

Sun, fun, sure bets in Cancun

Sparkling blue water greets tourists

BY LANA MINI

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Soft, clean, white sand and water bluer than one can imagine is what attracts hordes of tourists worldwide to Cancun — from spring breakers to honeymooners.

It's what attracted myself and two friends there this year.

Our journey to Cancun, we had hoped, would be filled with Mexican food and music, interesting Mexican shops, perfect weather and pristine beaches.

We didn't exactly find what we sought.

To our dismay, Cancun is more like Florida — except with prettier beaches — than actual Mexico. In downtown Cancun, American chain clothing stores and steak houses dotted much of the area. At first, we felt like we were in a Michigan mall.

However, to our delight we fast discovered the turquoise waters and beautiful coral reefs attract not only many Americans, but tourists from throughout the world — Europe, Africa, Australia.

Rather than spend a vacation dining on fine Mexican food amongst ourselves, we were pleasantly surprised to spend the week eating mediocre American food on the beach while indulging in conversation with tourists from Germany, Italy and Mexico. And human companionship, of course, is more important than any food.

Of all the beaches we've trav-

eled to over the last decade Cancun was the friendliest — and that's the greatest part of the 17-mile-long peninsula.

Cancun is a place for adult socialization. We didn't see a single child during the entire week of February 21. It's a place to parasail, snorkel, boogie board, dance by the hotel pool, dance at nightclubs and swim in the clean ocean. (Be warned though, Cancun's waters and undertow can be harsh).

Days are for water fun and nights are for discos.

During winter and spring months Cancun is not a place for those who want to escape crowds or be alone — even the honeymooners are social. People mingle everywhere; on the beach, in the restaurants and on the buses. (Tip: don't spend \$10 on a taxi cab. All the buses in Cancun — no matter how far the distance — are just 10 cents, or 50 pesos.)

We took our trip just one week before American college students begin spring break. When they started to pour in and the beaches seemed too crowded, we headed west to break away from the parties in search of something richer.

Mexican culture

Nearly three hours west of Cancun lies Chichen Itza, the incredible ruins of the ancient Mayan civilization whose wealthy population believed that voluntarily sacrificing themselves to the gods granted them eternal life.

The nine-hour day begins with



True blue: Turquoise waters, while somewhat rough, and powdery white sand are the main attractions of Cancun. The northern end of the hotel zone is the most lively, while those seeking quiet and relaxation head to the south end of the peninsula.

a bus ride through the lush Mexican forest into Chichen Itza where educated Mexican tour guides impress visitors with tales of the Mayans and their inventions of calendars and calculus.

The largest ruin is the highlight — created partially to help Mayans determine the start of seasons. Ninety-one steep steps high, tourists climb the tower with only a chain as a railing.

Once they conquer it, even the brave often are too frightened to climb down on foot and instead take each step down on their hands.

The cost of the tour was a mere \$55 — or 550 pesos — and included lunch, a Mexican ballet and stop at a Mexican Catholic Cathedral. It is recommended to book tours at hotels. Money swindlers who offer cheap tours (that don't exist) are everywhere in Cancun.

The island of women

Wearry of techno clubs, and Latin discos toward the end of our trip, we headed for an evening cruise to the island of women — Isla Mujeres.

For \$60, a double deck boat takes passengers to the Caribbean Carnival — a 45 minute-long sunset cruise filled with Conga lines and tequila. At the hour, guests enjoy a two-hour evening on the beach that includes an outdoor dinner and a lively, elaborate traditional Mexican and Latin dance show with silly audience participation.

Back in Cancun, surrounded by stores like Tommy Hilfinger, Outback Steakhouse and The Gap we found a wonderful Mexican flea market filled with treasures of sterling silver, exotic tapestries, hammocks and wood

Planning your trip

Thinking of going to Cancun? Here are some Web sites that offer helpful information:

■ www.cancun.com

■ <http://cancun.hotelguide.net>

Where did you go on spring break? Would you recommend Cancun as a travel destination? Send photos, along with spring/summer travel suggestions to Keely Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. Include a daytime phone number where you can be reached, and a self-addressed envelope if you would like us to return your photo.

E-mail travel recommendations to kwygonik@ee.homecomm.net.

carvings at, of course, reasonable prices.

Cancun is a place where visitors, and workers, take life in stride and not too seriously. The service in restaurants is laughable because while customers are desperately waiting for a soft drink, their server is busy dancing in the Conga line — too bad

life isn't like that everyday.

Despite bad food and big crowds, the culture of Chichen Itza, the beauty of Isla Mujeres, perfect beaches and friendly locals and tourists makes this Americanized peninsula worth a second week-long trip. Not bad for less than \$1,000

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