

# MEXICO

## Fairmont's Mexican golf meccas break par.

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After two unrelated visits to the Fairmont Mayakoba on the Riviera Maya and, in Acapulco, The Fairmont Acapulco Princess and The Fairmont Pierre Marques, I can't resist comparing them. They're all high-end destinations with championship golf, gorgeous beaches, world-class cuisine, and that Fairmont mix of haute luxury with local color and sustainability that enhances both guests' and locals' lives. Moreover, they all honor Fairmont's Famous Agents loyalty program (see the March issue of *Recommend*, page 10). Despite their similarities, though, these destinations are anything but look-alikes, so here's a guide to who's who.

onsitereview

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### win a 3-night stay at the fairmont acapulco princess

Make sure to read through this Fairmont Mexico onsite review for your chance to win a 3-night stay for two at the Pearl, a beach enclave at The Fairmont Acapulco Princess. Visit [recommend.com/fairmontmexicocontest](http://recommend.com/fairmontmexicocontest) and answer all questions correctly for your chance to win. Stay includes 3-night accommodations, breakfast and two rounds of golf at Turtle Dunes Country Club.

### fairmont mayakoba, mayans and bogeys

El Camaleón Golf Course, the handiwork of Greg Norman, hosts the only PGA TOUR event in Mexico, the OHL Classic. As part of the AAA five-diamond Fairmont Mayakoba, El Camaleón lies north of Playa del Carmen in Mayakoba's enclave of villas, resorts (besides the Fairmont, there's a Rosewood and Banyan Tree), and fairways.

Clients who fear a shark attack should take heart: Norman designed this 72-par PGA layout to also work for weekend duffers, thanks in part to the brilliant placement of its four sets of tees. Indeed, the entire course is brilliant.

"When workers began building El Camaleón, they discovered a cenote—one of those water-filled caves typical of the Riviera Maya—along the first hole," says Paulina Feltrin, Fairmont Mayakoba's director of public relations. "Instead of constructing a bridge, filling in the cenote, or steering clear of it, Norman featured the cenote as a trap." The result is authentic, green, photogenic, and pure Fairmont.

Approaching the course, I encountered an immense iguana, so I asked one of the pros, "Is this why they call the course 'El Camaleón'?" Too polite to point out that iguanas and chameleons are as different as horses and hyenas, he explained that the layout is chameleon-like because it camouflages itself to fit in with the natural mangroves, jungle, lagoon, and seashore. "It's designed for people who appreciate nature and a championship layout, even if they use the front tees," he said. They can get further assistance from the excellent Jim McLean Golf Academy. >>





Left top: Guestroom at the Fairmont Mayakoba in the Riviera Maya.  
Left below: Poolside at The Fairmont Pierre Marques in Acapulco.



This Fairmont features unobtrusive cottages, mostly separated from the beach by a lagoon and woodlands, plus restaurants, a convention center, and an Asia- and Mayan-influenced Willow Stream Spa. The property is so natural that it offers onsite wildlife boat tours, where during our visit we saw large turtles, gold Mayan cichlids that thrive in the canals, crocodiles that thrive on the cichlids, an adorable coatimundi, and scores of the resort's 300 species of birds. Nature is also a big part of the children's Discovery Club and Adventure Camp, complimentary for three hours a day.

Most guests get around via the golf-cart shuttle or the unlocked bicycles stashed everywhere—a delightful way to reach the beach. When booking families with little children, choose beach casitas or lodgings near the lobby and pool. Clients with mobility problems might negotiate the resort, but that's not Mayakoba's strong suit.

Xcaret, Chichen Itza, and the reefs of Cozumel are world-famous, but clients should also visit San Ka'an, a 2,500-sq.-mile UNESCO World Heritage site of rivers, wetlands, forests, beaches, and the ancient city of Muyl. Fairmont sponsors a Mayan guide service.

**Community Tours San Ka'an**, that offers birding, fishing, kayaking, and other tours.

The half-dozen people on our *Muyl Forest & Boat Tour* were the only visitors we saw at the temple ruins, where guide Alberto Cen Caamal matter-of-factly described the spirits in his life. Then we donned wet suits and floated, like the fish we saw all around us, down a lazy river toward the sea. We finished with lunch at a community center. How to top that? Making par would be nice.

Off-season rates start at \$229, but what's better is the *Best of the Beach Getaway*, including beachfront accommodations, daily golf or a \$50 non-cumulative spa credit per adult, golf video analysis, WiFi, and butler service. At press time it cost \$349.

## acapulco is back, turtles and all

While Mayakoba celebrates nature and the Mayan heritage, The Fairmont Acapulco preserves memories in a large city where Elizabeth Taylor, Frank Sinatra, John F. Kennedy, and Howard Hughes came to play. So what happened? In the '70s and '80s, newly built Cancun and Cabo mesmerized Americans; consequently, airlines cut back service to Olde Acapulco. Then Americans became worried about drug crime, no matter that the gangs have avoided the 30-mile-long tourist zone.

But talk about comebacks: As of March, several airlines have promised to expedite connections from Houston, Mexico City, Los Angeles, and other gateways. Moreover, The Fairmont Acapulco Princess is debuting a \$30 million upgrade and a smashing new golf course. The *Acapulco Princess Golf Course*, which made *Golf Digest's* "Top 25 Golf Resorts" list, is alive and well, too, but the buzz is all about the second course, the *Turtle Dunes Country Club*. >>



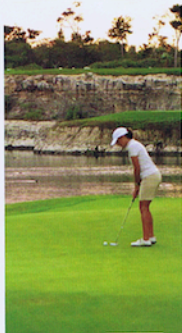
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# APPLE VACATIONS

\* Unlimited greens fees for adult guests staying at Luxury Bahia Principe Sun/Ka'an Don Pablo collection. Two rounds of golf per room, per 7 nights stay at the other three resorts; unlimited greens fees for select room categories. AD6822 4/13

## Mexico golf

continued

"It took courage for course designer Tripp Davis to rip up a Robert Trent Jones layout [the old Pierre Marques course]," declares Oliver Riding, director of golf at Turtle Dunes, but Davis aced it, creating a 7,200-yard layout that has drawn comparisons to Pebble Beach. "What's unique is the combination of a links-style course surrounded by sand dunes with native grasses, palm trees, big old parota trees, and bougainvillea," says Riding. "Also, the mix of longer holes, shorter holes, and holes that move left to right or right to left puts you in situations where you have to be creative. Play just nine holes, and you'll have used every club in your bag." He adds, "Turtle Dunes has perfect turf, too. People'll feel madly in love with it."

They also love the new golf school. The Lorena Ochoa Golf Academy offers indoor and outdoor facilities, video analysis, seminars on strategy, and full-swing, short-game, and putting instruction.

Where to chill after the 18th (or 19th) hole? The Fairmont Acapulco Princess pyramid—dramatically different from Mayakoba's tree-hidden cottages—remains an icon, and downstairs Nou, the newest club in Acapulco, accommodates up to 500. The Pearl, another tower on the property, has been completely refurbished, and our spacious room was typical, with bold colors, marble floors, and a balcony with fine views. One caveat: Until The Pearl gets its own front desk staff, the service may not be as sterling as the rooms.

The real pearl here is the adjacent Fairmont Pierre Marques, J. Paul Getty's hideaway. The Pierre Marques features low-rise buildings, golf and tennis (d'uh), pools and a beach, a kids' club, crackerjack service, estate-bottled tequila, and the excellent Tabachin restaurant. Guests may also use the Princess' facilities, including the Willow Stream Spa. You can book a room off-season for \$180, but for about \$280, clients can enjoy a ground floor hacienda-style Villa King.

Off-campus, Acapulco offers urban sophistication plus a few surprises.

Our recommendations:

- Zibu for mind-expanding Asian-Mexican cuisine. This is the best of many great restaurants in Acapulco.
- A table on the terrace overlooking Acapulco Bay at El Gran Recuerdo, which serves international cuisine. Romantic? You bet.
- A turtle release, which the Fairmonts can arrange. Surprising that this moving experience (plus, the baby turtles are cute!) is so close to a large city.
- Paddleboarding past gleaming high rises on Acapulco Bay. The owner of Subete al Mar gets novices up in no time.
- The cliff divers (of course). Clients can watch from La Perla Restaurant at El Mirador, but for well-heeled clients, ask the Fairmont to arrange a boat.
- Lunch at La Cabaña de Coleta, a beach bar classic. The \$10 seafood crepe is fresh, moist, and eggy; the drinks, generous. Hard to leave.
- A visit to Acapulco's Fort of San Diego, now a historic museum with extraordinary 18th and 19th century Mexican and Asian tableware, religious objects, and nautical instruments.
- Dance all night, because this is Acapulco. Where? Baby-O (for thirtysomething clients), Classico (upper crust), Albrje (electronic), Mandara and the Palladium (open bar), or El Mojito and Nina's (a mix of music, including salsa). Or suggest they stick around for Nou, after which they can practically fall into bed. After all, early tee time. ●

Archived related articles (available on [recommend.com/magazine-issue-archive](http://recommend.com/magazine-issue-archive)): Top Golf Resorts: Mexico (May 2012)

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