waters of the western (leeward) side of the island are ideal for swimming, snorkeling, windsurfing, and sunbathing. The desolate, eastern (windward) shore is lashed by waves and steady winds, although there are some lovely escarpments and bays safe for swimming. South of San Miguel there are several beach clubs offering simple seafront dining, sports equipment rental, beach chairs and palapas. Check out Playa Sol, Playa San Francisco, Playa Maya and Playa Palancar (see below).

WESTERN SHORE
(Listed north to south)

☞ **PLAYA SAN JUAN:** To the north of the Meliá Hotel, this family favorite has plenty of shade, calm water, excellent windsurfing, and restaurants.

☞ **CHANKANAAB BAY:** This popular full-service beach invites divers and snorkelers to explore the area's limestone shoreline caves. This is the island's prime snorkeling turf;

excellent facilities for swimmers and non-swimmers, include Chankanaab Lagoon and Botanical Gardens (see previous page). Head to La Laguna restaurant for lunch.

☞ **PLAYA SAN FRANCISCO:** Cozumel's best beach stretches 3.5 km along the island's southwestern shore. A favorite with locals and dive boats exploring the offshore reef, the beach has plenty of activity at several palapa restaurants and bars. Popular for lunch.

☞ **PLAYA PALANCAR:** located far to the south and opposite the famous Palancar Reef, this beach offers plenty of sand, calm water, and seclusion. A palapa restaurant and dive shop are the only facilities.

☞ **PLAYA ESCONDIDA:** the island's "escapist" beach is a sanctuary for those wanting privacy and willing to give up a few amenities. Located at Punta Sur.

EASTERN SHORE

☞ **PLAYA CHEN RIO:** Resting near the end of the trans-island road, this beach is protected by a wall of rocks, keeping the water calm. Very quiet and secluded.

☞ **PLAYA CHIQUERO:** The eastern shore's best beach, Chiquero is a protected crescent-shaped cove, ideal for swimming, windsurfing, and sunbathing.

☞ **BALNEARIO MUNICIPAL:** this new public beach facility offers palapas, a snack shop, lockers and showers. Good swimming conditions.

DIVING

About 80,000 of the island's annual visitors come for one thing: the area's incomparable scuba diving. With over 30 kilometers of reefs, water visibility to 200 feet, and over 200 species of tropical fish, Cozumel is considered by many the finest dive destination in the Western Hemisphere. Water temperatures range from summer highs in the low 80's (F) to winter highs in the low 70's (F).

Cozumel offers nearly 40 dive sites and has more than 100 dive operators. More

than 50 dive shops operate on the island, offering advanced dives and beginner instruction. Pick up a copy of *Diving and Snorkeling Guide to Cozumel* by George Lewbel and Larry Martin, available at shops in town. The area's dive shops have formed a cooperative. Look for shops displaying the "C.A.D.O." sticker. These are the island's most reputable operators.

Cozumel is the "drift diving" capital of the world. Its constant, south-to-north water current allows divers to jump from the boat, explore the dive site while drifting with the current, and ascend to find the boat waiting for them at the surface.

In 1999 the Cozumel Reefs National Marine Park (encompassing about 85% of the island's dive sites) implemented a conservation program funded by \$2.00 donations by divers.

Popular sites include **Paraiso Reef, Chankanaab Caves and Reef, Colombia Reef, San Francisco Reef, Santa Rosa Wall, Maracaibo Reef, and Palancar Reef.** Several U.S. and Canadian tour operators sell all-inclusive dive packages. (See Sec. III-17 for listing.) Most local tour operators are members of ANOAAT, a local water sports/marine protection agency, tel. 9-872-5955; fax. 9-872-5966; www.cozumel-diving.net/anoaat

SNORKELING

Many of Cozumel's best spots are within splashing distance from shore. Equipment rentals are available throughout the island (\$5-8 U.S./day) The western side of the island is dotted with dozens of excellent sites. Here are a few suggestions...

☞ **CHANKANAAB PARK:** teeming with fish and calm, clear water; several limestone caves and tunnels make for great fun.

☞ **LA CEIBA BEACH:** a sunken aircraft wreck lies 150 yards off shore in about 25 feet of water, home to a plethora of colorful fish, coral, and sponges.

☞ **PLAYA SAN FRANCISCO:** calm water and close-to-shore undersea delights. This beach has full-service amenities (dining, equipment rentals).

SPORTS & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES CONTINUES

Full-day and half-day snorkeling excursions can be easily arranged upon arrival, and often include equipment and lunch. For non-snorkelers there are glass-bottom boat trips, arranged at most resort hotels.

FISHING

The area's exceptional diving overshadows Cozumel's excellent fishing. Billfish, including marlin and sailfish, are caught within 1/2 km of shore (season: March through

June). Dorado, bonita, barracuda, amberjack and wahoo are caught year-round. Most excursions leave from the **Club Abrigo Náutico de Cozumel**, located north of town near the airport. A popular billfish tournament comes to the island every May.

LOCAL FISHING FLEET OPERATOR

Cozumel Angler's Fleet
Tel. 9-872-0118 Fax. 9-872-1135

OTHER WATER SPORTS

Windsurfing, sailing, jetskiing and waterskiing are also popular on the island's western shore. Nearly all resorts have water sports rentals. **Playa San Francisco**, **Playa del Sol**, and **Playa Palancar** all offer a wide range of water sports equipment.

SHOPPING

San Miguel's waterfront boulevard (the malecón) and the main plaza are the centers of Cozumel's shopping. Thanks to the island's duty-free status and discriminating cruise ship clientele, Cozumel has well-stocked stores selling quality Mexican and imported items. An island specialty is exquisite **black coral jewelry**. Please note that Cozumel adheres to the regulations for preservation of black coral, and gently harvests this resource.

Centro Comercial Joaquin: modern store with department store inventory.

Chachi: handicrafts, T-shirts, liquor and Cuban cigars. Good selection.

Cinco Soles: large selection of jewelry, pottery, glassware, embroidered clothing. On the waterfront.

Comercial Caribe: Mexican handicrafts from every region of Mexico. Downtown next to Plaza Villamar.

Diamond Creations: fabulous custom jewelry designs; mountings while you wait.

Galeria Alexander: original ceramic figures, similar to work of Sergio Bustamante.

Jewel Port: specializing in diamonds and fake gemstones.

Mexican Handicraft Market: big variety of souvenirs from all over Mexico.

Mi Casa: quality Mexican-made items for the home including non-lead ceramic tableware.

PAMA: imported perfume and fine gifts. Downtown on malecón.

Plaza del Sol Mall: a two-story mini mall featuring jewelry and craft items.

A Touch of Gold: fine gems, gold designs.

Van Cleef & Arpels: fine jewelry, featuring original designs. (Not affiliated with the Paris/New York stores.)

DINING & NIGHT LIFE

Like shopping, dining centers around San Miguel. Expect casual atmosphere and friendly service. The island's 90-plus restaurants and cafes cater to every budget and taste. There is a surprising variety of ethnic dining, from Italian to French and Lebanese to Japanese. Most menus are in U.S. dollars (to accommodate cruise passengers).

El Acuario: oceanfront seafood dining; large saltwater aquariums and tanks. 5-stars! AAA: ♦♦

El Arrecife: Italian and Mediterranean cuisine; ocean views. Presidente Inter-Continental Hotel. AAA: ♦♦♦♦

La Cabaña del Pescador: tropical garden atmosphere; live lobster.

El Capi Navegante: locals' favorite for seafood.

Carlos 'n Charlie's: party atmosphere; very good American and Mexican food. AAA: ♦

Casa Denis: since 1945; serving family-style dishes (no menu).

La Choza: the island's best Mayan-Mexican food.

Ernesto's Fajitas: the original fajitas factory; open since 1985. Downtown at the pier.

El Estadio: big screen TV and burgers.

El Foco: authentic Mexican Tacos.

Guido's: outdoor patio dining features pizza, lasagna, calzone.

Hard Rock Cozumel: American fare with quality and consistency. Store sells all the Hard Rock paraphernalia.

Joe's Lobster House: great live music and seafood.

Morgan's: nautical mahogany and brass, candlelight setting; international menu. A long established tradition.

Las Palmeras: a long-time favorite that's always busy; at the pier downtown.

Plaza Leza: international dining at sidewalk tables near the main plaza.

Pepe's Grill: great ocean views to match the extensive menu of seafood, steaks and Mexican dishes.

Pancho's Backyard: gourmet patio dining and tasty Mexican favorites. On the waterfront inside the Cinco Soles store.

Prima: Northern Italian cuisine with pasta, seafood, homemade bread.

DINING & NIGHT LIFE CONTINUES

Santiago's Grill: grilled beef, chicken, seafood plus fun atmosphere.

Sonora Grill: fajitas, tacos, steak, seafood; moderate prices.

Tony Rome Steakhouse: Texas-style ribs, steak and music.

EVENING ENTERTAINMENT begins and ends early in Cozumel, compared to the rest of Mexico. Restaurants are full by 8pm; discos wind down by midnight. Top disco is **Neptuno**. For more "lively" entertainment, **Platino's** offers exotic dancers who perform to disco music. Live tropical music is easy to find in

many hotel lobbies. **El Caribeño** at the Presidente Hotel has a live Marimba band and a trio. **Joe's Salsa Café** offers dancing to lively salsa and reggae music; live bands. The **Hard Rock Cafe** and **Carlos 'n Charlies** are other favorites.

LODGING

Cozumel's relatively small offering of hotels (just over 35 properties and approximately 4,150 units of lodging) has been upgraded significantly in the last few years. New deluxe properties have opened and many older hotels have undergone redecorating and renovations. In fact, in '98-'99 a total of \$12 million was invested in renovations and expansions. In 2000 an additional 240 units were added (Allegro Grand and Iberostar properties). The all-inclusive theme is also taking hold.

All hotels are in one of three areas: north of San Miguel (mostly older but refurbished properties on the beach); in San Miguel (two- and three-star inns with limited amenities, but bargain prices); or south of San Miguel (mostly newer deluxe properties and older, renovated hotels, either on the beach or just across the highway). All properties are along the island's western (leeward) shore.

LODGING SOURCES

Cozumel Central Reservations
1-800-327-2254

VILLAS/CONDOS FOR RENT
Casa Cozumel Vacations
Tel. 9-872-2259 Fax. 9-872-3058
Cozumel Vacation Villas
1-800-224-5551
Mexico Accommodations
1-800-262-4500
Solsierra Destinations
1-800-400-3333

Special Category

Playa Azul Beach & Golf Resort SE

The Playa Azul was purchased by a professional couple from Mexico City who completely renovated the hotel in 1999, adding guest rooms, room amenities, and a new beach front pool. The result is an intimate and charming 50 room hotel run with a personal touch. Four master suites offer living rooms and balcony Jacuzzis. Twelve one bedroom suites sleep up to 6 people. The 34 hotel rooms provide ocean or partial ocean views. All rooms and suites offer balconies or terraces, safe deposit box, telephone, air conditioning and ceiling fans, a small refrigerator, and a coffee-maker with coffee. Units have either King beds or two double beds and the one bedroom suites also have 2 single beds in the living room. Guests can enjoy a library, TV/VCR lounge with videos, game room, on-site scuba shop with dive boats departing from the hotel pier, gourmet indoor restaurant and casual beach front restaurant, indoor sports bar and beach front palapa bar. The Nicklaus-designed Cozumel Country Club is across the street and opens in 2001.

Reservations: 1-800-400-3333
www.solsierra.com

FIVE STAR

☆☆☆☆ Allegro Resort Cozumel

All inclusive. South of San Miguel on San Francisco Beach near Palancar Reef, this newer resort includes 300 villa-style units in 2-story palapa-covered buildings scattered about the landscaped grounds along the decorative tile walkways. All rooms are air-conditioned, have tile floors, peach colored walls, combination baths, and feature cable TV, and a hammock on the terrace. Two pools (one with swim-up bar), four restaurants, four bars, dining room, 4 lighted tennis courts, all water sports. Price includes all meals and bar, nightly entertainment, water sports, and tennis clinics. Children's program. Full-service spa (extra fees apply), amphitheater stage area for evening entertainment. Exchange privileges at sister property in Playacar. B'92/R'98

Reservations: 1-800-858-2258
www.allegroresorts.com

☆☆☆☆ El Cid La Ceiba Beach Hotel

Catering almost exclusively to divers, this high rise property is located about 3 km south of San Miguel very near the cruise ship pier. It was acquired by Mazatlán based El Cid Hotels in 2001. 113 rooms are equipped with beige tile floors, pale floral bedspreads, solid curtains, heavy wood furniture, combination bath, cable TV, mini-bars, and all ocean views. Main building is a plain, 12-story tower, flanked by a 3-story wing, but grounds are well kept and beach features an underwater snorkeling trail off shore. Two ocean view restaurants, lighted tennis court, weight room, diving and snorkeling facilities (Del Mar Aquatics). Two large square pools with swim-up bar and sea side jacuzzi. Sandy terrace compensates for lack of beach. Children's program. Wheelchair access. Meeting space for 100. B'78, Tower '83/R'88

Reservations: 1-800-525-1925
www.elcid.com

☆☆☆☆ Coral Princess Club

Located on a small beach on the north end of town, the Coral Princess Club is a newer deluxe property. Two 9-story, beachfront highrises (one opened Dec. '95) have 139 rooms, including 39 suites with kitchens. Decor is modern with white and bright tropical color scheme, terrazzo floors throughout, teal and white wicker in the bedrooms, marble combination baths. Most rooms have ocean view, balcony; all have phone and satellite TV. One restaurant, three bars, two pools, travel agency and dive shop, meeting facilities. Children's playground. Nice snorkeling beach. B'89/R'95

Reservations: 1-800-253-2702
www.coralprincess.com

☆☆☆☆ El Cozumeleño Beach Resort

All-inclusive. One of the island's old timers, but now passing the grade thanks to a 1999 facelift, El Cozumeleño offers beachfront rooms in a 5-story modern building 6.5 km. north of San Miguel, next to the Meliá. Most of 254 rooms have ocean views and a balcony or patio. Large rooms feature air-conditioning, tile floors, rattan furniture, peach and beige fabrics, colorful bedspreads, shower-only baths, cable TV. Free-form pool, children's pool amid pleasant landscaping. Very good beach. Three restaurants, three bars, tennis court. The hotel recently converted back to the EP format. Other EI

LODGING CONTINUES

Cozumelño Beach Resort continues...

facilities include a miniature golf course, complete health club, jacuzzi, a disco, and a complete game room, kids club. A good family choice. Property added 150 new rooms and expanded meeting facilities in 1999. B'72/R'99

Reservations: 1-800-437-3923
www.elcozumeleno.com

★★★★★ **Fiesta Americana****Cozumel Dive Resort**

(Formerly Holiday Inn) 7.5 kilometers south of town and close to Chankanaab Lagoon, this newer property lies across from a nice beach. The Cozumel Reef offers a large free-form pool with swim-up bar and palapa hut, and modern colonial architecture (now painted burnt orange and rust). 228 air-conditioned rooms are in a 7-story beachfront building across the street from beach and have tiled floors, contemporary painted furniture, floral fabrics, combination bath, and have ocean view and balconies, cable TV. Three restaurants, bar, lighted tennis court, windsurfing and sailing school, beach club, boutique, jogging trail, health club, excellent dive shop. 56 Mayan-style casita suites opened in 1996 catering to divers, honeymooners and visitors wanting seclusion. The jungle-shrouded casita suites offer private terrace with hammock and dive lockers. B'91/96/R'98

Reservations: 1-800-FIESTA 1
AAA Rating: ♦♦♦
www.fiestaamericana.com

★★★★★ **Iberostar Cozumel**

Located on 170 meters of white sand beach near Palancar Reef, this deluxe all-inclusive blends in with the ecology and environment with its low-rise thatched Mayan-style huts. 300 guest rooms are surrounded by lush gardens and are divided into 2 story, 8 room thatched huts with two queens or a king sized bed, garden and pool views, private terrace or balcony with hammock. All rooms have air conditioning, ceiling fan, bathroom with shower and hair dryer, satellite TV, mini-bar, direct dial phones, and in room safes. Two pools, a large free form pool and separate kiddie pool surrounded by palm trees and palapas. 4 restaurants (1 a la carte), 4 bars, 2 lighted tennis courts, beauty salon, fitness center, baby sitting, kid's club, daily entertainment includes Spanish classes, nightly entertainment include theme parties, live music and professional dancers, water sports, and dive center which offers certification courses. B'99

Reservations: 1-800 523-2274

★★★★★ **Paradisus Cozumel Beach & Golf Resort**

(All-inclusive) 5 km north of San Miguel is this, the northern-most of the island hotels. 147 rooms and one bedroom units set in older 12-story highrise ('72) and newer three-story wing. Lobby is impressive, furnishings tasteful. Location isolated and beach excellent. Rooms have terrazzo floors, muted floral fabrics, wicker and rattan furnishings, tiled combination baths, balconies (60% with ocean view), phones, and satellite TV. One large pool has

swim-up bar, second activities pool, two tennis courts, water sports facilities, 3 restaurants, 5 bars. Conference facilities. Rooms were redecorated in 2001 as part of a multi-million dollar expansion that added a specialty restaurant, a full-service health club, kid's club, and game room. One of the island's better all-inclusives, noted for good service and quality dining. B'72/R'01

Reservations: 1-888-341-5993
AAA Rating: ♦♦♦
www.solmelia.com

★★★★★ **Presidente Inter-Continental**

Six km south of San Miguel in an isolated setting on great snorkeling beach, the Presidente offers 253 rooms stretching along a full kilometer of shore. Accommodations are in a five-story building (standard rooms) or one of three 2-story wings (superior rooms). Lobby has marble floors and bright Mexican pink and blue accents. All rooms are large with marble floors, bright blue throw rugs, wood furnishings, white walls plus a bright pink accent wall, thick pink cotton Mexican fabrics, combination bath with make up mirror and hair dryer, balconies and mini-bars. Two restaurants (including a gourmet AAA 4-diamond winner), 2 bars, billiards, ping pong, lobby bar, pool, complete water sports, car rental and moped rentals, 2 lighted tennis courts, conference facilities. Hotel is the island's most upscale offering despite its advanced age. Sunken barge just off shore is snorkeling attraction. Enjoy live music and spectacular sunsets at seaside bar. B'69/R'99

Reservations: 1-800-327-0200
AAA Rating: ♦♦♦♦
www.interconti.com

FOUR STAR

★★★★ **B & B Caribo**

Popular since day one, the Caribo offers 12 rooms (the American owners live on site) in a quiet residential neighborhood, just a 10 minute walk to the beach. This 2-story home offers at least two double beds in each room sleeping up to four guests. All rooms except one offer air-conditioning, two have kitchens; upper floors have balcony. Rooms have tile floors, Mexican furnishings, and private bath. Breakfast is served in the lovely garden. Bike rentals plus variety of tours are available. Sunday is Mexican Fiesta Night with drinks, buffet, a flea market. Rates are very reasonable; book early. B'94/R'01

Reservations: 52-9-872-3195
www.visitcaribo.com

★★★★ **Casa del Mar**

The Casa del Mar is a good alternative to the pricier Cozumel hotels. Although billed as a dive resort, non-divers will enjoy this property as well. Hotel has three wings facing a pleasant courtyard. It is located across the street from the beach south of town near the Crown Paradise Club. All 106 units (8 two-level cabañas, 98 spacious standard rooms) have air-conditioning, balconies or terraces, cable TV and sofas. Attractive pool area, restaurant and

bar built from salvaged ship wreck, and one tennis court. Complete dive services. B'87/R'01

Reservations: 1-800-437-9609
www.webfooted.com/delmargroup98

★★★★ **Casa Mexicana**

Casa Mexicana is a modern Mexican hotel housed in a contemporary white 5-story pyramid structure, with an ocean front location in the heart of Cozumel. The 90 deluxe rooms offer air conditioning, combination bath, cable TV and private balcony. Small swimming pool, gym, and fully equipped conference room accommodating up to 50 people classroom style. Two restaurants; buffet breakfast included in rates. B'00

Reservations: 1-877-228-6747

★★★★ **Condumel**

Condumel is a small Mayan style condominium resort offering ten breezy and fully furnished, air conditioned, one-bedroom waterfront apartments. Condos feature large marble baths, stocked and furnished kitchens, bedroom, living room, balcony or terrace with hammocks, and ocean view. Lovely garden with stone façade and excellent snorkeling on the waterfront. Friendly personal service catering especially to dive and fishing enthusiasts.

Reservations: 1-800-262-4500
www.aquasafari.com

★★★★ **Costa Club**

(Formerly Fiesta Inn) About 2 km south of town, across the street from the beach, this 3-story modern colonial-style structure with arched façade and red tile roof has 180 standard rooms. All feature grey carpeting, in-room safe, dark wood furniture, modern fabrics, balconies (25% have ocean views), satellite TV. Large geometric-shaped pool with terrace and small wading pool, two bars (one a popular Karaoke bar), coffee shop restaurant. One tennis court; beach club across the street has water sports facilities, dive shop, bicycle and moped rentals. Appeals to divers and younger travelers. Free kids club. B'90/R'96

Reservations: 1-877-454-4355
AAA Rating: ♦♦♦
www.chboyce.com

★★★★ **Fontan Cozumel Ocean Resort**

Located 1 km north of town on a coral sea ledge, the Fontan is a white three-story building without elevators. 50 rooms are generally large, have light carpeting, beige simulated wood furnishings, pale blue fabrics, baths with showers only, balconies (not safe for kids), TV, and most have ocean views. Pools for adults and kids and dive shop. Restaurant, small beach. B'69/R'90

Reservations: 1-800-GO BOUNTY
AAA Rating: ♦

continues...

LODGING CONTINUES

☆☆☆☆ Plaza Las Glorias

Less than one km from the ferry pier, just south of San Miguel, this property is true to the Plaza Las Glorias look featuring the usual 4-story pueblo-style structure. 168 rooms are all junior suites (some one and two bedrooms with kitchenettes) and have marble floors, wood and built-in furnishings, sculptured white headboards, quilted floral spreads, sitting area with wicker furniture, marble combination baths with Mexican style slate, satellite TV, balconies or patios, all with ocean view. Attractive rectangular pool has marble decking and swim-up bar under a modern looking palapa. One restaurant, 2 bars. Terraced sandy areas substitute for lack of beach. Excellent dive shop with scuba lessons, boutique, gift shop, meeting facilities. B'88/R'96

Reservations: 1-800-342-AMIGO

☆☆☆☆ Reef Club Cozumel

All inclusive. Debuting in late 1997 as one of the island's newest all-inclusives, the Reef Club uses color-splashed two- and three-story Caribbean bungalows to house its 250 rooms scattered along a very long, narrow sandy beach. Central courtyard pool leads to nice sandy beach with palapas and water sports rentals (included). A second lagoon-style pool offers quieter setting. Rooms have air conditioning, ceiling fans, satellite TV, terrace or patio (few units have ocean view), bright floral spreads, and combination bath. Three bars (unlimited international and domestic drinks), three restaurants (one a la carte), large courtyard pool, plenty of guest activities/classes, professional kid's program, one tennis court, theme parties, game room, horseback riding, weight room, nightly shows and a hopping disco. R'01

Tel/Fax: 52-9-872-9300

www.reefclubcozumel.com

☆☆☆☆ Sol Cabañas del Caribe

On Playa San Juan, just north of town in the rejuvenated hotel row, this older 48-room property has 8 bungalow-style cabañas and 39 cozy, standard rooms in the main building. Cabañas are equipped with small patios, tile floors with throw rugs, new fabrics in pink or beige color schemes, medium wood colonial furnishings, tiled shower. Rooms in main building have terrazzo floors, beamed ceilings, same decor, and balconies; 80% have ocean views, air-conditioning. Nice beach with excellent sunning and snorkeling, water sports hut, small pool, seaside thatched hut restaurant, meeting facilities. Very romantic and quiet (no phones or TV). B'58/R'88

Reservations: 1-800-336-3542

www.solmelia.com

THREE STAR

☆☆☆ Barracuda

Located towards the south end of the beach- front malecón, this four-story hotel is close to shops and caters to divers. All 51 units feature tile floors, two double beds, air-conditioning and ceiling fans, and small refrigerators. Upper floor rooms have sea view balconies. Dive shop and pier. Water slide drops into ocean.

Reservations: 1-800-247-3483

☆☆☆ Days Inn-Villa del Rey

Located in the town of San Miguel, 5 blocks south of the town center, the Villa del Rey offers 39 rooms and 6 efficiencies with kitchenettes in a quiet residential setting. The modern building is two and four stories with outdoor corridors and stairways. Rooms simply furnished with shower baths and cable TV. Attractive pool/garden area. Hotel is walking distance to the beach. Restaurant and bar.

Reservations: 1-800-325-2525

AAA Rating: ♦♦

☆☆☆ Scuba Club Dive Resort

(Formerly Galapago Inn) Catering almost exclusively to divers, the Scuba Club is located 2 km south of San Miguel across from the Fiesta Inn. Accommodations in this three-story 55-room property are basic with tile floors and balconies, small refrigerators and baths with showers only. All rooms are air-conditioned. Beach and sandy sunning area are pleasant and strewn with hammocks. Complete dive school, equipment, boats and dock. Dining room and 2 bars; freshwater swimming pool. B'75/94

Reservations: 1-800-847-5708

AAA Rating: ♦

www.scubaclubcozumel.com

☆☆☆ Suites Bahía

Just three blocks from the ferry pier in downtown San Miguel, the Bahía is located in a four-story stucco building facing the sea. All 27 units are junior suites and include air-conditioning, king sized beds and kitchenettes with refrigerators. Units have tiled floors, tiled showers and whirlpool tubs. Some units have ocean view and balconies.

Reservations: 1-877-228-6747

☆☆☆ Villablanca

This respected Cozumel hotel is located just 7 minutes from the airport and only 5 minutes from downtown Cozumel by taxi. The 50 guest rooms include standard rooms, superior rooms, suites, royal suites, and villas, with either garden or ocean views. All are equipped with ceiling fans, A/C, refrigerators, telephone and sunken tubs. There is an excellent dive operator on site, "Dive Paradise", which is just across the road from the hotel, on the beach. One restaurant bar and grill, swimming pool, tennis courts. Bicycle, scooter & car rentals. R'01

Reservations: 52-9-872-0730

www.villablanca.net

TWO STAR

☆☆ Safari Inn

A small 12-room hotel located above the Aqua Safari dive shop in downtown San Miguel. The simple rooms are air conditioned, have a shower-only bath with lots of hot water and good water pressure. Eight rooms offer king size bed, four remaining rooms offer twin beds, a bunk bed and twin sofa bed sleeping up to five people.

Tel: 52-9-872-0101 Fax: 52-9-872-0661

www.aquasafari.com