



View from your room at El Taj Condo Hotel, Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

Holidays,

BY KIMBERLY DAVIS GUERRA

MEXICAN STYLE

Tired of the same routine? Need a break desperately, but feel like holidays spent with the in-laws is not going to recharge your battery? I have just the remedy for you. Start a new family tradition and spend your holidays on the Riviera. The Mexican Riviera, aka Playa Del Carmen.

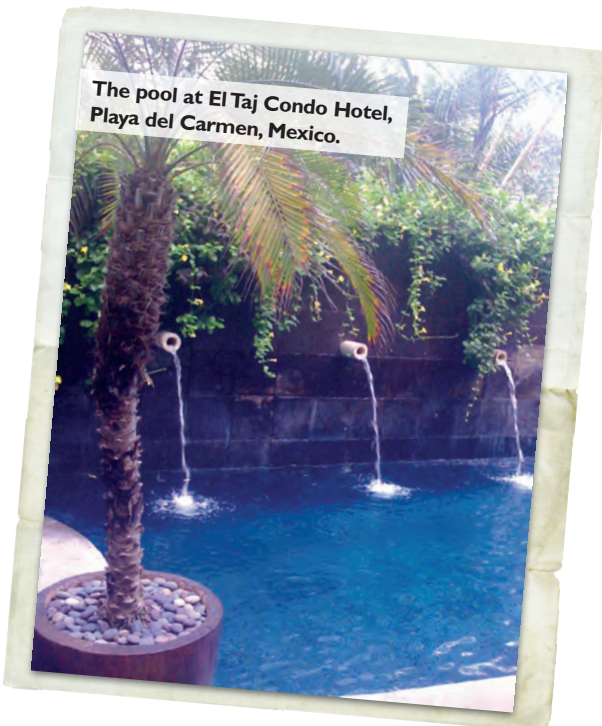
Just 45 minutes south of Cancun, you will arrive in your destination after a quick two and a half hour flight from Houston Intercontinental. If you are the adventurous type, rent a car. It's a straight shot from the airport and then you will have wheels if you decide to venture out on your own. Otherwise, car service can be arranged by your hotel to take you directly to your destination for approximately \$100-150.

My suggestion is you take them up on the service. One less thing for you to worry about!

Speaking of worry, I know what you are thinking. Spending the holidays away from home in a hotel room is going to be strange, right? I have a remedy for that, too. The Condo Hotels in Playa Del Carmen offers luxury condos mere footsteps from the beach.

Equipped with all the comforts of home and then some, these condos are the perfect place to bring the family for a relaxing holiday. Your home away from home offers various size accommodations for families of all sizes, maid service, Internet access, cable, beautiful pools and views that put Texas beaches to shame. They truly have not left anything out.

Depending on your preference, Condo Hotels of Playa Del Carmen offers properties to suit every style. Visit www.condohotelsplayadelcarmen.com for the full story. Here is just a quick tidbit on your choices.



The pool at El Taj Condo Hotel, Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

El Taj offers two serene properties with an Indian flavor to bring out the Zen in you. Decorated with Buddha's everywhere, this Asian influenced property is simply breathtaking.

Villas Sacbe is a quaint, boutique property with simple lines and gorgeous foliage. This is definitely the property to choose for a quiet environment.

Maya Villa is the property that most feels like you are in Mexico. Decorated with a Mayan flair, this property boasts the design of the regions most talented Mayan artists and craftsman.

Last, but not least, is Porto Playa. The focus here is the rain forest gardens and the pools! If you love to lounge outdoors, you will not be disappointed.

Now, if you are like me, and love to stay at a nice hotel, but want to get out and explore, too, then this is the city for you. I happen to love to shop (go figure!) and Playa Del Carmen boasts quite the little shopping experience. Within blocks from the Condos, is 5th Avenue, home to hundreds of restaurants and beautiful boutiques. If you love to shop, plan to spend the day there. Pick up unique gifts for the holidays and those family members that you did not get to spend time with this year!

Now, the hotels are wonderful and the shopping is great, but here is the piece de resistance...Christmas dinner at Ajua Maya! No prepping, cooking, cleaning or hassle. Just glorious food and time spent enjoying your family! What could be better?

Ajua May also happens to be a family-owned, five-star dining wonderland offering dishes of spectacular authentic Mayan and Mexican cuisine! Not only is the food too yummy for words; they cater to holiday dining experiences for Thanksgiving, Christmas & New Year's Eve. Be sure to contact them early, though. They tend to fill up quickly!

The owners are transplants from the U.S. that happened to marry into the culture! Be sure to look them up – they are always there and love to speak with people from back home!

Looking for a little adventure while you're away? There is much to choose from on the Riviera. So much so, that it is difficult for me to point you in one direction. Be sure to visit the Playa Del Carmen website at www.playadelcarmen.com. It offers a good overview of activities and attractions for you to choose from.

I will note, for the real adventurous, check out Alltournative Tours. They are amazing! You can choose from Mayan adventures into the rain forest to meet Mayan Shamans and swim in a Cenote after you zip-line through the jungle or visit the ruins of Tulum overlooking the breathtaking ocean. Whatever adrenaline-packed tour you choose, you will bring back memories to last a lifetime!

This town is truly built for tourists. When we visited this summer, I felt completely safe. We walked everywhere and enjoyed meeting the locals. It helps that my husband speaks the language, but I would go back by myself any day. And, I definitely will build in more time to shop!

Start a new tradition today. Plan your holidays, Mexican style!

RESOURCES

- **Playa Del Carmen visitor's bureau**, www.playadelcarmen.com
- **Continental flight** from Houston Intercontinental to Cancun start at \$198 per person.* (*Booked at least three weeks in advance; check www.continental.com for flight information.)
- **Condo Hotels of Playa del Carmen** start at \$185 a night, depending on the property and travel dates. Visit www.condohotelsplayadelcarmen.com for reservation information.
- **Ajua Maya** is located at Calle 4 Norte #128 entre 5a y 10a Avenidas Col., Centro Playa del Carmen, Q. Roo 77710 México. You can call their US line at 804-201-4142 or visit their website at www.ajuamaya.com for more information.
- **Adventure tours with Alltournative Tours** start at \$119 adults; \$95 ages 6-12. www.alltournative.com