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A quick guide to Mexico's top beaches

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09 March 2011 05:01

Meet chilled-out surfer dudes, Hollywood starlets or dorky tourists lathered in mosquito repellent, depending on the beach you choose.

1. Cancun

The Historian

Expect honeymoon kitsch and package-holiday crowds in Cancun. The clear, calm waters make for great snorkelling and scuba diving, and you can go swimming with dolphins. Balance beach time with a visit to nearby Tulum, the only walled city built by the Mayans. Sunset: For dinner, head to Paloma Bonita. The traditional food here is expensive but the ocean view from the terrace is worth every penny. Order the chili la doña.

2. Acapulco

Hollywood Star

Mexico's iconic spot on the Pacific Coast was a favourite with the Hollywood glitterati back in the 1950s. Nowadays adrenaline junkies come to dive off the jagged cliffs around La Quebrada, others spend their time snorkelling, jet-skiing, parasailing or hiking. Sunset: Acapulco is Mexico's nightlife wild-child with bars and high-end restaurants. Zibu (zibu.com.mx) serves an eclectic combo of Mexican and Thai dishes. Try the fish wrapped in banana leaves.

3. Manzanillo

The Fairy Tale

Picturesque Manzanillo is a coastline dotted with tranquil golden beaches, attracting surfers, yogis and a bohemian-chic crowd that dines in fancy restaurants. Shop at the village markets, then hit the beach. Troncones beach is a favourite with surfers, secluded Manzanillo Bay is best for swimming, snorkelling, kayaking, horse-riding or sea-turtle watching. Sunset: Come nightfall grab some beers and spicy shrimp tacos el Burro Borracho.

4. Cabo San Lucas

Californication

Low-key Los Cabos is a favourite with camera-shy Hollywood stars. The 33-kilometre stretch of white sand between San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas is the aptly named "corredor turistico" (touristic corridor) studded with intimate beach huts and exclusive resorts. There's great golf, big game fishing and whale watching here. Sunset: Uber-glamorous Nikki Beach is for evening follies, with extravagant theme parties and on champagne on tap.

5. Playa Del Carmen

The Gem

In the past, Playa del Carmen was an unpretentious seaside village. Now it's a hit with sun seekers. An ancient Mayan port, it's also home to the great Mayan reef, the second largest coral reef system in the world. Escape the heat on 5th Ave., the main strip running parallel to the beach, for shops and snack bars. Sunset: Enjoy a dinner of seafood risotto and crayfish sashimi at EL Alux, a lounge bar.



This sun-soaked strip in Cancun tops our writer's list of Mexico's best beaches.

Metro World News