

Stretching

Out out a Mexican vacation

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Rosewood Mayakoba retreat is mind-boggling



Fernanda, a shaman, conducts a "marry myself" ceremony on the beach at Rosewood Mayakoba, top photo. The wellness retreat is located in a jungle setting.

PLAYA DEL CARMEN, MEXICO – I'm not one to sequester myself at any resort I visit. Normally I'm itching to get off any property, no matter how elegant the surroundings, so that I can indulge my wanderlust soul. That changes, however, when I step foot onto the grounds of the Rosewood Mayakoba, which speaks not only to the wellness warrior in me but also my eco-conscious soul, as the Mayakoba has attained Rainforest Alliance Certification.

Located just north of Playa del Carmen, the 1,600-acre resort is nestled in a protected jungle, so much a part of the setting that it's not uncommon to see animals like coatis wandering freely throughout the resort.

As I'm escorted to my beachfront suite by a boat through the lagoons and mangrove area, which remains 80 per cent untouched – later, I take a lagoon tour on the 13-km stretch of waterways and see wildlife like the great kiskadee, crocodile and aningha – I feel my soul shift. I'm here for a weekend of wellness and it's clear that I won't have to work hard to find the balance I'm seeking.

One thing you should know





An instructor puts guests through a float fit class in the main pool at Sense Spa, the resort's luxury wellness retreat.

about the Mayakoba: you can't escape logging a good amount of activity here, even if you opt for a golf cart ride from the staff or ride your bike – every guest can request that a bike be delivered to their accommodations for use during their stay – throughout the resort.

Just walking from the beach where I'm staying to the main part of the resort feels more like a hike than a casual stroll, largely because I'm traversing a large swath of jungle, which I love doing at night to hear the chorus of frogs. Even for a fast walker like me, the journey takes 20 minutes, but it's a pleasant one, not only for the scenery but also the other guests and employees I pass, everybody greeting each other with a friendly "hola."

Although Mother Nature could be my gym the entire time – the resort's white sand beach is phenomenal for walking and there are 4.7kms of nature trails that run throughout the property – I can't pass up the opportunity to try my first "float fit" class at the Sense Spa, which sits on a private island. The class takes place in the outdoor pool on floating mats that are tethered to the wall. Six of us take to the pool and attempt to balance as we do 45 minutes of strength training mixed with some cardiovascular activity.



Diners at the resort's famed La Ceiba Garden & Kitchen restaurant eat outdoors under a ceiba tree, top. Guests are transported to rooms in small boats.

At one time, I'm in a plank position, shifting my weight first to my right hand and then my left to create the biggest waves I can. The problem? Everybody else has the same goal so it feels like a tsunami from my precarious position. I have to fight hard not to topple into the water, which is, of course, the point of the class, building not only strength but also balance and coordination.

While movement is certainly one way to pamper the body, so, too, is the nourishment you provide it, and although I'm a plant-only eater, the Mayakoba doesn't disappoint. I have two favourite dining experiences, the first being at La Ceiba Garden & Kitchen, an outdoor eatery centred around a ceiba tree. I'm told that the Mayans believed the tree held significance, which may explain why the community dining table is situated under the tree. Dinners, featuring dishes that change with the seasons, take place here twice a week and they're open to resort guests only. I'm told this is such a popular activity that guests who visit the Mayakoba frequently arrange their trips around when a spot at La Ceiba is open.

The night includes live music and an open bar, the ambiance a cozy one with the numerous torch-



The pool area at Rosewood Mayakoba is sensational and its breathtaking setting promotes harmony.

es glowing in the night. Before the dinner, which the culinary staff prepares on site, the chef offers a warm welcome and a toast with one of the wines they're serving, saying he never cooks for guests but friends, as is the Mexican tradition.

I find the same welcoming spirit at the resort's food truck, *Aquí Me Quedo*. The truck has a separate spot on the beach – adult-only, mind you – and it's designed to be a relaxing beachside cantina. Sofas and lounge chairs are set up in the sand so that you can enjoy uber-healthy Riviera Maya fare like vegan ceviche. The truck's name translates to "Here I stay," which sounds like the perfect mantra to me.

No wellness retreat is complete without incorporating the mind and spirit, and my time at Mayakoba is filled with interesting encounters. For starters, there's the Journey Experience I undergo at the Sense Spa where I stroll down wooden boardwalks set in the jungle to a stand-alone treatment room. My 90-minute treatment starts with a foot washing and foot massage before I undergo an anti-aging facial, which includes a comprehensive shoulder, neck and head massage.

Later, I return to the spa for the Garden Experience where I meet Laura, a therapist who guides me through a spiritual journey. We're sitting in an airy, naturally-lit wooden garden house that's overflowing with plants and flowers. Laura asks me to take my shoes off and walk around the room, picking the flower or plant that speaks the most to me.

I choose lavender, always my favourite, and when I return to my seat I'm directed to close my eyes and place the lavender somewhere on a table made out of a tree trunk that has four quadrants. Choose what feels right, I'm told. For whatever reason, I drop it in the upper right quadrant.

On the day I'm leaving, I get married. But this isn't your traditional wedding. Nor am I marrying my hus-

band again. I'm marrying myself – and for good reason.

"You can't love anybody unless you love yourself first," says Fernanda, a third-generation shaman who officiates the ceremony.

The ceremony, now a three-to four-day "Marry Oneself Journey," is held on the beach where I'm seated in front of a maraca, shell, mirror, glass and flower necklace. Fernanda is speaking in English, but she has an assistant who repeats her words in Mayan. She starts by wafting incense into the air and then introducing the four elements of the earth. I sip water from the glass and place the shell to my ear next to hear the wind.

Next, I look into the mirror, first my left eye, then right, then both. I place the flowers on my head, eat a grape that represents the earth and hold a candle.

During this time, Fernanda instructs me to ask my heart what it needs. Then we stand, shaking our maracas high in the air, and I repeat Fernanda's chants, shouting my name after each chant. At the end, I'm asked to use an imaginary pen to write in the air what my heart needs and then as I face the ocean, she "introduces" my new heart to the world.

As I leave, I remind myself that I can take this newly found tranquility with me, especially my emboldened heart. Yet no matter how much I try, I know that it will be nearly impossible to replicate the calm I've felt at Rosewood Mayakoba. ☺

• Rosewood Mayakoba is a 40 minute drive from Cancun International Airport

• The resort has 129 suites and several multi-room private residences and numerous dining options.

• Info: <https://www.rosewoodhotels.com/en/mayakoba-riviera-maya>