

Home / Life / Travel

TRAVEL

# Mexico's Riviera Maya offers up adventures in learning

Five exhilarating experiences to expand your mind while on vacation in a Mexican paradise.

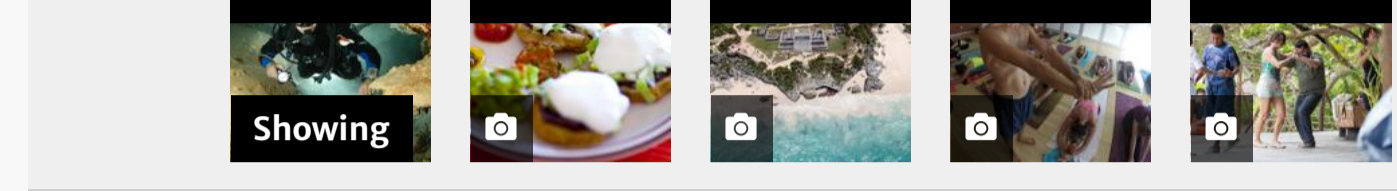
By Mike Fisher Special to the Star  
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Phocaea Mexico Playa del Carmen  
Diving and snorkeling in the ocean or the fresh water pools in and around Mexico's Riviera Maya are among the favourite pastimes for locals and visitors. There are many dive shops and places to rent snorkel gear, from Cancun in the north to Tulum in the south.



Opportunities for learning on vacation abound along Mexico's Riviera Maya. Foodies, divers and snorkelers, history buffs, yoga enthusiasts, soul searchers and dancers can discover exhilarating experiences.

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### Food:

I took a class at the [Little Mexican Cooking School](#) with a handful of other travellers in a comfy house nestled in the seaside village of Puerto Morelos, less than a 40-minute drive south of Cancun. My cooking skills run to burning toast, but within a few hours, I learned how to make sauces and salsas, tamales and prepare the crunchy, potato-like jicama vegetable with a dash of lime and salt. A professional chef taught us while overseeing our culinary efforts. At the end, we all enjoyed a sit-down dinner.

ARTICLE CONTINUES BELOW

### History:

The great Mayan Indian civilization rose in the area now known as the Mayan Riviera. You can discover archeological sites that include pyramids and pathways. I've explored [Coba](#), a two-hour drive from Playa del Carmen. It's about a 70-sq.-km. area where you can stroll, rent bikes and climb the Nohoch Mul pyramid. Various tour groups offer guided packages to the site. The town of Tulum, a one-hour drive south of Playa del Carmen, also has impressive ruins.

### Water:

The world's second-largest barrier reef stretches past the length of the Riviera Maya and on to Guatemala, making it a playground for divers and snorkelers. But the Riviera Maya is also home to [more than 100 cenotes](#) (seh-note-ehs), a unique feature of the Yucatan peninsula. [Divers and snorkelers](#) can learn with guides how to explore these freshwater pools. It's fun. The pools are formed by rainwater that corrodes the limestone throughout the area.

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### Spirit:

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If you want to do some soul searching, you're in the right place. The Mayan tradition of purifying the body and spirit plays out in a Temazcal ceremony at a dome-shaped sweat lodge. I've done it. Some Riviera Maya hotels such as [Sandos Caracol Eco Resort](#) offer the experience. Otherwise, [Rosewood Mayakoba](#) has a shaman that does an energy healing ritual at its Sense Spa. For yoga enthusiasts, [Michael Gannon Yoga](#) in Playa del Carmen attracts seekers from around the world.

### Dance:

While some like to lounge by the pool, others want to get their bodies moving. Learn some steps and try the free salsa lessons on Sundays at [La Zebra Tulum](#), about an hour south of Playa del Carmen. The popular, one-hour lessons begin at 6 p.m. The weekly event is a favourite with locals as well as visitors. It usually attracts about 50 dancers.

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