



Playa Del Carmen vs Cancun: Which to Choose?



Playa Del Carmen vs. Cancun

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local destinations and finds new trails for hiking. She shares her travel tips and tricks that suit your needs. In her spare time, she loves hiking and working out.

Playa del Carmen is becoming a hot spot amongst tourists, even though it's notably calmer and quieter than its vibrant counterpart, Cancun. Playa del Carmen started catching the eye of travelers in the late 1990s and early 2000s, while Cancun, which is about an hour away, has been a go-to vacation spot since the 1980s.

Overall, Playa del Carmen is artistic and eco-friendly, and while there are open-all-night bars and clubs, the vibe is considerably calmer than in Cancun. It's not boring, just slower and more laidback. If you want to party, though, or at least have the option to party whenever the mood strikes, consider Cancun.

Let's explore how these two exciting cities differ, even though they're both found on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula in the Riviera Maya. As you'll see, their biggest differences are in their beaches, nightlife and other things to do on your trip. (You can read about other popular locations in Mexico [here](#), too.)

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Playa del Carmen vs Cancun – Is Playa Del Carmen in Cancun?

The main differences between Cancun and Playa del Carmen, which is a town next to the city of Cancun are:

1. Differing Cultural Focuses: Playa del Carmen has a more authentic Mexican atmosphere, whereas Cancun has an Americanized setting to appeal to tourists
 2. Accessibility: Playa del Carmen has all of its amenities within walking distance of each other, whereas Cancun has a larger space with venues more spread out and not easily walkable
 3. Beach Maintenance: Playa del Carmen has plenty of beaches, but they're not all as well-maintained as Cancun's, whereas Cancun has beaches with vendors, chairs, umbrellas, restrooms, and the regular assistance to clean up seaweed
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5. Location to Airports: You can fly into the Cancun airport and get right to your vacation, but it'll take about an hour to get to Playa del Carmen from there

Getting to Playa del Carmen vs. Cancun



While there isn't an airport in Playa del Carmen, you can fly into Cozumel and then take a ferry to Playa del Carmen. You'll be dropped off on the city's southern edge, putting you right next to popular bars if you're ready to party. Alternatively, you can fly into Cancun, but you'll have to take a taxi or shuttle to Playa del Carmen, which could be costly.

Once you're in Playa del Carmen, you don't have to worry about public transportation. Everything is walkable, and you can go from one end of the city to the other in under half an hour. If you do want to take a cab, you'll pay a flat rate instead of worrying about the tab being unexpectedly high.

Getting to Cancun is easier because you can fly right into the city's international airport. Getting around is trickier, though, so be prepared to take taxis or Uber your way around town. Or book a hotel close to the beaches and clubs you plan to frequent and stay there for your whole trip.

The Climate in Playa del Carmen vs. Cancun



Playa del Carmen and Cancun are located in the same area of Mexico, which is why they have practically the same weather year-round. Both cities are typically hot and humid. October is a great time to visit because the weather is still warm but crowds haven't picked up yet. March is also excellent in terms of weather, but this is when a lot of spring breakers head to these parts of Mexico, so decide if that's a deal-breaker or a deal-maker for you.

Beaches in Playa del Carmen vs. Cancun

Odds are you're traveling to Mexico to take advantage of its beaches. Whether you end up in Playa del Carmen or Cancun, you'll have plenty of sand and ocean at your

Some of the beaches in Playa del Carmen are busy, and the city's main beach is often overrun with locals, tourists, and vendors. It's best to head farther out to find an enjoyable beach in Playa del Carmen. Or, hop the ferry to Cozumel, where you can take out a wave runner or head to a water park.

While the beaches in Playa del Carmen are lovely, they're more narrow than the beaches in Cancun. However, if you want to spend part of your beach day in clubs, the narrowness makes it easier to pop between clubs and your beach blanket. It's also important to note that some of the beaches in Playa del Carmen are not well-equipped, meaning they don't have bathrooms, lifeguards, beds or umbrellas.

Many of the beaches in Cancun are extra-crowded, but head to Playa Delfines for a calmer experience. For the most part, though, beaches here will be packed with visitors. That may be okay, though, especially if you're in Cancun to meet other people. If you're with the family, head to one of the north-facing beaches, which have shallower waters.

Nightlife in Playa del Carmen vs. Cancun



The nightlife in Playa del Carmen is tamped down when compared to Cancun's, but that doesn't mean it's nonexistent. Head to the tourist-heavy parts of the city for the best nightlife.

Cancun has a hopping nightlife scene, one that's bigger and more energetic than Playa del Carmen's. Cancun has been a [tourist destination](#) for longer than Playa del Carmen, especially popular with college students on spring break, and it's also the bigger of the two cities. Whether you want to party during the daytime or late into the night (and the early morning hours), Cancun won't disappoint.

The one and only negative about nightlife in Cancun is that the bars and clubs aren't all

you're going to stay at for the evening. Another option is to sign up for a bar-hopping tour, which will transport you to several clubs in a night.

Shopping in Playa del Carmen vs. Cancun

There are dedicated shopping areas in both Playa del Carmen and Cancun. To go shopping in Playa del Carmen, head to 5th Avenue. Playa del Carmen has a mellow shopping experience when compared to Cancun, which may be exactly what you're after. There are more artisans selling their items and authentic Mexican products to be found in Playa del Carmen.

On the other hand, Cancun is where you'll want to go if you're after designer shopping, big brands and malls. Head to La Isla shopping center, which is a lot larger than 5th Avenue, or Luxury Avenue. While there are a handful of shops in the Hotel Zone, there's not as much to do in the area as you may think, aside from taking in the view and booking an excursion with a local company.

Dining in Playa del Carmen vs. Cancun

Playa del Carmen is the better option if you want a taste of authentic Mexican food or fresh fish. The food here is less expensive than in Cancun, and there are a lot of opportunities to try street foods. If you head away from the town center, you'll come upon plenty of local eateries where you can try more authentic dishes.

On the other hand, because it caters to so much tourism, Cancun has a lot of the same foods and chain restaurants you'll find at home. If you want to eat foods you're familiar with, Cancun is the best spot. Also, Cancun is the larger of the two cities, so you can find practically any cuisine you're in the mood for, from Mexican and American to Italian, French and other international options.

The Pros and Cons of Playa del Carmen and Cancun



That was a lot of information! Let's quickly recap the major pros and cons of Playa del Carmen and Cancun to make your decision easier.

- The grid system puts everything in close proximity to one another and makes the entire city easily walkable.
- Playa del Carmen may have a subtler nightlife scene than Cancun, but it has a more well-rounded offering, including still-great nightlife, plus lots of shopping and authentic Mexican food.
- There are fewer families and college students in Playa del Carmen, so if you're looking to vacation around an older age group, this is the better option.

Cons of Playa del Carmen

- It's not difficult to get to Playa del Carmen, but it does require an hour-long ride from the Cancun airport or a ferry ride from Cozumel.
- Some of the beaches at Playa del Carmen are either narrow, unequipped or both, sometimes making it difficult to find a safe, comfortable beach to spend the day at.
- While Playa del Carmen does have a good nightlife scene, it's not nearly as vibrant as that of Cancun. If nightlife is your main goal, head to Cancun.

Pros of Cancun

- Cancun is easily accessible thanks to its international airport, which is possibly why it became so popular in the first place.
 - The beaches in Cancun are more well-equipped than in Playa del Carmen, with all the amenities you need to spend a day on the sand (or at a beach club).
 - This is the city to choose if you want to shop for designer labels or big brands.
 - There are a lot of American chain restaurants in Cancun, so you can have a taste of home and eat the foods you're familiar with.
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Cons of Cancun

- Getting around Cancun can be tricky because it's so large, and some people feel that public transportation, like taxis, aren't completely safe.
- There's not too much to do in Cancun aside from spending time on the beach and partying at clubs. If that's precisely what you're after, though, that won't be a problem.
- You won't get many (or any) tastes of Mexican culture. From the restaurants to the shops, everything is Americanized and focused on big brand names.

FAQs About Playa del Carmen vs. Cancun

Which is safer, Playa del Carmen or Cancun?

Both Playa del Carmen and Cancun are considered equally safe. Both are Americanized cities in Mexico that attract a lot of tourists. However, though they're among the safer parts of Mexico to travel to, it's still suggested that you be aware of your surroundings, limit public transportation and stay in the heavy tourist areas.

If possible, stay in an all-inclusive resort, which is the safest option. To learn about resorts and other types of travel accommodations, check out this article.

Cancun is a much more popular travel destination than Tulum, with more hotels and nightlife, as well as nicer beaches. The beaches in Cancun are well-equipped and have smooth sand, while many of Tulum's beaches are rocky.

Is Playa del Carmen part of Cancun?

Playa del Carmen and Cancun are separate cities in Mexico, located about one hour apart from each other. They're both set on the eastern side of the Yucatan Peninsula, in Quintana Roo, one of the country's states. Both cities are part of the Riviera Maya.

Is it safe to travel to Playa del Carmen right now?

Officials say that it's safe to travel to Playa del Carmen. The safest option when traveling is to stay in an all-inclusive resort. Avoid walking or traveling through non-resort or non-tourist areas, and be careful when choosing public transportation.

Final Thoughts About Playa del Carmen vs. Cancun

It's almost impossible to say if Playa del Carmen is better or worse than Cancun because they both offer so much. The true question is, "What do you want out of your vacation?" Answering that will determine which location is the right fit for you.

Neither Playa del Carmen nor Cancun is the place to go if you want to be immersed in Mexican culture, but they both excel when it comes to sunny, fun vacations. Plus, English is heavily spoken in both areas, so you won't need to learn Spanish to visit either city.

While Cancun does have some appeal other than nightlife, it may not be enough to fill an entire trip if you don't want to party much or at all. In the Hotel Zone, there are hotels, of course, and a few restaurants, plus large areas for jogging or walking, but there's not too much beyond that. On the other hand, Playa del Carmen's main streets,

When it comes to beaches and nightlife, the answer is clear: go to Cancun. Its beaches are better equipped and maintained than Playa del Carmen's, and its nightlife is unparalleled. But if those are only some of your requirements for your vacation and you want to balance beach days and nights out with fewer tourists, more shopping and an overall more sophisticated atmosphere, Playa del Carmen is the right choice.

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