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## 4 Unique Activities to Do in Riviera Maya, Mexico

 **Like** 2 **Mexico's** gotten a bad rap lately. Most people hear the name and automatically think violence. But the truth is, while certain cities in Mexico are unsafe right now, like Ciudad Juarez, there are many areas, like Cancun, Riviera Maya and Playa Del Carmen, that could be considered some of the safest travel destinations in the Caribbean. Even if that doesn't ease your mind, consider this: the distance from Ciudad Juarez to the Riviera Maya is more than 2,100 miles. That's greater than the distance from Dallas, TX, to Detroit, MI. You wouldn't tell a foreigner not to come to the U.S. because Detroit can be dangerous.

The Riviera Maya, located on the eastern portion of the Yucatan Peninsula, is one of the most eco-friendly destinations in all of Mexico, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and preserving the environment. The area, which is home to many historic sites, is full of beautiful beaches with dozens of luxury all-inclusive resorts and many fine dining options. Following are four off-the-beaten-path activities for you to try during your next visit.

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**1. Rio Secreto:** The longest semi-sunken cave in the Yucatan Peninsula is a stunning, 7.5-mile-long underground river with thousands of ancient stalactites and stalagmites. Before 2007, almost no one had entered Rio Secreto — translated as the “Secret River” — except for the man who first found it. But now, there are guided tours available (starting at \$59) that allow you to hike and swim through a 600-meter route, providing you access to some of the most dramatic mineral formations in the world. (See [RioSecretoMexico.com](http://RioSecretoMexico.com).)



**2. Annual Whale Shark Festival:** The Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the second largest barrier reef in the world, extends along the coast of the northern tip of the Yucatan Peninsula and continues south alongside the Riviera Maya, making the area a hot spot for scuba divers and snorkelers. But if you're looking for something truly unique, attend the Annual Whale Shark Festival in July. Guests can swim with whale sharks, the largest fish in the ocean and an endangered species. The festival kicks off with the whale shark *afuera*, when hundreds of these gentle giants migrate near the coast of Isla Mujeres. (See [WhaleSharkFest.com](http://WhaleSharkFest.com).)

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**3. Water Journey at Grand Velas Spa:** This hour-long relaxation ritual in the Water Lounge of the Grand Velas Riviera Maya Spa is built around the use of eight specially designed water-based facilities (picture a steam room and sauna on steroids). Led by a personal spa valet, the Water Journey is a truly relaxing hydrotherapy experience that alternates between various hot and cold rooms and pools — like the Clay Room, a circular steam room with a fiber-optic “starlight” ceiling, and the Ice Room, with floor-to-ceiling windows. You can also recline and relax in the central infinity pool, which has massaging faucets throughout and carved-stone chaises with jets set just underneath the surface of the water. (See [RivieraMaya.GrandVelas.com](http://RivieraMaya.GrandVelas.com).)



**4. Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead):** Beginning on October 31 with festivities continuing through November 2, this Mexican holiday, rooted in Aztec culture dating back thousands of years, is marked by lively gatherings, colorful costumes and ancient traditions to honor the souls of the departed. Dia de los Muertos festivities begin with All Saints Day, which honors infants and children, and is commonly referred to as “Dia de los Angelitos,” or “Day of the Little Angels.” Celebrations continue with All Souls Day, which honors adults who have passed on. Though customs vary throughout the country, common traditions include visiting the gravesites of deceased loved ones, building alters in their honor, and offering symbolic tokens such as sugar skulls and marigolds. Visitors can attend the “Life and Death Traditions Festival,” held each year at the eco-archaeological park Xcaret, where festivities include plays, dances, cemetery tours and art exhibitions. (See [FestivaldeVidayMuerte.com](http://FestivaldeVidayMuerte.com).)



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