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DESTINATIONS

Riviera Maya, Mexico

Relaxation retreats along the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula honor the healing rituals of the ancient Mayans.



Spiritual Sanctuary

More than three centuries ago, the Mayans ruled the Yucatan Peninsula in southeastern Mexico. They were known to be a sophisticated civilization with a magical connection to their gods and the Earth and the creators of a calendar that is coming to an end Dec. 21, 2012. Though some bill it as the would-be end of the world, most Mayan scholars offer another take. "Despite popular beliefs that the end of the Mayan calendar coincides with the end of the world, the Mayan people actually view the event as a new beginning—the awakening of a period for self-reflection, rejuvenation, and reconnecting with nature," says Laila Medina, spa director of Sandos Hotels & Resorts. "The date marks the end of just one cycle in the Mayan calendar and the beginning of the Mayan Renaissance, an unmarked era within humanity of interconnectedness, sustainability, and consciousness." Here, discover how spas in this magical locale are celebrating age-old traditions and looking forward to the future. —Julie Keller Callaghan

The revered customs of the Mayans are incorporated in several spas throughout the region.



The ChacChac Ritual was inspired by the Mayan god of rain.



Soothing Showers

Chac, the rain god, was one of the most important deities in Mayan history, and the word “cha” means “to let go” or “let loose.” So the ChacChac Rain Ritual (\$239, 90 minutes) at **Willow Stream Spa** at Fairmont Mayakoba is the ultimate escape for those looking to wash away their troubles. First, guests relax on a rain table with an application of a healing body mask and exfoliation with an Ayate cloth, followed by a warm overhead rainwater rinse. The session concludes with a massage application of soothing sage oil. This service is one of several Mayan-inspired experiences. Another is the Chocolate – Food of the Gods (\$169, 60 minutes), which is a nod to the Mayan practice of offering chocolate as a tribute to the gods. This experience includes a cacao mask body wrap, a scalp massage, and a hair treatment followed by a nourishing massage application of pure coconut oil and rose essence. For both gods and mortals, it’s an experience that is certainly sweet.—*J.K.C.*

The Gift of New Beginnings In celebration of the end of the Mayan calendar, **Sense, A Rosewood Spa** at Rosewood Mayakoba is offering guests several new services that conclude with a present. Available through the end of 2012, the Mayan Equinox Ritual (\$450, 2 hours 30 minutes) begins with a temazcal session and continues with the burning of copal incense, a traditional blessing Mayan warriors received before going into battle. Next comes a wrap, a mask, and a silver pendant featuring guests’ names inscribed in Mayan. The New Moon Treatment (\$350, 2 hours) for moms-to-be includes a rose-infusion bath, a cleansing, a prenatal massage, and a silver pendant featuring the Mayan horoscope sign of their new baby. Whether guests are would-be spa warriors or earth mothers looking for a pre-baby retreat, all signs point to relaxation.—*J.K.C.*



New spa treatments provide guests with an auspicious start to their vacations.



Temazcal Traditions

Among the most well-known Mayan rituals still practiced throughout the Riviera Maya region is that of the temazcal steam bath. Designed to be a therapeutic cleansing of the body, mind, and spirit that symbolically brings

guests back to Mother Nature's womb, a temazcal often begins with a ceremonial blast from a conch shell, with participants entering an igloo-type building, where they gather around heated volcanic stones. Water and herbs are poured upon the stones, and guests are encouraged to meditate and center themselves as the steam rises, often enjoying herbal teas and fresh fruit throughout the experience. Following the steam, guests exit the temazcal and cool down in the ocean or a cool bath or shower. Myriad properties feature such offerings, including **Aroma SPA** at Essencia; **Kinan Spa** at Maroma; **Maya Spa**; **Sense**, a **Rosewood Spa** at Rosewood Mayakoba; the **Spa at Ceiba del Mar**; the **Spa at Sandos Caracol**, which debuted a new temazcal in June; **Wayak Spa** at the Viceroy Riviera Maya; **Zoëtry Paraiso de la Bonita**; and others. According to the experts at Sense, a Rosewood Spa, it is an experience like no other. "This indigenous ritual connects you with your internal being—a circle of fire, an offering of love, worship, and chants to nature and the universe," reads the menu. "The temazcal treatment is a union with the elements of life, with aromas that wake up ancestral memory and guide you back to the womb of Mother Nature."—J.K.C.



A spa shaman (above) helps guide guests through the temazcal (pictured) at Wayak Spa at the Viceroy.



BEE-UTIFUL BENEFITS

For centuries, Mayans have used honey culled from the hives of Melipona bees for both nourishment and beauty—the sticky sweet substance provided their skin with much-needed moisture and healing. Modern-day spa-goers can enjoy these benefits at several spas throughout the region, many of which have on-site hives for harvesting honey.

Banyan Tree Mayakoba Spa uses this honey for its body wraps and facials, including the **Honey Facial** (\$180, 90 minutes). Designed for sensitive or sun-exposed skin where exfoliation is not recommended, this soothing treatment provides a light cleansing followed by a gentle and relaxing facial massage using pure honey. A hydrating fresh mask completes the facial, restoring balance. **Willow Stream Spa** at Fairmont Mayakoba features **Honey In The Heart** (\$159, 60 minutes), a signature service that begins with a honey body mask to feed and hydrate the skin, followed by a rainforest rinse under the vichy shower and a relaxing massage, ending with a sip of honey.

Guests of the all-inclusive **Sandos Caracol Eco Resort & Spa** can get a taste of these buzzworthy benefits at the **Spa at Sandos Caracol** with several services that incorporate honey culled from on-site honeybees. To help guests take their experience home, the spa team provides them with the following DIY recipe for a ritual that will bring them back to the beach on a weekly basis, taking the sting out of the end of a vacation.

Honey & Coconut Mayan Ritual

1. Remove makeup and carefully wash face.
2. Place a cloth or a small towel in warm water, and apply for one minute to the face to open the pores.
3. Apply a blend of honey and coconut and rub gently onto face. Leave on for 15 to 30 minutes.
4. Rinse off with warm water, then use cold water to close the pores.—J.K.C.



A manta shawl helps aid in alignment and posture.

That's a Wrap Spa-goers are wrapped in authenticity at **Spa Grand Velas** at Grand Velas Riviera Maya during the Mayan Shawl Treatment (\$198, 80 minutes). This service involves the use of a Mayan shawl, or *manta*, for stretching and movement. Originally used by the Mayans to help women give birth, this modern-day service works to relieve tension and alleviate aches and pains. It's one of several locally inspired services, including the Maya Yaxche Experience (\$335, 80 minutes). During this treatment, guests are treated to a four-handed massage, during which strokes are inspired by animals from the Mayan region, including a jaguar, a snake, an eagle, and a butterfly. It's the ultimate in creature comfort.—*J.K.C.*

Seaside Transformation

Yoga lovers with a penchant for healthy living will adore **Maya Tulum SPA & Wellness Centre**, a destination spa that is home to two yoga centers, a labyrinth, 45 beachside cabana accommodations, and a restaurant that specializes in vegetarian and pescetarian cuisine. Guests can partake in yoga specialties ranging from Anahata, Hatha, and Kundalini to Ashtanga, Anusara, and more. Following one of these intensive sessions, a popular stop is the seven-treatment-room spa, where guests can select from a variety of services, including several based on Mayan healing techniques. Options include the Mayan Honey “Xuunan Kab” (\$120, 80 minutes), a sea salt exfoliation and scrub followed by a massage with local honey; the Traditional Mayan “Yoot Kene” Massage (\$120, 80 minutes), which uses a technique developed by the ancient Mayans; and the Maya Kaaten Kuxtal (\$120, 80 minutes), a stress-reducing exfoliation and wrap that uses agave plant extracts, aloe vera, cacao, honey, lemon, and lime. Guests can also participate in Mayan ceremonies, such as weddings and birthdays; full-moon temazcal experiences; Mayan astrology; labyrinth meditations; and more. “The experience in the Maya Tulum SPA is like entering another dimension—it honors life and soothes the senses with natural elements unique to the Mayan culture,” says general manager Loriana Granillo Vicenttin. “Our unique and authentic healers offer any soul the opportunity to reconnect and expand its true inner light.”—*J.K.C.*

CLOCKWISE: Maya Tulum features a labyrinth, airy beachside cabanas, and two spacious yoga centers.

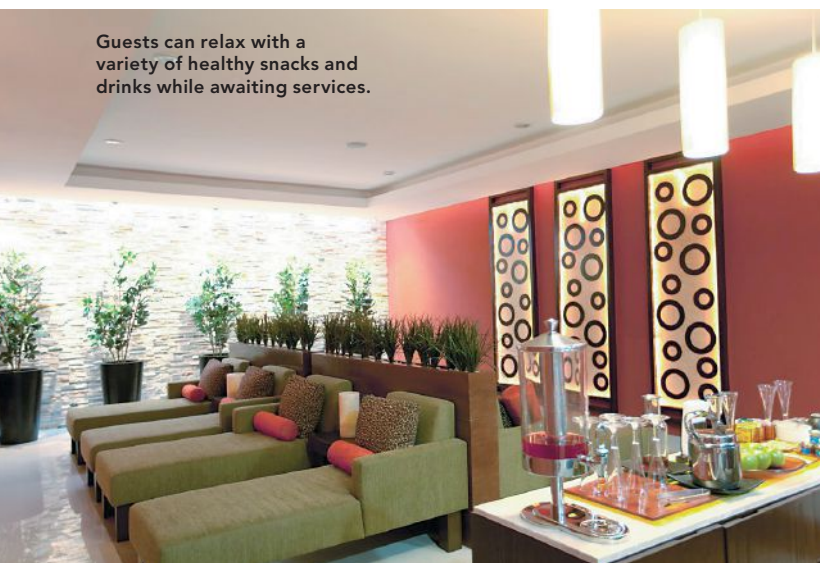




Jungle Retreat

Spa-goers looking for a total Mayan immersion will love **N'AAAY SPA** at El Dorado Seaside Suites by Karisma. With a name that means “the Mayan vision,” the fact that the 30,000-square-foot, 14-treatment-room retreat is deeply rooted in Mayan traditions is not surprising. Guests arrive at the spa via a pathway lined by 13 stone-carved Mayan animal totems and are then greeted with a welcome drink made of star anise and pre-Hispanic chia seeds. Services are performed using indigenous Mayan ingredients, including coffee, chocolate, and freshly ground local plants and herbs. Says Mandy Chomat, vice president of sales and marketing for Premier Worldwide Marketing, the exclusive worldwide representatives for El Dorado Spa Resorts & Hotels by Karisma, “With its rich traditions, aromas, textures, flavors, and ancient healing traditions, all under the expert hands of our wellness artisans, the N'AAAY SPA is positioned to become the new luxury hot-spot on Riviera Maya.” —J.K.C.

Guests can relax with a variety of healthy snacks and drinks while awaiting services.



A soak in a zapote tree tub concludes the fertility service.

Fertility Friend Spa lovers who have been struggling with getting pregnant can rely on the wisdom of the ancient Mayans at **Wayak Spa** at the Viceroy Riviera Maya. There, they can participate in the Xaman Ek South Star Fertility Treatment (\$180, 80 minutes). Xaman Ek is the name the Mayans gave to the South Star, which was said to help guide couples through a path of love, comprehension, harmony, and welfare. As such, the service is performed in the Xaman Ek cabin, where massage beds are positioned to seek abundance from Xaman Ek. The experience includes a balancing massage harmonized to the sound of a waterfall. It continues in a side-by-side herbal bath infused with herbs harvested from the resort garden in tubs made from zapote trees. It also includes two herbal-infused drinks that are said to help bind the couple and the gods and toast new beginnings. —J.K.C.

TICKLED PINK

Young spa-goers now have treatments to call their own with the launch of Perfectly Pink Spas, a program for teens, tweens, and youngsters ages five and older. Introduced by Azul Hotels by Karisma, the age-appropriate treatments performed by pink-clad professionals recently debuted at Azul Beach Hotel, Azul Sensatori Hotel, and Azul Fives Hotel by Karisma. The signature Pink Dreams (\$84, 65 minutes) experience includes a manicure, a pedicure, and a massage with bubble gum glitter body cream. Pink facials are designed to balance problematic skin. To conclude the visit, kids receive a complimentary gift including glitter body cream and a pink bracelet. The experience is sure to leave them tickled pink. —Heather Mikesell





A Mayan Education

The end of the Mayan calendar has created a buzz that is attracting history buffs, culture junkies, and curious travelers to the Riviera Maya. These inquiring minds can find the answers they seek at Maroma Resort & Spa. For those who want a taste of tradition, executive chef Juan Pablo Loza created a Four Elements Dinner prepared with local ingredients and using age-old cooking techniques. Relaxation seekers are welcomed to **Kinan Spa**, which was designed with Mayan health and wellness secrets in mind. All of the treatment rooms, as well as the spa's picturesque waterfall, are strategically aligned to the stars to ensure positive energy flow to the body, and guests can indulge in four new treatments that are themed around the natural surroundings and the four elements. Post-treatment, they can head to the resort's permanent Maya Room, where a staff member can talk about the Mayan culture and traditions. Also available are off-property excursions to ruins, including Coba, Tulum, and Chichen Itza, which are sure to inspire wonder in any would-be Mayan scholar.—*J.K.C.*



Kinan Spa was designed using Mayan building techniques and strategies to ensure the ultimate in relaxation and energy healing.



Local herbs are incorporated into the temazcal and other inspired sessions.

Cultural Connections Kukulkan is the name of a feathered Mayan serpent god who is revered throughout the region. **Aroma Spa** at Esencia is honoring this deity and his prominent role in the Mayan calendar with the Kukulkan Ritual (\$800 per person), a three-day purification event that includes a temazcal session, Mayan yoga, water massage, and more. "We've gathered the ingredients and the ancient knowledge of different regions and cultures of our country to give a solid and native base as anyone ever has," says spa manager Ledia Cámara. "Our philosophy and goal is the union with Mother Earth and the preservation of our culture. Coming to Aroma Spa is to live outside time and space, where past and present mix, resulting in an unusual experience."—*J.K.C.*