

UNICO 2087: Quite Possibly the BEST All-Inclusive Luxury Resort in the Riviera Maya

Chances are you've heard of the Riviera Maya. A stretch of rainforest and white sand beaches between Cancun and Tulum, this is the idyllic sort of place people dream of when they use the phrase "Relaxing on a beach somewhere...".

I wasn't sure what to expect when I first came to this hotel because usually when I think all-inclusive I imagine that corners are cut so that the resort can still make a profit. Let me just start right here and say, I was VERY surprised (in a good way).



Luxury unveiled the minute you walk in

The minute you enter you notice the attention to detail and design. The doormen help you to the check-in counter where you're sat at one of the couches in the lobby and given a welcome drink and even asked what type of candle you'd like to choose for your room scent. I was also shown the app (YES! An App!) for the hotel, which was by FAR the most full featured app I've ever seen for everything from ordering room service 24/7, to having your room cleaned or turned down WHENEVER you'd like, and even allowed you to request different TYPES of pillows according to your preference in sleeping position. I was VERY pleasantly surprised and hesitant that something like this would work in operation but more on that later...



Welcome drinks + Relaxation Candles. This is how you welcome guests!

Now onto the property itself. This place is a VERY large.

Lets list it out – Too many pools to count (including an Adult-only pool), a Mexican, Mediterranean, AND Sushi/Teppanyaki Restaurant, along with poolside tacos and a beach front cafe. I honestly could have spent an entire week without feeling like I was at a lack of things to do and eat. Speaking of – it just so happened that it rained for a bit of my stay, but that didn't ruin a single thing. They had live music, a nightclub within the resort, TOP-SHELF liquor at the bars, and every room contains an outdoor hottub or direct access to a plunge pool.



Don't want a hottub? Then choose a room with direct access to a plunge pool



Don't want a plunge pool room and prefer a hottub with a view? They have that too

Lets get to the food and drinks. This is one of the biggest problems I have with all-inclusive resorts – they skimp on the quality. Not here – as an avid “Foodie” and a food writer I have to say the quality of the dishes and selection at this resort was simply outstanding! Particularly delicious were the poolside tacos along with the incredible Mediterranean inspired kitchen and the breakfast pastries in the main lobby’s coffee shop (yes, all you can drink coffee and pastries – highly dangerous here).

Of course, the room itself is itself enough to write an entire article about. The interior is modern yet homey with just the right hints of stone and wood, and everything from the locally sourced soap, to the Mexican candy and all you can eat snacks were icing on the cake.



An absolute delight, comfortable and modern, these were some of the nicest rooms i've seen in the 5 star category

Now if you decide to leave the property (Which I highly encourage doing), they have an incredibly helpful concierge and booking service. Through them we got locals type tours of Cenote's (cave swimming holes), and of the local ruins of Tulum. Seeing as how the resort is ideally located Tulum is only 25 minutes away so this is sort of the perfect place to stay without being in the hustle of the city and being able to enjoy Resort life AND Tulum life.

It is truly rare that I find something that I enjoy so fully, especially in the all-inclusive category, something is usually found wrong, whether its quality of the rooms, quality of the food, or somewhere that the property decides to cut corners on, but with UNICO, I really couldn't find fault.

RATING:

Hard Product:

-Location (How close is this to top attractions in the surrounding area?)

On its own private beach, not too far from the airport, and

close enough to local sights like Tulum

10/10

-Cleanliness (Is the grout in the bathroom clean? How good is maid service here?)

The app really kills it here. They are on top of their game and its a very new property at time of writing (September 2018)

10/10

-Upkeep (Is the hotel in need of a remodel, or is it being constantly kept up?)

Still a relatively new property, nothing at fault here

10/10

-Public Spaces (How unique/inventive/useful are the public spaces?)

The Gym is one of the most full featured ones including even a yoga room. The spa was on par with any 5-star resort, and with restaurants and bars galore along with unique spaces to just relax and read a book or just have a drink, this was high up there.

9/10

Soft Product:

-Service (How good is the service here?)

Staff were attentive and easy to speak to, concierge was great. No personal butler here but at this price point it was incredible service.

8/10

-Restaurants On-Site (Are the restaurants on site somewhere even the locals would go to?)

One of the best perks of this place, the quality of food and service.

9/10

-Concierge (Specifically, how effective is the Concierge at helping you with a new locale?)

Lovely concierge service with great local suggestions

8/10

TOTAL: 64/70

(35/70 is average)

PROS:

- Modern, refined, All-Inclusive
- Every room is a great room here with either an outdoor tub or a plunge pool
- Attention to detail with the easy to use App really made this place incredible

CONS:

- At this price point there really are none

SECRETS:

- Don't stay in Tulum. Although the hotels there have lots of their unique qualities, if you want a full service resort but want to explore Tulum on the side THIS is the place to go. d

How to do Tulum Properly: Tips for an Awesome First Trip

It seems that every year Tulum is getting more and more popular as a destination not only for those seeking yoga and vegan food on the beach, but for those looking to discover something other than nearby Cancun and its endless clubs.

This is a quick guide as to what you should (and shouldn't do) while in Tulum so that you can get the most out of this unique spot down in the Riviera Maya.

1. **Where to stay:** Your best bet is actually to stay just a little bit north of Tulum town, in the area of Riviera Maya. My hotel of preference is the UNICO which is an all inclusive and VERY NEW (as of early 2018) hotel with stunning rooms, some of the most delicious all-inclusive meals you've ever had, and service that is on par with some of the best 5-star resorts in the world. However, if you do choose to stay somewhere else, just know that it's not necessary to stay within the actual town of Tulum as many of the resorts just north of it are within 15 minutes of taxi rides and will often offer better rates and larger accommodations – a win-win in my book.



The Unico 2087, it's every bit as nice as it looks.

- 2. What to Do:** There's three main things to do in Tulum. There's obviously more than that, but the first is to visit the old Mayan ruins. Now, normally I don't like tourist traps, but the Mayan Ruins are certainly worth seeing and so unique to this area of the world and so well preserved that they're definitely worth a visit. Just know that during the middle of the day there is ZERO shade and it gets quite hot. I would recommend using a tour guide from your hotel or a local service as they know the quickest routes in and out of the place to make the whole experience a bit more fulfilling. The second thing you want to do in Tulum is just browse the actual town of Tulum. The main "row" is essentially a quaint one street town with a road and palm trees overhanging it. On both sides there's hotels, stores, and a ton of shopping. You could easily spend a few hours just perusing this area and going in and out of spots. Many of the hotels here are worth visiting just for a few hours for a meal or for a day fee to use their "beach clubs". Of particular note worth visiting is

Habitas.



This is the main street. Stroll it.

- 3. Cenotes:** The third thing everyone must do is visit a Cenote (or a few). These are essentially natural water sinkholes which double as swimming holes and are specific to this region of Mexico. These are amazing for their crystal clear water and incredible diversity of fish and turtles just hanging out. There are a TON of Cenotes in Tulum but there's one in particular that is definitely worth visiting and it is called the "Cenote Dos Ojos". Now there's a bit more to this – when you visit Cenote Dos Ojos be sure to take the ride towards the back of the Cenote park and explore the myriad of Cenotes that are beyond just the initial one at the entrance. Most people make the mistake of just going to the first one they see and miss out on exploring the more intricate caves that are deeper into the Cenote Park at Dos Ojos.
- 4. Where to Eat:** Tulum is very much a food destination, with some calling it a rival to Mexico City, because of Chef's like Rene Redzepi and Eric Werner who have

created pop up culinary feasts in this beach town. There's a heavy focus on wood-fired foods, local seafood, and Yucetecan inspired cuisine with Mexican influence. Keep in mind, the food here is NOT truly Mexican, and I say that in a good way, because it has its own unique flavor and style. There are quite a few restaurants that one could argue are worth visiting here in Tulum, but the two which I highly recommend are Hartwood and Kin Toh. Hartwood is an original and known for being one of the original high-end wood-fired restaurants – serving locally sourced ceviche and legendary pork ribs. Kin Toh is the place to go if you want equal parts entertainment to equal parts cuisine. Located in the Azulik hotel, this restaurant is situated in a treehouse, something straight out of Swiss Family Robinson or Tarzan with stunning skybridges, tables nested above the nearby forest, and hammocks to lay around in – all 40 feet in the air. The food itself is gastronomic and seasonal, and should you wish to imbibe they even offer a hookah program with imported tobaccos. You'll want to spend a few hours here at sunset to lounge, relax, and eat and drink slowly.



This is Kin Toh. You'll want to spend a lot of time here.

REVIEW: A little slice of heaven – Andaz Papagayo

Staying at this hotel was one of the best experiences I have had in a while. I know, it may sound like hyperbole, but the Andaz really knows how to do things right when it comes to their resort in Costa Rica. I was lucky enough to stay here during low season which turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the resort was exceptionally placid and relaxing with only a few people around.



This is the view that you'll be seeing every morning as you have an amazing breakfast

One of the first things you'll notice when you enter the Papagayo Peninsula and then the Andaz is just how secluded it all is. Costa Rica, in general is already a getaway, but at the Andaz the buildings just meld into their environment making guests feel at one with the nature around them. When I was choosing whether to stay at this hotel, or the Four-Seasons down the street I decided upon the Andaz due to its newer build and more zen-like atmosphere. I did get a chance to visit the Four Seasons one night and my decision, in retrospect, was correct.

There's a lot of things to love about this property, its direct beach access and water-based activities, including jet-skiing, snorkeling, paddle-boarding, and snorkeling, to its

beautiful set of infinity edge pools that span across the entire width of the resort. What I love most about the hotel, however, was the fact that the management has spent a lot of time training the staff to make you feel as if you were an old friend, and valued guest. This is especially important when you're at a secluded resort and spend a significant amount of time on the property.



Modern, relaxing, and awesomely integrated into the mountainside – Big ups to the Andaz hotel chain for this one!

The staff went out of their way at each moment to know the names of the guests, to know my personal preferences in drinks and food, and to impart some personal tidbits about Costa Rica – once they knew it was my first time there. The concierge was extremely helpful in planning activities, and one of my favorite things about the resort was the mixology bar and the mixologists on staff. The complexity and innovation that went into some of the beverages that the staff made for me was

almost incomprehensible (yes, it's that good).



They take mixology to a whole 'nother level here. I really can't begin to describe how amazing the drinks are at the Andad Papagayo

The spirit of "Pura Vida" (Google it, because that's a whole 'nother article in itself), is especially prevalent here, and I cannot hesitate to recommend this as a must-see and must-stay at property if you're ever in Costa Rica.

PROS:

- Beautiful modern property with amazing rooms/bathrooms, it's a lot newer than the more expensive Four Seasons next door, and a lovely property
- The service is bar-none. I would put it at the same level as a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, which is saying a lot
- All the awesome activities were put together with lots

of planning and thought, the mixology classes, coffee classes, forest hikes – you won't feel at a loss when finding things to do here

- The food is incredible, lots of amazing cuisine for vegetarians to meat lovers alike

CONS:

- Some of the restaurants were closed on certain days due to it being low season, but that ended up not being an issue as there were shuttles to the Four Seasons next door when added variety was needed

SECRETS:

- Check out the adults-only pool next to the spa, it's got a nice secluded atmosphere to it
- The ceviche at Ostra is incredible and a must have

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- I highly recommend the ATV tours through the company that Andaz's concierge uses, it's a fun adventure through rivers and rainforest that shows some of the beauty of Costa Rica (hidden waterfalls, local towns, etc)

REVIEW: Trump International in Panama



I had very high expectations for this hotel. It was essentially the highest rated luxury hotel in Panama City, and Trump hotels generally have great service and well thought out

and luxurious accommodations. However, I should've known something was off when I arrived and the front desk wasn't even staffed.

You see, this hotel was originally developed as a condotel (Hotel + Condo units). Many didn't sell, and as a result this happened: Condos not doing so well at Trump Panama. The result is a grand plan for a stunning hotel, crippled by high vacancy rates and low staffing. The rooms at the hotel weren't terrible, except that they hadn't seemed to have been well thought out. For one, Panama is a very hot environment, and there's a significant amount of humidity. Whenever the patio door was opened, condensation would form on the massive marble floors making them downright scary to walk on.

The rooms also lacked any real separation between the bathroom and the beds which was odd, and due to the shape of the building there were odd acute angles which made the rooms seem smaller than they actually were. My neighbor also approached me in the hallway one day to tell me his A/C hadn't been working the entire duration of his stay and the front desk wouldn't give him a different room when it was obvious that the hotel was at high vacancy.

The gym was large, but the equipment was old and needed changing. The pool had an amazing view, but the chairs had rust developing on them, and there never seemed to be sun because most of the pool area was blocked by the building during the middle of the day.



The rooms weren't terribly decorated but had odd space planning



The pool may look stunning in the pictures but the view is of swampland and the building blocks most of the sun

PROS:

- The low price of the hotel makes up for its lackluster performance
- The hotel is easy to find because of its size

CONS:

- The decor is spartan and of low quality
- The dining options at the hotel are subpar
- The pool is one of the highlights due to its view, but look closely and you'll notice that its located right above swampland and the sun is blocked most of the time by the building itself
- The service is mediocre at best

SECRETS:

- Use UBER for quick travel to and from destinations
- Check out the rooftop bar which is accessible from the side entrance where the Casino is
- Before booking here, I would recommend looking at the Hard Rock International as an alternative option

OTHER STUFF IN PANAMA:

- Getting lost in Casco Viejo is a great way to spend a day or two (or three in my case). There's a lot of restaurants and other interesting sights in the old section of Panama but one place that I really enjoyed was Tantaló. It's a hotel but with a restaurant downstairs and a bar upstairs. It's got great views of the city from the rooftop, and when downstairs you've got a variety of delicious tapas and drinks. Definitely check this place out!