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THE
PASSIONATE
CHEF

destination

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ESENCIA babymoon



AS IF IT WEREN'T ENOUGH THAT SOME HIGHLY CREATIVE INDIVIDUAL CAME UP WITH THE "PUSH PRESENT," ANOTHER HAD TO COME UP WITH THE "BABYMOON." BEING A FIRST-TIME EXPECTANT MOTHER I WAS NEVER ABLE TO RELATE TO EITHER CONCEPT...UNTIL NOW.

A few years back I reviewed the picturesque 50-acre property that is Esencia located about an hour and half from the Cancun airport – and it has remained one of my favorite destinations in the world, hands down. First of all, there's the easy flight from Houston to Cancun, which is usually pretty affordable. Next **the property is flawless.** There's something enchanting about this place, which was once the private retreat of an Italian Duchess. It's not hard to imagine her (I picture a woman like Diane von Furstenberg or Sofia Loren) in a long caftan from some faraway exotic destination wandering the paths down to the beach barefoot with a huge floppy hat.

The attention to detail is not only in the décor but also in the service and the staff. From the iPod docking stations loaded with an iPod with the perfect soundtrack for this place, to the winding paths with free-roaming, sun-bathing iguanas, leading to the villas, most of which feature private plunge pools beckoning you to take a dip with a cold Mexican lager.

Bright concrete, white walls turn into end tables and the base for a cloudlike, equally white, covered bed providing some of the best sleep I can remember. (Which I really reminisce about now with a 9-week-old). Sectional, well-appointed lounge sofas carved out of the same white washed concrete are covered with plush white cushions and colorful throw pillows honoring various indigenous embroidery techniques of the region.

A regular day on my babymoon consisted of early morning yoga facing the ocean followed by a few laps in the lap pool. Then on to a delicious breakfast of the kind you can only have in Mexico with fresh local fruit, eggs that are so fresh the yolks are orange and fresh juices made of watermelon, melon, orange or whatever fruit is featured that day. We were greeted daily by name, even recognized by some of the waitstaff who are still working there from our previous visit years earlier. A quick plunge in our private pool followed by a quick change into my swimsuit featuring my 6-month bump and a walk down to the beach to pick out our palapa for the day.

The beach is usually as calm as a swimming pool and just as crystal clear – it's the perfect spot to enjoy some weightlessness. Now on to the second most impor-

tant thing of the day – lunch! Esencia has a vast ceviche menu and we made it our duty to taste one every day! (Just in case you don't know – the fish in ceviche starts out raw but gets cooked with the lime juice). If you are paranoid about eating ceviche, the fish tacos are heaven. With a full belly and a happy baby Pascual back-flipping, thanking me for lunch – we returned to our initial position of a beached whale basking in the warmth of the sun and breathing in the salty seaside air. Next on our to-do's a prenatal couples massage.

Aroma spa is an organic spa that features ingredients indigenous to the area, most grown on site. The spa is surrounded by lush vegetation and herbs, many perfume the air and are used in the treatments. We were led through a series of easy yoga partner moves that stretched me out and massaged my achy back. The treatment ends with a warm cup of apple-spiced tea and we were off for a relaxing nap before dinner!

Sal y Fuego is the property's delicious restaurant, satisfying my every craving. Inspired by Meso-American cuisine, Yucatán methods shine here. Fish wrapped in banana leaves and meat cooked in a pib (an earth oven) are not to be missed. Perfectly cooked rice and vegetables round out the dishes.

Although I needed nothing more than what Esencia had to offer for my 6-day stay, if you require activity there is more than enough to do and the concierge can coordinate anything. **20 minutes south is Playa del Carmen** with fantastic restaurants, lounges, clubs and shopping; **20 minutes north are the ruins of Tulum.** There are various cenotes (deep natural pits or sinkholes, resulting from the collapse of limestone bedrock that exposes groundwater underneath.) Cenotes were sometimes used by the ancient Mayans for sacrificial offerings (Wikipedia) and are a sight to be seen. You can snorkel or dive in them, or you can stick to the Caribbean.



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