



COSTA MAYA Mexico



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OVERVIEW

According to *Wikipedia*: Costa Maya is a small tourist region in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico, located between Cancún and Belize. The area is generally undeveloped but has been growing quickly and rapidly after construction of a large pier to accommodate cruise ships. The Costa Maya includes two small villages — Majahual and Xcalak and extends physically from Xcalak in the south to the southern border of the Sian Ka'an in the north, a distance of approximately 100 km.

While Xcalak is approximately 60 km south of the Costa Maya cruise port, the fishing village of **Mahahual** is only about 3 km (2 miles) away. Cruise ships can easily be seen from the village. Mahahual has soft sand beaches, grass thatched palapas, and a coral reef a short distance off-shore, as well as several bars, restaurants, and shops.

A resort development called **New Mahahual** is being created directly inland from the port. When ships are in port, the village is busy with cruise passengers.

Costa Maya's port has a new and modern tourist shopping mall. The center has a central plaza with saltwater pools and "swim-up" style bars. There are several jewelry stores and many small shops selling ubiquitous souvenir items. It is generally open only to cruise ship passengers.

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► MomJen, Jun/2010: Costa Maya: We didn't get to dock here do to 15-20 foot sea swells & a 60 mph headwind. But, we didn't mind too much since we didn't have an excursion booked. The extra \$9.50/person allowed me to get an extra formal night picture or two.

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: If you build it they will come. Costa Maya, the newest port in the Western Caribbean, may be located on a peninsula; but, in effect, it feels more like a private island created from scratch expressly for cruisers. Costa Maya is located on the Caribbean Sea approximately 100 miles south of Playa del Carmen & quite close to the border of Belize.

Costa Maya is what you'd expect if Disney World decided to create its own private island in Mexico: a man-made tourism village with bars, restaurants, shops & pools at the ready. The faux village itself was created solely to woo cruise passengers & it has a myriad of facilities: pools, restaurants, bars, shops & a small beach (though it's too rocky to swim). Since Costa Maya first began accepting cruise passengers in February of 2001, the developers have added a beach house & water sports area, which is actually well away from the main village & is typically used by cruise lines as a shore excursion option.

Currently, Costa Maya can handle at least three ships or more than 6,000 visitors per day.

COCKTAIL, BEST

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Any fruity concoction sold in a yard-long plastic tumbler called, appropriately, "la yarda." If three feet of banana daiquiri or strawberry margarita don't float your boat, quench your thirst with a few bottles of Bohemia or Sol, the requisite beers.

CURRENCY

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: The Mexican peso; one U.S. dollar is equivalent to about 10 pesos. However, many vendors will gladly accept U.S. currency.

DOCK LOCATION

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Ships dock right at Costa Maya's purpose-built facilities.

DON'T MISS

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: For first-timers to Costa Maya, a trip to the Mayan ruins at Chacchoben, in a jungle setting roughly an hour or so by motorcoach from the port, is an interesting & worthwhile outing. Chacchoben (the Mayan word for “red corn”) dates back to around 350 A.D., but was largely unexplored until 1999. Visitors can ascend the steep stairs of “El Gran Basamento,” the only structure available for climbing. What’s also kind of special is that the site has not been fully excavated; our guide explained that wherever you see a hill in this otherwise flat area of Mexico you can bet there are ruins beneath. The site also houses a gift shop selling a genuinely distinctive collection of crafts.

Take the five-minute cab drive to Mahahual, a quirky & eccentric fishing village with lots of character. The main “boulevard,” a street of sand that runs between a pretty white beach & some concrete shacks on the other side, has now been made a pedestrian throughway. Though the shopping is standard at best (owners are persistent to sell typical cheap trinkets), the beach is clean — & the water, protected by a reef, is very calm & shallow so it’s a perfect place for families. You can also get beach massages (\$20 for 45 minutes), & rent jet skis & kayaks.

GETTING AROUND

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: A taxi ride into Mahahual is about \$5 per person round-trip. Local buses to Mahahual are located behind the shopping area; tickets for the \$3 fare are must be purchased in advance & are sold at a booth located in the same area. Golf carts & Jeeps are also available for rent for around \$12 an hour or \$60 per day, respectively.

HANGING AROUND

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: A “faux” village created solely for cruise passengers is just steps from the dock. The pier-side village features a number of free-to-use pools, one of which is huge with a swim-up bar; restaurants, bars & shops including the usual suspects like Diamonds International & a small beach lined with chairs & hammocks for relaxing, though it’s too rocky for a good swim.

LANGUAGE

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: Spanish, though English is widely spoken, as most places in the area cater to tourists.

LUNCH

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: By the Port: The chain-restaurant-style Mexican food at Mamacita's, the pier-side beach-front restaurant, plays second fiddle to the fun atmosphere & live entertainment (who would have thought men in sombreros would rock out on a Rolling Stones cover?).

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: In Mahahual: The best eatery along the strip is El Faro, which means 'lighthouse' in Spanish. Order the conch *ceviche* & *quesadillas* with homemade guacamole.

MAYA CHAN EXCURSION — www.CostaMayaBeachResort.com

All-Inclusive resort including snorkel equipment, kayaks, bikes, unlimited alcohol, unlimited buffet (noon–3pm), chairs, lounges, fresh water showers, etc. (Bring your own towel.) — \$49.

SELF-GUIDED TOURS

► 'WannaSail4ever', August 22, 2009: We took a taxi (it was \$2-per-person) over to Majahual. It's just a one dirt road town about 2 miles away. We loved the beach there. Also, they had a great little palapa bar with cheap beer. [A *palapa* is an open-sided dwelling with a thatched roof made of dried palm leaves.]

SHORE EXCURSIONS

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: **Active Travelers:** Explore Costa Maya's coastline on a bike & kayak adventure. Cyclists ride along a dirt road & through the fishing village of Mahahual for views of the water before arriving at the beach & boarding two-person kayaks. The tour is approximately 2 1/2 hours & costs about \$48 for adults & children (minimum age: 12).

► Magna, Aug/30/2010: **Ruins Enthusiasts:** If you have already seen Chacchoben or just want to kill two birds with one stone, take a Mayan explorer excursion that combines the archaeological ruins at Kohunlich, near the border of Belize, & Dzibanche, known for beautiful pottery & breathtaking

temples. The tour is approximately eight hours & costs about \$98 for adults & children.

➤ Magna, Aug/30/2010: **Beach Bums**: Spend the day at popular Uvero Beach. Cruise line beach break packages, approximately \$38 for children & adults, include entrance to the beach, open bar, use of hammocks, non-motorized water sports (based on availability) & roundtrip transportation. There are bars & a fast food restaurant (plan for an a la carte experience there).

➤ Magna, Aug/30/2010: **Off-Roaders**: Reach the beach in style: A bilingual guide will take you through the jungle in a World War II class S Mercedes Benz Unimog. For more, check out www.costamaya-mexico.com.

THE NATIVE CHOICE

<http://www.TheNativeChoice.com>

➤ Jtoniva, April 25, 2010: Check out this company. My wife and I have both done a tour with this company as did our daughters on the April 3rd sailing of the Dream. We highly recommend them.

WEATHER

➤ MasterBaker, Jul/16/2010: November – February is rainy season:

☆ Roatan: 16 inches or rain over 15 days in November.

☆ Cozumel: 4 inches average over 5 days in November.

☆ Belize: 7 inches

☆ Costa Maya: 2 inches

Think of it as 'island air conditioning'. The humidity level is practically liquid and the average temps are in the mid-80's in the region. The rain is a relief in that heat and humidity. Pick clothing to wear ashore that is lightweight and dry quickly; you are going to be wet either from sweat or rain.

WEB ACCESS

➤ Magna, Aug/30/2010: There's an Internet cafe in the village of Costa Maya.

XCALET

➤ Magna, Aug/30/2010: Xcalet is a small, off-the-beaten-path village within the Xcalak National Reef Park. Here visitors can dive or snorkel among ship-

wrecks (there have been hundreds over past centuries) in Chinchorro Banks, Mexico's largest coral atoll.