

# Costa Maya, Mexico

Everybody argues about whether this port is too fake. I think they are asking the wrong question, and I think most of them walk straight past the best thing here.

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## Let me start with the thing nobody tells you

Almost everyone walks off the ship at Costa Maya and heads straight for the pool, the shops, or a bus to the ruins. And a hundred feet behind them, right there in the port complex, is a spa.

### WHAT I FOUND THERE MYSELF

Milk baths. A steam room. Massages. They sell it as a package if you want the whole thing, or you can do what I do and just book the massage on its own.

Two things I want you to hear. It costs considerably less than the same hour in the spa on your ship. And the massages are genuinely good. I have a professional background in bodywork, so I am very hard to impress on this particular subject, and I was impressed.

If you have a sea day coming, or your knees are done, or you simply do not want to get on another bus, this is the best hour you can spend in this port. Walk in when you get off, book your time, then go enjoy the rest of the day and come back to it.

Now let us deal with the argument everybody has about this port.

## "Costa Maya is fake." Yes and no.

The complex was built for cruise ships. The pool, the swim-up bar, the shops, the tequila tasting, the aviary with the hanging bridges — none of that existed before the ships came. If what you want is an unvarnished Mexican fishing town, you will not find one forty feet from the gangway.

But "built for tourists" is not the same as "not worth your day," and I think the people who sneer at this port are usually people whose knees still work.

Here is who Costa Maya is genuinely good for. If you are travelling with small children. If you have a bad hip or a bad back. If this is your fourth port in five days and you are honestly a little tired. If you want a beach day with no negotiating, no taxi, no wondering whether the driver will come back for you. You walk off the ship and it is all right there.

And if you want the real town, it is three kilometres down the road and it is not hard to get to. You can have both in one day. Most people do not realise that.

#### How I would spend this port day

- **Tired, sore, or travelling with littles:** stay in the complex. Book the spa when you walk off, use the pool, eat there, go home rested. No shame in it whatsoever.
- **You want the real Mexico:** shuttle or taxi to Mahahual, walk the malecón, eat at a beach club, come back mid-afternoon.
- **You want the ruins:** Chacchoben, and read the warning further down before you book, because it is a real one.
- **You want all of it:** ruins in the morning, spa in the afternoon. That is the day I would build.

#### What is actually in the complex

A large swimming pool with a swim-up bar, shops, restaurants and bars, the spa, ATMs, restrooms and Wi-Fi. Celebrity's port guide mentions a free trolley from the ship to the port village, and you will want it, because that pier is long.

Three things inside get named again and again, and they are worth a wander even if you are not buying: **Aviarus**, an aviary connected by hanging bridges; **Kakaw**, a cocoa museum where you can taste chocolate made by hand; and **La Consentida**, a tequila distillery.

What I cannot tell you is what any of it costs, and I would rather say so than guess. The port's own website would not load when we checked it, no official page publishes prices for anything inside the complex, and nothing published anywhere states whether that pool is free or paid. Everything above comes from the cruise lines' own port pages and Mexican government documents. Budget as though the pool costs something and be pleasantly surprised.

#### Mahahual, if you want the real thing

Three kilometres from the pier. Take the shuttle for a small fee, grab a taxi, or rent a golf cart, which is the most fun of the three. Walking takes about 45 minutes and I would not do it in August.

Celebrity tells beach lovers to go to Mahahual outright, saying plainly that the beaches there are better. The Quintana Roo tourism board describes the malecón as a relaxed strip of restaurants, beach clubs and small shops, and that is a fair description. If you would

rather not arrange it yourself, Carnival sells a beach club day at Fisherman's Village for \$70.99 adult and \$64.99 child, five hours with chairs, kayaks and an open domestic bar.

### **The ruins, and an honest warning**

Chacchoben is the usual choice, about an hour each way. Carnival's own [excursion](#) runs four hours at \$109.99 a person, air-conditioned bus, site entrance included. Going independently, Mexico's national institute of anthropology publishes entry at 155 pesos, open 9am to 5pm daily. Kohunlich is further out, 8am to 5pm, 210 pesos, or 105 for residents of Mexico. Nobody publishes the drive time to Kohunlich.

#### **FROM MY OWN FAMILY**

My daughter did the ruins and loved every minute. She came back full of it. So if you are able and it appeals to you, go — this is not me talking you out of it.

**But read this before you book it.** Carnival publishes that its Chacchoben tour "is not accessible for guests using wheelchairs, canes, rollators, or other mobility devices," that guests with walking difficulties or heart conditions may not take part, and that it involves "a fair amount of walking over uneven surfaces and climbing." Their Mahahual beach [excursion](#) carries the same exclusion. That is unusually blunt for a cruise line, and I am glad they say it. If you use a cane on bad days, this is a no. Take the spa instead, and do not feel one bit sorry about it.

### **Money, and the dollar sign trap**

The currency is the Mexican peso. Dollars are widely accepted, but you may get your change back in pesos — and both currencies use the \$ sign. A price tag reading \$200 is a very different thing depending on which one they mean. Look twice, and ask if you are not sure. Nobody will mind.

## At a glance

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Getting ashore</b> | You dock. Royal Caribbean states guests "step ashore without taking a tender boat." No tender, no queue, no weather gamble.                                                                                  |
| <b>The pier</b>       | Y-shaped concrete, and long. Mexico's navy port sheet gives 14 metres depth and three cruise berths up to 366 metres; trade press reported a fourth opening in 2019. The port publishes no count of its own. |
| <b>Mahahual</b>       | About 3km. Shuttle, taxi or golf cart. Roughly 45 minutes on foot.                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Best for</b>       | Easy port days, families with small children, anyone whose body is tired of shore excursions                                                                                                                 |

## Questions I get asked about Costa Maya

### Is there a beach right at the port?

There is a large pool complex at the port, and the better beaches are at Mahahual, three kilometres away. Celebrity says so themselves. If a proper beach is the whole point of your day, plan to leave the complex.

### Do I need pesos?

No. Dollars work. Just watch which dollar sign you are reading, and expect change in pesos.

### Can I do the ruins if I walk with a cane?

Carnival says no, in writing, and I would take them at their word. Uneven ground and climbing. There is no shame in choosing a different day.

### Is the spa really cheaper than the ship's spa?

In my experience, considerably. I cannot quote you a price, because nothing inside the complex publishes one, so ask when you walk in.

### Can I walk to Mahahual?

You can. It is about 45 minutes. In the heat, with the return trip to think about, I would spend the few dollars on the shuttle.

**What nobody publishes, and we will not invent:** prices inside the complex, whether the pool is free, the shuttle and taxi fares to Mahahual, golf cart rates, the drive time to Kohunlich or Bacalar, and any accessibility information for the port itself. If you find an official source for any of it, tell us and we will add it with the link.

## Where these facts come from

- Royal Caribbean, Puerto Costa Maya (<https://www.royalcaribbean.com/inspire/caribbean-puerto-costa-maya-mexico-shore-excursions>)
- Celebrity Cruises, Costa Maya port guide (<https://www.celebritycruises.com/ports/costa-maya-mexico>)
- Princess Cruises, Costa Maya (<https://www.princess.com/cruise-destinations/caribbean-cruises/costa-maya-cruise>)
- Mexican Navy (SEMAR), Majahual port data sheet (PDF, Spanish) (<https://diredimoat.semar.gob.mx/cuestionarios/cnarioMajahual.pdf>)
- INAH, Chacchoben archaeological zone (Spanish) (<https://www.inah.gob.mx/zonas/zona-arqueologica-de-chacchoben>)
- INAH, Kohunlich archaeological zone (Spanish) (<https://www.inah.gob.mx/zonas/zona-arqueologica-kohunlich>)
- Carnival, Chacchoben Mayan Ruins excursion (<https://www.carnival.com/shore-excursions/costa-maya/chacchoben-mayan-ruins-316005>)
- Carnival, Beach Escape with open bar (<https://www.carnival.com/shore-excursions/costa-maya/beach-escape-with-open-bar-316007>)
- Caribe Mexicano, Mahahual (Spanish) (<https://caribemexicano.travel/destino/mahahual/>)

Ports change their rules and their prices. Check the official pages above before you sail.

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