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Secrets Excellence Resort & Spa

Puerto Morelos (Cancun), Mexico



After taking 7 consecutive cruises over the last 4 years and not having a real vacation, we thought it was time to go someplace where we could just lay around and relax. Being in the business, a cruise to us is more like a trip than a vacation. Oh sure, we enjoy them, but we're always busy trying to do and see everything, and we don't have time to relax. We want to make sure we get as much information as possible on a cruise so we can share this with our clients and make recommendations to make their vacation more enjoyable. But this time, we decided to spend two weeks recharging our batteries at an all-inclusive resort.

We have sent many clients to several of the resorts on the Mayan Riviera, which stretches from Cancun to Akumal on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. Unfortunately, we have not had the opportunity to see some of them ourselves and wanted to check out this very popular destination. Having spent many, many weeks in various parts of Mexico, we knew the food to

be excellent and the people have always been warm and friendly - not to mention that the beaches are beautiful!

After searching through all the resorts and emailing them about rates and availability, we decided to try the brand new Secrets Excellence Resort & Spa in Puerto Morelos. It's about 35 kilometers south of Cancun and about 30 kilometers north of Playa del Carmen, so the area is not overly populated. Secrets Excellence just opened on October 12, 2004, so we were anxious to be one of the first to visit this adults-only all-inclusive resort.



I contacted several taxi companies in Cancun via email to enquire about rates and decided on Cancun Vans (www.cancunvans.com) for our transfer from the airport to the resort. For the two of us it was \$74 roundtrip plus gratuity, which was one of the least expensive rates I could find. I prepaid the fare using PayPal and received immediate confirmation. Their customer service was good and their communication and assistance was prompt and accurate.



The least expensive airfare we found at the time was on Spirit Air from National Airport, which was about \$320 per person. Unfortunately, our plane was delayed 1-1/2 hours due to a navigational equipment problem. Turned out the equipment used for navigating over water was broken, which forced us to fly over land. This necessitated adding 2500 gallons of fuel, further delaying the takeoff. We arrived in Ft. Lauderdale to find our connecting flight was delayed by an hour because they were waiting for other delayed flights to arrive. Needless to say, I was not a very happy camper.

As with most planes nowadays, the seats are made for people 5'1" weighing 120 pounds, not for someone like me who is 6'1" weighing 220 pounds, so I felt like I had been folded, spindled, and mutilated by the time I got to Cancun.

After getting off the plane in Cancun, we proceeded to the immigration area, which did not take very long, then got our luggage and went through customs. The whole process was handled rather expeditiously and did not take more than a 1/2 hour. It's been a while since we were at the

Cancun airport and were impressed with the many improvements they have made and continue to make to accommodate the ever increasing tourist load.

We walked outside the terminal to find our driver holding a big sign with my name on it. (There are a lot of people trying to sell you timeshares, taxi rides, and souvenirs outside the terminal, so it's best to reserve a taxi before you get there – it'll definitely make your life easier.) He took us to a new Chevy Malibu and handed us two ice-cold bottles of water as he loaded our luggage in the trunk. Since the terminal is rather warm and humid, the water and the air-conditioned car felt great.

It only took about 20 minutes to get from the airport to the resort – roughly 35 kilometers.

Upon arrival at the entrance to the resort, we were greeted with a tray of cool moist cloths to wipe ourselves with, which felt fantastic given the heat and humidity of the day. They took our bags and then led us into a beautiful reception area where a young lady offered us glasses of cold champagne.



Since we were not sure whether we wanted an upstairs room or to spend more money for a ground floor room, we asked to be shown the rooms first before checking in. We were taken to a ground floor room in Building 2 and as soon as we saw it, we knew this was what we wanted and headed back to the front desk to complete our check-in.

The room was beautiful! The first thing you notice is the natural stone on the floors and the large whirlpool tub in the bathroom. The four poster king-size bed was very comfortable. The outside patio also had a whirlpool tub and we had two lounge chairs and a hammock in our own little backyard. About 10 steps from the patio was the pool, which circumnavigated the entire spa area.



I know I'll continue to use the same words to describe this place, but I can't come up with other words that would truly describe it. Simply stated, the entire resort was beautiful and wonderful. It was also very clean with lovely landscaping. I would sum it all up by saying it was truly a subdued elegance. All the colors, decorations, buildings, chandeliers, etc. enhanced the visual charm and splendor.

The Secrets Excellence only has 442 rooms, making it smaller than most 5-star resorts on the Mayan Riviera. But this also makes it more intimate and relaxing. If you're looking for someplace where there is an abundance of activity, crowds of people, and a variety of nightlife, then I would recommend some other resorts or hotels, such as the Moon Palace or the Aventura Resort & Spa.

The rooms are large with a king-size canopy bed. All the amenities are provided, including bathrobes, slippers, and a hair dryer. There was also a small refrigerator

that was kept full of bottled water, sodas (coke, sprite, orange), and beer (Corona and Montejo). I was disappointed they did not have Dos Equis anywhere on the resort, but after trying Montejo for the first time, I was very pleasantly surprised and this became my beer of choice during our stay.



The Secrets Excellence has 7 restaurants, so there are plenty of choices and all offer excellent cuisine. There are two Italian-themed restaurants side-by-side; one serves the more traditional Italian-style with lasagna and the like. The other is more of a trattoria-style with pizza and pasta. Together, they serve as the place for a very large and varied breakfast buffet. We ate there every morning and always requested the same waiter, Emmanuel. He was absolutely wonderful and catered to our every need. As soon as he saw us coming in the door, he would come to seat us and then immediately

fetch two large mimosas using champagne and tangerine instead of the usual orange juice – they were excellent! He was so sad to see us leave; he gave us some parting gifts and invited us to his house for dinner upon our return. I think he was rather embarrassed when I presented him a rather large gratuity at the end of our stay. I did not see many people leave tips, so this must have been the rarity, but he was very pleased we thought so highly of him. There were a couple of other waiters we rewarded for outstanding service, but all of them were very good and tried very hard to please their patrons.

The other eateries included an outstanding Japanese/Chinese/Thai style restaurant that was very good. The French restaurant was very lovely and the food was excellent, but the wait staff was rather slow. This was our only disappointment in an otherwise perfect vacation. The steakhouse was my favorite and the seafood restaurant was my wife's favorite, both had a wide variety that was always prepared as requested. But having lived in Albuquerque for 9 years, my wife and I really like Mexican food, so we thoroughly enjoyed the



Mexican restaurant at Secrets. From the decorations, to the margaritas, to the live music, it was a very nice place to absorb the ambiance and enjoy the wonderful food.

We only ordered room service one time for lunch and it was okay, but we much preferred the great restaurants. In fact, we ate three times a day, missing only one lunch when we were out sightseeing. Overall, the food was very good, the waiters were all exceptional, and the restaurants were beautifully decorated making our entire stay outstanding. They even served

dinner on the beach one night – they had entertainment and a buffet that was great, especially because you could run your toes through the soft sand while eating. It was very romantic.



There are bars everywhere, so you're never too far from your favorite libations. The bar in the spa area was not yet open, so we either had to call room service and have them send a bar waiter over to our area or we had to walk over to the main pool area.

And speaking of the spa, it was absolutely wonderful! Not only is it aesthetically beautiful, but the treatments and staff are among the best we've encountered.

The activities were varied and they try very hard to have something for

everyone. There are sailboats, wind-surfboards, and kayaks for those so inclined. There is also a well-equipped fitness center and they have a great yoga class twice a day.

There was a company on site selling scuba and snorkeling excursions, but everyone we talked to that purchased a trip through them said they were very disappointed and did not recommend their services. Avis Car Rental has a representative on site, offering compact cars for around \$60 - \$65 a day. The roads in the area are very nice and plenty of signs, so there was no problem getting around. Apple Vacations also has a representative on site, but as with their vacations, their prices were more than other options. The concierge desk was always attended and readily available for assistance to guests.

The one area I really appreciated was the business center. They had 8 brand new computers with flat screen monitors hooked up with a very fast internet connection. And it was free of charge to use them along with the printer! This was a great service to those of us trying to conduct business long-distance and needing to stay in touch with clients.

There were several small stores at the resort offering jewelry, film, clothing, and the usual tourist stuff. After checking prices in the area, we found their prices were not inflated over other places.

Overall, this was a very relaxing vacation at a wonderful resort. We've visited other resorts in the area as well as hotels in the 'hotel zone' of Cancun. Depending on exactly what you're



looking for, there is something for everyone. There are even a couple of nude resorts, one of which I would highly recommend, if you're so inclined: Hidden Beach Resort & Spa. It is absolutely wonderful and extremely beautiful. It is definitely a 5-star resort that is very private with fantastic food and amenities.

As I said earlier, if you're looking for a 5-star resort with a lot of activities and people, there are several we can recommend, including the Aventura Resort and Spa and the Moon Palace, just to mention two. But if you're looking for a small intimate resort with attentive staff, wonderful food, and beautiful surroundings, then Secrets Excellence Cancun gets our highest recommendation.

Please contact us if you would like additional information or have any questions.



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