



The Seductive Allure of Hotel Esencia on the Riviera Maya

October 12, 2012 at 11:00 am

Filed under Beyond NYC, Central America, Hotels, Review, Travel, Winter Getaways

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If you tend to eschew the mass-produced, goliath-like resorts with their all-inclusive packages and homogenized depiction of local color, there's a good chance that you take a B-line straight for Tulum (or beyond) the minute you set foot in the Cancun airport. Along the way, you see splashy billboards with dolphins and flamingos and kids in snorkel masks and you press down harder on the gas pedal. Further down, the signs get less splashy and become less numerous, but their vague names and foreboding gateways give little reason to stop short of the paradise you imagine awaiting you a mere 30 miles further down. That is, until now.

Caught up in the romance of Tulum, we were coerced into venturing northward on the Yucatan coast, towards the area hailed as **Riviera Maya** and what we feared were those very same goliath resorts that we had chosen to avoid in the first place. What caught our curiosity, however, was the seductive allure of **Hotel Esencia**—with a reputation of a hidden opulence in perfect harmony with its surroundings, tucked into a bit of beach side jungle and waiting to welcome its guests with a quietly luxurious bliss.

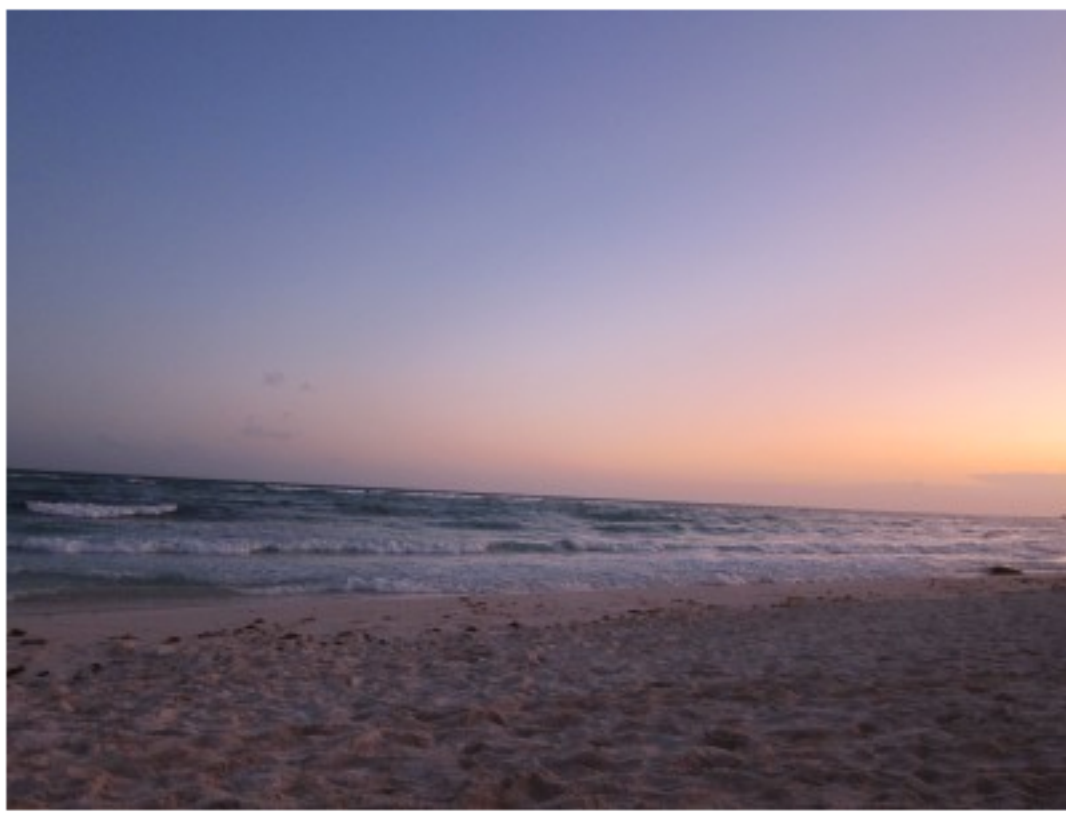
We were not disappointed.



Not far past one of those large, imposing gates, just down a gravel road leading through a tunnel of a jungle, our car is met by two helpful attendants who whisk us out of our ride, briefly check us in, and then (our car already having disappeared) gather us into a golf cart to take us deeper into the jungle. Pathways venture out here and there until a clearing reveals a small enclave of gorgeously luxurious but traditionally composed buildings and a jaw-dropping view of the Caribbean sea.

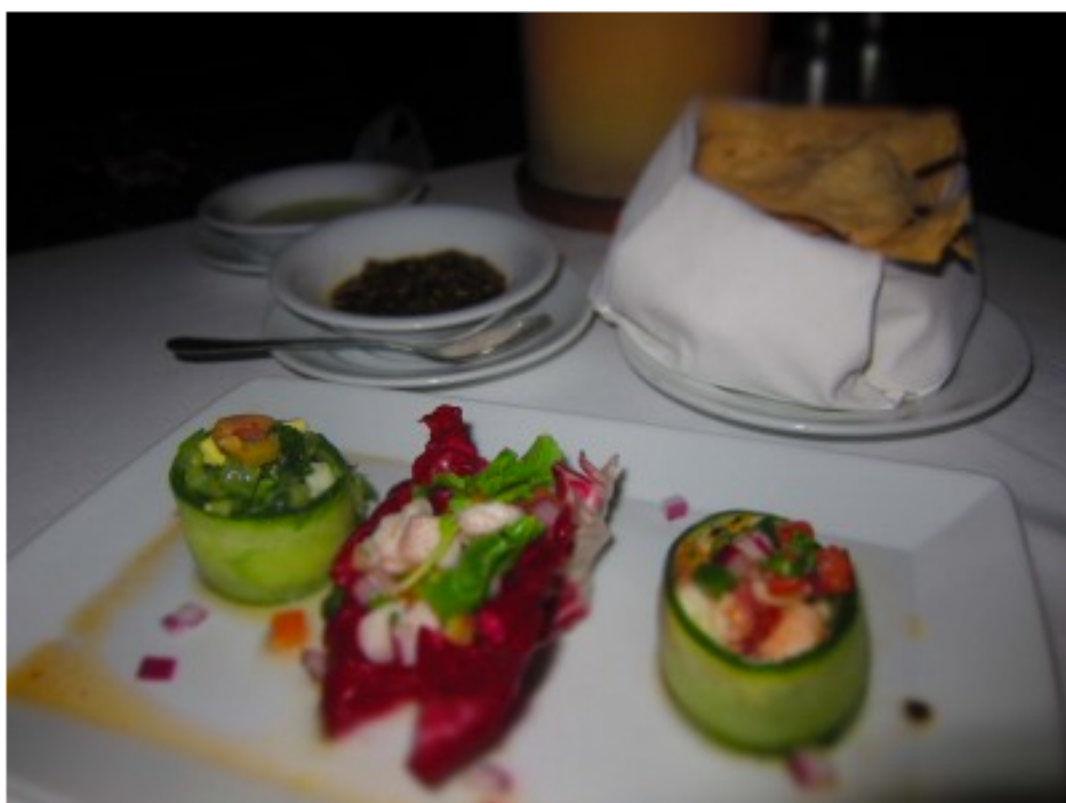


After such a trip, quite naturally, our first stop is the **spa**. Built out of locally sourced materials, the inviting space simultaneously encompasses the feeling of both a cathedral and a shaman's hut. It follows then, that the unique roster of treatments also incorporates traditional spa therapies with traditional Mayan rituals and ingredients. The result of these treatments is an immersion not only into a state of relaxed bliss, but into the surrounding atmosphere. The couples massage, our treatment of choice, was beyond romantic and the private whirlpool and traditional Jamaica tea afterwards was a perfect way to ease back into the real world.



A stroll on the beach at sunset and a margarita later (yes, this *is*, in fact, real life!) we were seated at Hotel Esencia's on site restaurant **Sal y Fuego** (Salt and Fire). Again the fusion of modern technique with ancient and local flavors and traditions produces a remarkable harmony. A signature plate, the trio of ceviches, perfectly showcased how such a simple dish could be creatively interpreted under the skilled hand of Esencia's **Chef Bernardo**.

Served with warm, homemade "totopos," ridiculously addictive, hand made tortilla chips, and you can think of nothing better to pair with such perfectly mixed margaritas (yes, we were on to number two). What followed was a building of harmonies into a true symphony of the palate: Mayan *Tikin-Xic*, red snapper roasted in banana leaf; warm and spicy octopus salad; a traditional cactus salad of *nopales*, brought to life with coriander and bright citrus, and a succulent tuna steak accented with fresh vegetables and a deeply intoxicating sauce.



To finish, a dazzling array of rare and highly prized Tequilas were presented for our perusal. It is a happy decision to have to make. No matter what you choose, you can be confident that you have chosen wisely: family reserves and dark aged varieties—each one mysterious and promising delight—much like Hotel Esencia itself.



And you will not be disappointed.

- Ava Fedorov

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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