

# TRAVEL

4B\*\* (F-4C) 10A\*\*

O&E Monday, October 21, 1991



crossroads  
**Iris Jones**

## Mexican paradise provides bounty of food, fun, sun

It is 7 a.m. I wake to the sound of waves. The new sun shines into my room here on the beach at Cancun, Mexico.

As I pull the curtains I hear a slight noise in the hall. That is the thermos of coffee and basket of rolls left outside the door every morning here at Puerto Al Sol, an all-inclusive suite hotel that opened a year ago at the "Club Med end of the beach."

The bridge that joins this island to the mainland near Club Med is at the opposite end from the bridge that connects it to Cancun City, 12 miles away. The traveler's task is to pick a hotel from the several dozen beautiful properties that line the beach.

The Cancun Puerto Al Sol Hotel Suites and Spa is the most luxurious of the island's three all-inclusive hotels, which offer meals and beverages with the price of the room. You can take 40 of your friends into the outdoor whirlpool or learn to dive in the above-ground "diving tank" if you're tired of sizzling away on the very lightly populated beach.

BY 8 A.M. the joggers are silhouetted against the froth of breaking waves, the pool handlers are working beneath my balcony, and the gardener is going clip on the world's tiniest patch of grass. The choice is determined by how much you want to pay, how far you want to be from the activities, around the museum, mall and convention center at Cancun Point and what style of hotel suits you.

The three dozen hotels on the beach are all spread out for me to see as I ride the 30-cent bus that runs every 15 minutes or so between the Hotel Zone and Cancun City. The Mayans would recognize the hotel shapes built side-by-side along the beach: pyramids, stepped roofs, with an occasional touch of the Taj Mahal. All look quite luxurious.

The less expensive are in Cancun City and along the sheltered swimming waters of the Bay. There are sometimes red flags on the beach that faces the Caribbean Sea because of the undertow.

Hotels range from the luxury of places like the Melia and the Omni through the moderately priced condos of the Kinha to the low-priced rooms of the Club Las Perlas, which still sports a pool and restaurant but lacks the fancy touches.

THE 50-CENT bus will drop you at the city hall, where balloons, sunlovers and politicians rally. Go to the tourist office door for information; you will learn, for example, that Bus Number Eight takes you five miles north to the ferry for Isla Mujeres if you prefer independent travel to tours.

I had tortilla soup to the strum of music in an open-sided restaurant called Mi Ranchita in town; other Mexican places I heard about were Rostre Mexicano and Garibaldi's. I'm not an old Cancun hand so I picked local brains about the best places to eat and play.

Most hoteliers recommend the deluxe Blue Bayou at the Hyatt Caribe and the Calypso at the Camino Real.

Beef lovers recommended Beefeaters, Jaguar's and the inexpensive La Hacienda. Seafood lovers suggest The Fisherman, Calamar and Pericos, where the waiters strum the music.



IRIS SANDERSON JONES  
A lifeguard watches swimmers on a Cancun beach.

## Cancun seas call travelers

By Iris Sanderson Jones  
special writer

THIS IS A fairy tale. Some people like the way it turns out and some people think the wicked witch of tourism has been here.

Once Upon A Time a fat finger of land poked into the emerald green waters of the Caribbean Sea. At the tip of the Yucatan Peninsula, a 12-mile-long elbow of sand enclosed a blue lagoon. Not ordinary sandbars, but glorious beach ankle-deep in powdery sand, gleaming like a golden bracelet under the hot Mexican sun.

There were only crab tracks and the footprints of pirates or fishermen around the Mayan ruins on the sand when the Mexican government asked a computer to select the ideal Caribbean resort setting.

You should see it now. Tourists bring their gold and their suitcase to 21,000 rooms in high-rise and low-rise hotels that start on the mainland in Ciudad Cancun (population 150,000) and follow that elbow of sand along 12 miles of Hotel Zone. The coral and sand beach, and the emerald sea, may

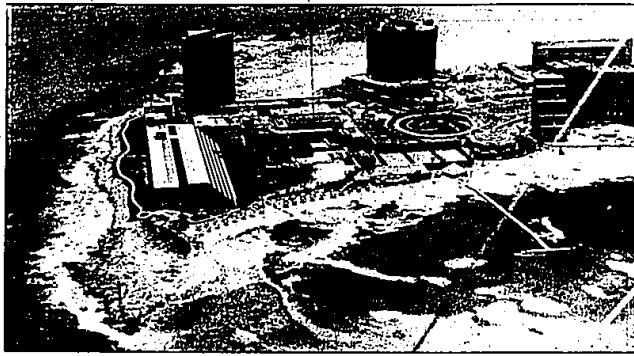
now offer the best value per dollar of any warm weather getaway in the world.

WHY? CUNCUN is for the moment overbuilt, especially in luxury class hotels, so it's a buyer's market. You can spend a lot of money on meals and incidentals when you get there, so the wise traveler plans carefully before he leaves home.

Kenneth R. Trefilek, Director of Resort Vacations for Travel Charter International, which runs charters to Cancun weekly in summer, four times a week November through mid May, says "no place draws from this side of the country, on a year-round basis, as steadily as Cancun. It is the most competitively priced resort in the world."

"It's accessible, within four hours flight of 65 percent of the U.S. population, it's new, clean, has beautiful white beaches and turquoise seas, lots of water sports, enough rooms for variety and you can spend a week there for the same price as a week in Florida."

Cancun was a higher-priced destination before Hurricane Hugo stripped that glorious beach away in 1988. The beach is completely re-



MICKY JONES

Although some argue that Cancun is over-developed, the large number of accommodations make the vacation resort a buyer's market, with prices remaining low compared to many other tropical destinations.

stored but prices have stayed low enough to attract honeymooners, spring breakers and weekenders as well as the typical one-week vacationers.

TREFILEK: "It's easy to take your first international trip to Cancun. It's not far away, people speak English, the facilities are American

and you can still see something of Mexico on daytrips."

My observation is that most travelers spend a significant amount of time on the beach, wandering the hotel strip and exploring Ciudad Cancun City, which grew on the mainland as the hotel zones grew along the beach.

The convention center, midway down the strip at Cancun Point, or-

ganizes tours daily to nearby Isla Mujeres, by ferry or hydrofoil to the resort island of Cozumel, but the most popular tours are to the ruined Mayan city at Tulum two hours drive south or the larger ruins at Chichen Itza three hours drive west. Insiders recommend that car travelers stay overnight at Chichen Itza rather than rushing through the long day tour.

## Airlines offer travel packages

No airline flies non-stop to Mexico, so most travel agents sell charter travel packages to Cancun. Wholesalers to Mexico include Key Tours, Apple Vacations and Travel Charter International.

Travel Charter sells the largest number of packages to Cancun, with rates ranging from \$300 to \$700 for three days, and from \$400 to \$800 for seven days, depending on

whether you leave weekday or weekend and what hotel you choose.

TCI flies once a week in summer, four times a week in winter, on American Trans Air. ATA meets the government certification required of all scheduled airlines; not all charter airlines do.

If you don't buy a package, you can connect to daily flights out of

Miami on American, Pan American and Mexicana. Mexicana flies daily non-stops from Chicago.

Carlos Banks of Farmington Hills, district sales manager for Mexicana, announced new rate structures last week for round-trip fares that are totally refundable and require no advance purchase: fly Monday to Friday for \$438, \$502 weekends, Detroit to Cancun via Chicago.

### Fall Excuses Start Here.

The pressure's on. There's no time to get away. Everything's falling apart. It's not the right time. Everyone's depending on me. Wait until things fall into place. This is a critical time for us. I don't want to fall on my face. Maybe when things slacken off.

## But They End Here.

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