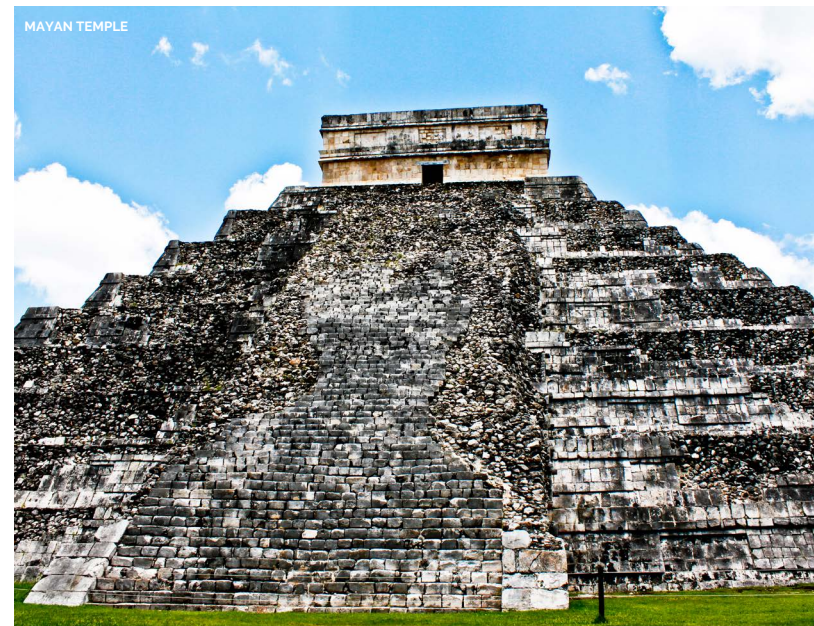




XEL-HÁ WATERPARK SLIDE  
©MIRIAM PORTER



MAYAN TEMPLE



MEXICAN COATI

Stretching 120 kilometres, the Riviera Maya is a tropical paradise. Xel-Há translates from the Mayan language to mean, *where the water is born*. The park's natural river tour has us floating and laughing for hours. Noah also does a daring water rope cross and zip line. Fresh mangroves, marine vegetation, natural gardens, caves, and mesmerizing inlets are all around us. Fish have fascinated Noah for years and snorkelling freely with so many species is dreamlike. The fish represent every colour of the rainbow in the green turquoise waters and whirl around us with bulging eyes and shiny fins. Snorkelling gear is included with admission, but we bring our own water shoes. Breakfast and lunch buffets are included and there are showers, change rooms, lockers and souvenir stores.

After hours of swimming, we meet huge resident iguanas chilling under the hot sun. Known as black (even though the adults are grey) or spiny-tailed iguanas, they are native to southern Mexico and Central America. The day before at our resort, we celebrated my birthday with new furry friends – the coatis. These adorable skinny raccoon-like creatures with twirling monkey tails live in the Mayan jungle and forests. On daily treks to swim in the Atlantic Ocean, Noah and I walk along a wooded path through a thick forest packed with playful curious coatis. We also come across a variety of bird species, including colourful peacocks and graceful bright pink flamingos.

Being near the ancient Mayan Ruins is the perfect excuse to add a fun history lesson to family travels. Chichén Itza, the second most visited archaeological site in Mexico, has limestone relics of the Mayan city to explore and learn about its former empire. Chichén Itza, one of the new Seven Wonders of the World, is accessible from Cancun and Playa del Carmen by car or tour bus. However, on this trip, we explore the smaller and less populated Muxil archaeological ruins located southwest of Tulum, adjacent to the Sian Ka'an biosphere reserve on the edge of a coastal cliff. Years ago, this Mayan city was used for trading goods from Honduras into Yucatan. Noah loves touching the old stones and we talk about what life might have been like back then.

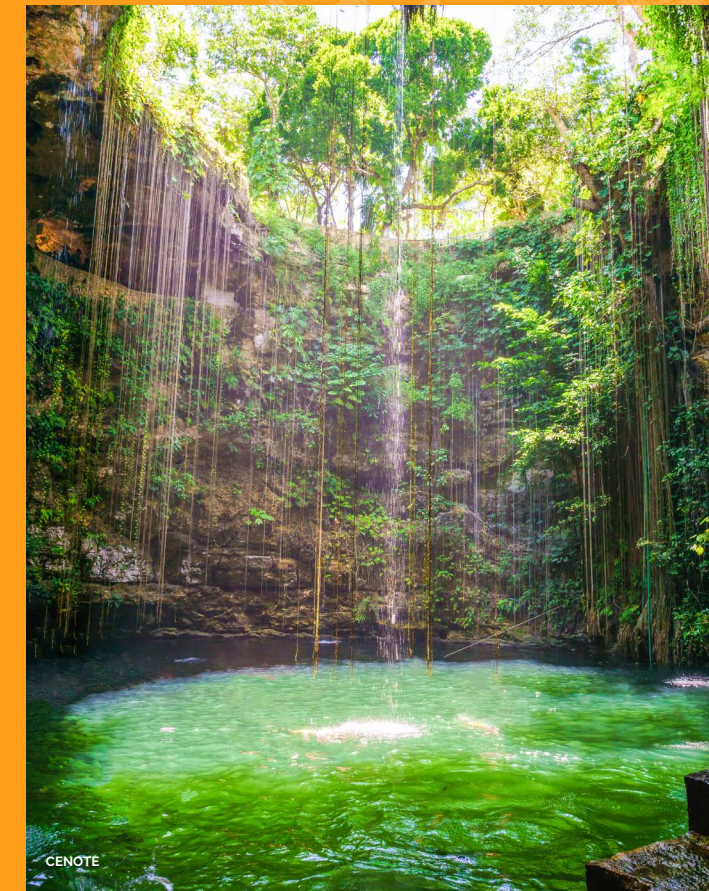
After fun-packed days, there is really only one thing left to do – eat. Our new normal becomes fresh guacamole at every meal. We love the plant-based food options around town including fresh tropical fruit, veggie and tofu tacos, authentic Mexican salads and rice dishes. Each restaurant is a new opportunity to practise the Spanish we learned on the Duolingo app leading to our trip. *"Hola somos veganos!"* (Hello, we are vegans!) we say proudly as we enter Comet 984 – 50's Diner in Playa del Carmen. This retro vegan diner with familiar American dishes is perfect for families wanting to indulge on old-school favourites.

After lunch, we stroll along pedestrian sidewalks and the popular 5th Avenue, and order *jugo de frutas tropicales* (tropical fruit juice) from a friendly woman at a tiny wooden kiosk. We also purchase fresh bread from local bakeries and munch our way through town past colourful storefronts and blooming flowers.

Travelling with Noah inspires me to see the world with wonder and curiosity. I encourage him to try new things and he does the same for me. Happiness comes in many forms – and that day on the top of a cliff as Noah challenged himself to soar higher than ever, I knew that even if our Spanish words and phrases are forgotten over time, the memories of our trip to Mexico will last forever.



MEXICAN IGUANA



CENOTE

## More Fun in Riviera Maya

### CAVES OF KANTEMO

For those brave little souls and adventurous eco tourists wanting to explore snakes and bats, it's a walk on the wild side in the Caves of Kantemo. Discover ancient underground rivers flowing between stalactites and marine fossils.

### CENOTES

Whether travelling with older kids wanting to scuba dive or younger ones that snorkel and swim, cenotes are located throughout the Riviera Maya. They are pits and sinkholes exposing the groundwater underneath and filled with fresh clear water formed by collapsing limestone bedrock and filtering rainwater. Cenote Dos Ojos near Tulum is a popular choice as it's a short walk through the jungle.

### GLASS BOTTOM BOATS

For those travelling with younger non-swimmers, a glass bottom boat tour is the ideal way to explore. Travel to nearby Cancun, Tulum, Cozumel or Playa del Carmen for boating options. Or set sail from the small port town of Puerto Morelos on a small private boat right off the beach. When in Puerto Morelos, consider exploring the second largest barrier reef in the world, the Great Maya Reef, guaranteed to have every family member in awe of its natural beauty.