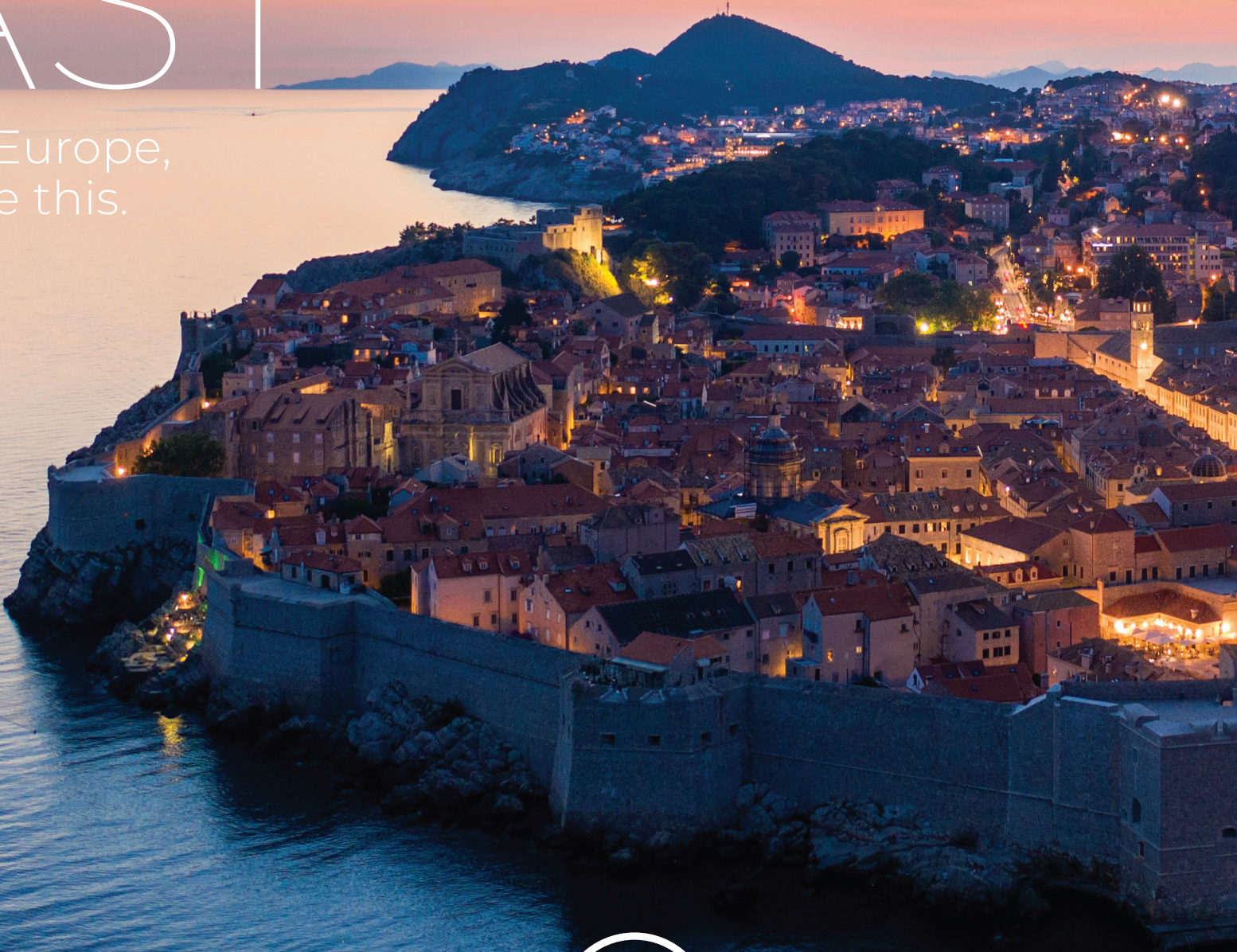


# TRAVEL WEEKLY

THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY'S TRUSTED VOICE

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# LUXURY TRAVELERS DESIRE AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES IN

# Mexico

BY MARK CHESNUT

Predictions about the travel industry may be difficult to make in today's less-than-certain environment, but Mexico's luxury travel segment appears especially well positioned for the winter season and 2022, according to many industry observers.

"I think travel and tourism to Mexico will continue to be strong into 2022," says Cristina Buaas, owner and luxury travel advisor at CSB Travel, a Virtuoso agency in Houston. "The incredible new resorts opening and developments are piquing the interest of travelers that haven't been there recently."

Maggie Stein, director of independent contractor services and luxury travel at In the Know Experiences, a Global Travel Collection affiliate, says that upscale clients are finding lots to love in Mexico. "As a result of what we have all experienced over the last year-plus, travelers coming to Mexico are more and more looking for destinations and properties that can provide ample space, where they can spread out and feel safe from a health perspective—while still providing a vibrant atmosphere that brings back feelings of life and socialization that we've all

been lacking during this time," she says. "The best example of this is the growing interest in booking villas that are attached to a resort property."

Indeed, upscale travelers are increasingly gravitating toward certain types of experiences and accommodations, according to industry experts.

"Affluent travelers have continued to seek privacy and exclusivity since the beginning of the pandemic," says Daniel Torres D'Elia, operations director of FIDETUR, Acapulco's destination marketing office. "However, more and more luxury travelers are now requesting to experience open spaces, to connect with nature and ask for adventure activities that typically weren't booked as often by this segment." Proof of

PRODUCED BY  
**TRAVEL WEEKLY**

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Photo Credit: St. Regis Punta Mita, Marriott International



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## INCLUDED PARKS

The parks included in the All-Fun Inclusive concept are: the iconic Xcaret park, Xel-Há, Xplor, Xplor Fuego, Xenses, Xoximilco, Xenotes and Xavage; altogether they offer 200 cultural, entertainment and adventure experiences. Transportation is included, as well as the food plan offered by each attraction.



## MEXICAN ART EXPERIENCE

As with everything done by Grupo Xcaret, this newly opened hotel has surprised everyone with experiences never available before. What sets the hotel apart more than anything else is its Adults Only format, which includes artistic workshops which seek to make guests feel they are a part of art from its origins. The themes are textiles, painting, literature, pottery and dancing.

Another distinctive feature of this hotel is the art that guests can absorb and admire in every hallway and corner of the hotel. Nature is undoubtedly the muse for this concept. The hotel has four rooftops with infinity pools from which guests can gaze at the Caribbean Sea. Another not-to-be-missed attraction is the Speakeasy with its live jazz band and an atmosphere that makes guests feel as if they are in a New York jazz bar.

# HOTEL XCARET ARTE

You have probably heard or read the word Xcaret when researching the Mexican Caribbean. Xcaret means 'small inlet' in the Mayan language, and this area owes its name to its geographical characteristics, specifically where the sea enters the mainland. This geographical location made it an attractive point to build a port and Xcaret became an important trade center.

Nowadays the name has become well recognized thanks to the opening of the water park of the same name. Thirty years have passed since that opening and today Grupo Xcaret constitutes a brand of businesses that includes parks, tours, hotels and many adventures in Cancun and the Riviera Maya.

In July 2021, Grupo Xcaret opened its second hotel, Hotel Xcaret Arte, a 900-suite resort with a concept that has revolutionized the local and national industry, known today as All-Fun Inclusive. This concept is superior to traditional all-inclusive hotels since it offers much more than just accommodations with food and beverages included. All-Fun Inclusive extra features encompass:

- Unlimited access to all Grupo Xcaret parks
- Premium dining experiences designed by celebrity chefs
- Round-trip transportation to the Cancun International Airport (CUN)
- Shuttle to the parks



## GASTRONOMY AS ART

Hotel Xcaret Arte has eight included restaurants, designed and supervised by renowned chefs. The signature restaurant Encanta, headed by Chef Paco Méndez, deserves special mention — Chef Méndez has a Michelin star and is world-famous for his Barcelona restaurant Hoja Santa. The ninth restaurant Xaak (\$) is a must, too. Its a four-handed experience by Chef Alejandro Ruiz and Chef Roberto Solís, where Mayan cuisine is the protagonist.



## MEMORABLE EVENTS

Hotel Xcaret Arte has dreamlike locations for celebrating weddings or organizing conventions, incentive meetings and other business events. It offers everything from an ecumenical temple overlooking the sea and white-sand beach to a convention center with a capacity for more than 3,000 persons. Organizing an event is easy here since the All-Fun Inclusive concept includes everything mentioned above, so there is no planning stress and everyone can concentrate on enjoying themselves.

Without a doubt, Hotel Xcaret Arte pays tribute to Mexican art and will let you enjoy the best of its culture, history and gastronomy.



Arrange for your clients enjoy the unique All-Fun Inclusive amenities at Hotel Xcaret Arte by emailing Rocío López at [rlopezg@hotelxcaret.com](mailto:rlopezg@hotelxcaret.com) and visiting [hotelxcaretarte.com](http://hotelxcaretarte.com).





## a daily dose of *Luxury*

The state of Yucatan has debuted a new marketing campaign in 2021 called 365 Days in Yucatan. The campaign highlights at least one unique tourism activity for every day of the year. Visits to archeological sites, off-road excursions and bird watching are just a few examples of the new initiative, which can be especially appealing to affluent travelers, according to Michelle Fridman, the state's minister of tourism.

"The new luxury is having authentic, sustainable and organic experiences in open spaces free of crowds; unrepeatable experiences that offer contact with nature and the ancient history of Yucatan, with circuits that combine relaxation, spas, adventure, sun and sand," she says.

The 365 Days in Yucatan campaign consists of an extensive selection of unique experiences—visitor favorites, renewed products and new adventures that are available throughout the state. A daily trip option is published via Yucatan Travel's official social networks. Many are featured online at [yucatan.travel/en/unique-experiences](https://yucatan.travel/en/unique-experiences). Each experience listed has a detailed description accompanied by a visually stunning photo gallery.

this trend, according to Torres D'Elia, is an increase in private yacht rentals in Acapulco and strong interest in waterfront accommodations.

"In 2022, travelers will ask for more private and individualized experiences that allow them to receive a complete, end-to-end luxury vacation," he predicts, noting that culinary experiences are also likely to be big sellers.

With their greater spending power and ability to afford exclusive and customized vacations, upscale travelers are an ideal target market for both destinations and travel advisors, according to Rodrigo Esponda, managing director at the Los Cabos Tourism Board. "As soon as we reopened the destination [in 2020], the first wave of travelers who came were the luxury travelers," he says, noting a surge in private aviation arrivals. "We have two airports for private planes. Both airports have been getting double the number of travelers from international markets."

According to recent surveys and research by the Los Cabos Tourism Board, upscale travelers are more likely to reserve their trips further in advance, stay longer and buy complete vacation packages with both air and hotel, according to Esponda. "If the luxury traveler is opting to book with more [advance notice] and staying longer, then it's double the benefit for the destination," he says.

### WHAT LUXURY TRAVELERS LOOK FOR

A typical upscale vacation today is likely to include more diverse elements than in the past, according to Germán Ernesto Kotsiras Ralis Cumplido, tourism minister for the state of Jalisco. "Luxury travelers have diversified in terms of their interests when traveling, and suppliers are offering more options to meet this wider array of interests," he says. "There is a growing demand for more unique, authentic and emotional experiences."

"We've noticed an increased interest in open spaces, nature activities and sustainability which has boosted the popularity of our haciendas, glamping and options for outdoor lodging that have the luxury and comfort of a hotel," he adds. "Many luxury travelers are now seeking experiences that will bolster their mental and physical well-being, such as meditation, yoga and other holistic activities." Jalisco's multiple tourism destinations—including Puerto Vallarta, Guadalajara, Costalegre and Tequila—offer various options to satisfy those interests, he notes.

Dario Flota, director of the Quintana Roo Tourism Board, agrees about the increased popularity of nature-based and culinary experiences. "Travelers are now looking for places where they can have experiences that involve the natural wonders of the destination, the local gastronomy—now fused with gourmet elements—without foregoing comfort," he says. "Now, more than ever, the traveler has modified their travel patterns, taking a preference for private yachts, tours, transportation and gourmet cuisine." In addition to promotional efforts by government tourism

organizations, hoteliers are also doing their part to foster growth in the upscale market segment. "Luxury travelers still don't have too many places to go," says Enrique Calderon, COO of Grupo Posadas, which owns La Coleccion Resorts by Fiesta Americana. "They're not traveling overseas much because there are a lot of restrictions, so they're coming back to our hotels—but coming back for new experiences."

Among the new experiences they're most requesting, according to Calderon, are spa treatments, culinary programs and locally authentic and unique activities. To that end, La Coleccion has introduced new options like balloon excursions at the Live Aqua San Miguel de Allende Urban Resort and a new venue for The Table, a high-tech, table mapping dining experience at the Grand Fiesta Americana Coral Beach Cancun All Inclusive. New local culinary options are also available at La Coleccion properties in Oaxaca, Puebla and Los Cabos, and the company is also upping the ante with new features like a luxurious, adults-only rooftop pool at the Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta All Inclusive & Spa and plans for revamped family suites at the Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancun All Inclusive, which will have private gardens and kid-friendly small pools.

The forecast for luxury travel sales is bright at La Coleccion Resorts by Fiesta Americana, according to Calderon, who notes that bookings at the company's beach resort properties have already surpassed numbers for 2019. Bookings at properties in larger cities and colonial destinations, for the most part, are recovering more slowly, he says, in part due to the slower rebound of business travel. But La Coleccion is encouraging leisure travelers to explore those destinations too, with a soon-to-launch program that features customizable, multi-destination itineraries that include properties in Mexico City, Morelia and Guadalajara, among others.

Buass agrees about the popularity of traditional beach vacations for luxury travelers, with especially strong sales for several regions in Mexico. "Cabo, Riviera Maya/Tulum and Riviera Nayarit/Punta Mita have been the most popular destinations by far," she says. "Many are renting villas, but we also have families and couples opting for rooms or suites in luxury resorts. They want to experience all the destination has to offer, from whale shark diving in La Paz to mescal tastings in Punta Mita."

As with any market segment, affluent vacationers are likely to evolve further in the coming months and years, according to Stein. "I think by 2022 people are really going to be craving local authentic experiences that they've been missing out on," she says. "Right now, people have still been somewhat content with traditional resort getaways, as the slag of this pandemic has left many feeling drained and in need of a relaxing, luxurious getaway. But by next year, I think people will really be missing the experience of exploration and diving into other cultures, that just hasn't been as readily available during these times."