

## A Magical Experience in the Heart of the Yucatan

We hopped onto a bus in Tulum, three hours later, a ten-dollar ticket and a short siesta across the heart of the Yucatan peninsula is where it all began. Destination: [Hacienda Chichen](#), a small boutique, eco hotel less than a five-minute walk from the gates of the ancient Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza.

Smells of the lush grounds, bungalows scattered between ancient Ceiba trees and the golden arches of the hacienda were the initial sites our eyes captured. The friendly, well-dressed, smiling staff greeted us as we approached the main hacienda. Bags were freed from our hands and a server held a silver tray offering two glasses of fresh green juice; the perfect combination, it was delicious. We proceeded up the stairs of the open-air reception to an antique desk to check-in where the receptionists acquainted us with the history of the property and the sustainable tourism programs Hacienda Chichen proudly provided.

Set back on the expansive grounds lay the twelve charming guest cottages, each ranging from one to four rooms in size. Each of our rooms was uniquely decorated with handmade Mexican furniture, photographs of flora and fauna, white linens, colorful embroidered pillows and vases filled with tropical foliage. One of our favorite perks to the cottages was the verandas where hammocks and rocking chairs await you.

We were amazed already by the relaxing aura of our room and could have quite easily been content with just this alone. But it was time to take advantage of the extra activities and spa services we signed up for: the Mayan medicinal tour, Kukulcan treatment, Chichen Itza ruins and an authentic cooking class. We had a busy three days ahead and many heartfelt memories that we were soon to embark on.

The sun was dwindling and our appetites were growing, we showered up and made our way to the restaurant on premises. The restaurant, located in the main hacienda has one of the highest standards of Yucatecan fusion cuisine. Tables, set with fine cutlery and linen napkins, overlooked a stunning garden with a fountain. We feasted on several dishes during our stay, all plated with great execution and presented with impeccable service. The food was divine and made with in-house organic grown vegetables and herbs. Chef Josue Cime offers only aged primed meats and his menu prices are fair compare to other fine dining. Some of our favorites include: huitlacoche crepes, Chaya quesadillas, and never to forget, the best chocolate cake. Experiencing new flavors to your palate is one of the best ways to learn about the regions agriculture, traditions and culture.

The next morning we woke to a variety of tropical jungle birds singing away to each other. Followed by a guided tour of Chichen Itza, the guide was resourceful and passionate about his heritage. After the tour we had a short break to refresh and begin our cooking instruction. Classes were held outside, next to the pool under a canopy of coconut palms. The Executive chef himself, Josue Cime, and two of his assistants demonstrated three courses of traditional Yucatecan/ Mayan cuisine. Sopa de Lima, Bu'ut and Dulce Papaya were on the menu. The majority of the produce used in the restaurant and class were harvested from the organic garden on premises. Simple ingredients, fragrant spices, a precise order of events and love made the meal especially delectable.

The experience was wonderful. The Hacienda Chichen setting, the service, the staff and the recipes learned, just like the memories will be revisited from time to time in the future.