



ALONE ON A ROMANTIC COUPLES GETAWAY

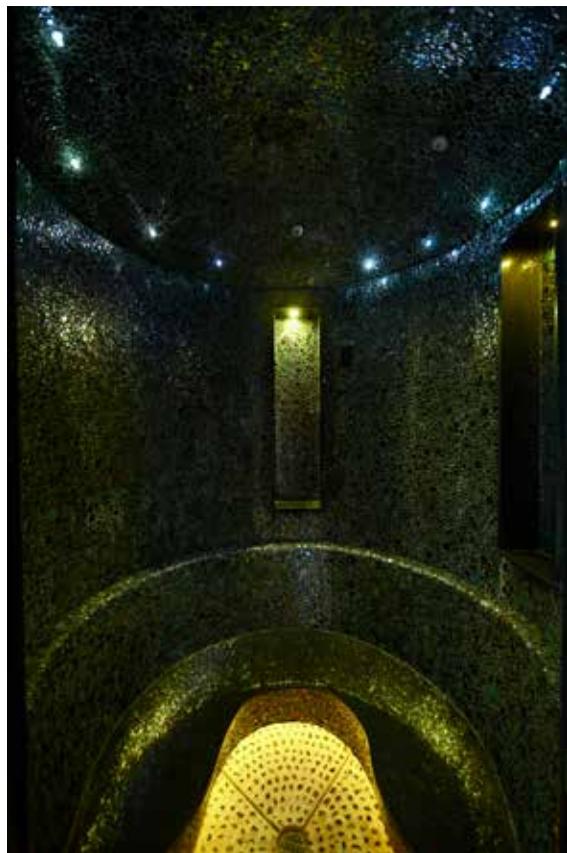
Still plenty to love at this Mexican retreat

BY DAVID DURAN

I just came back from this incredible trip to Mexico. It was a group trip, mostly couples, with some singles, like me, mixed into the bunch. There were also some on the trip who were open to sharing their significant other with me—for some much needed cuddles (but that's another story). The trip was to a planned LGBT-friendly resort community within Riviera Maya, minutes from Playa del Carmen and an easy

flight into Cancun. These private resort communities are not uncommon in Mexico; in fact, I had visited Punta Mita in Riviera Nayarit recently and was kind of in love with the exclusivity of it all. This time, the destination was Mayakoba, and with the rowdy bunch I had enlisted to join me, I was looking forward to lots of tacos and tequila.

I was taken aback by how deep into the resort complex we drove from the



OPPOSITE: Banyan Tree HAAB, an amazing Mayan dining experience with fire performers.
ABOVE: (clockwise from top left): Spa Rainforest Brine Cavern; dining at our villa; the Spa Rainforest Vitality Pool; a water taxi we used to get around



Traditional Mayan
cuisine in Mexico

main entrance. There are checkpoints along the way, for security reasons and to maintain the resort's exclusivity. Mayacoba is made up of residences as well as several hotels: The Fairmont, Rosewood, Andaz (the newest addition), and where we were booked, Banyan Tree Mayacoba. The four luxury resorts are connected via water pathways, and designated bike paths. Guests are encouraged to wander to the other resorts—where they can charge meals and other purchases to their rooms no matter where they are in the complex. This offers you the chance to experience more than just one hidden resort; here you got four.

Banyan Tree is a collection of villas, each with their own private full-on legit swimming pools. Lush green vegetation and freshwater lagoons surround the villas, inhabited by a wide range of birds and wildlife. Some are friendlier than others. I was filming a spider



ESCAPE TO **KEY WEST**

Even the resistance needs to relax and recharge sometimes.

Key West is the farthest you can get from mainland America and still be in the lower 48. The fact that it's also a queer mecca makes it all the more tempting as a destination for anyone wanting to get away from it all. The gay-owned Gardens Hotel (gardenshotel.com) is the perfect boutique B&B when you want get away from it all. Choose their luxurious master suite—replete with two bathrooms, a sitting room, balcony, Jacuzzi tub, and its own private sauna (you'll never want to leave)—or one of the pet-friendly cottages (especially if you'd like your own kitchen). Rooms have wifi and modern amenities, but you'll spend more time lounging poolside, drink in hand (the onsite bar may be small, but it's well stocked). Free continental style breakfast offers specialties from local artisans. In the evening a pianist serenades you. Wander through the gardens, following the winding path beneath a lush canopy and you'll find beautiful sculptures, flowing fountains, and a plethora of lizards. During some months live jazz will accompany your stroll. Located just off Duval Street, the hotel is walking distance to local LGBT hot spots and a short drive to amazing beaches. If that's not enough to forget the specter of the U.S.'s spiral into authoritarian rule, take advantage of their self-serve "wine gallery." It's a great way to taste different wines on your own for just a few dollar. If you're lucky, the visit will be enough to have you asking, *What President?*—**JACOB ANDERSON-MINSHALL**

LEFT: The heated pool at the Gardens Hotel. **RIGHT:** One of the cottages at the Gardens Hotel in Key West, Fla.

monkey swinging from tree to tree when he dropped down to the ground and started coming towards me! I'm a bit of a coward when it comes to monkeys, so I bolted into the villa and quickly shut the door behind me. I wasn't going to take any chances. I didn't want to share my delicious mango with anyone.

Upon arriving with my excessive luggage via golf cart, I was pleased to see a pair of bicycles for my personal use throughout the stay. Guests can use the bikes and leave them anywhere on the property and employees will return them to the appropriate villa. I found this service especially useful after a few too many tequilas.

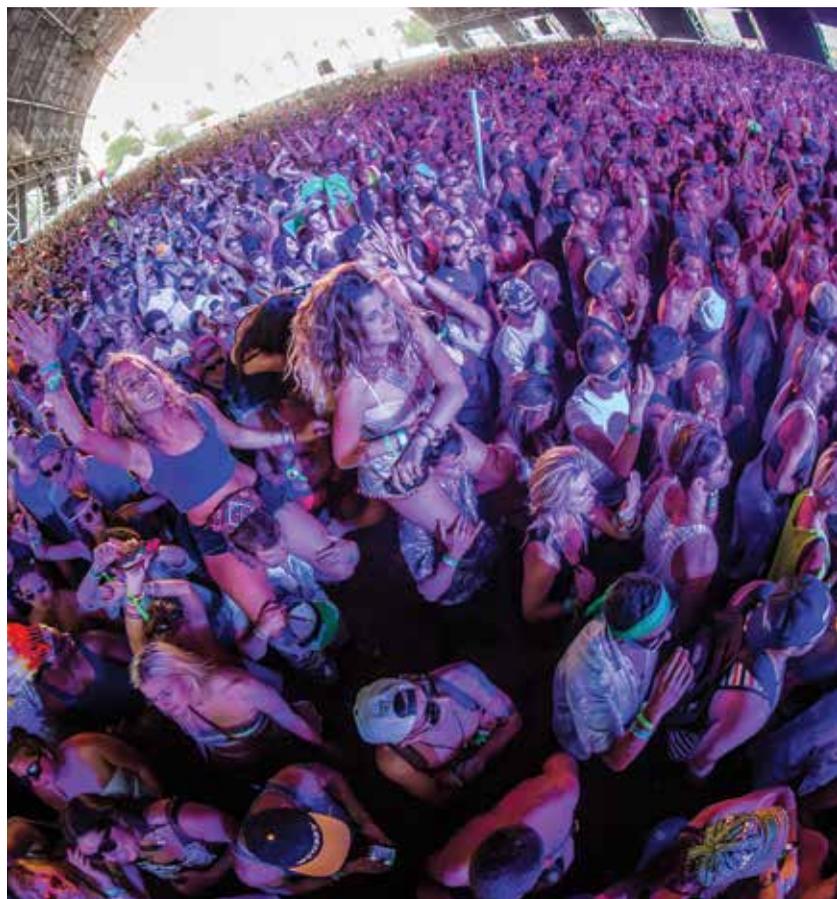
Entering the private outdoor space of the Serenity Pool Villa, I was greeted by a heated swimming pool and hot tub with two separate buildings on either side. To the left was the bedroom, with an impressive wooden headboard that stretched to the top of a vaulted ceiling, and a bathroom larger than most Manhattan apartments. The shower was what I like to refer to as a "party shower;" spacious enough for multiple guests and featuring a glass wall looking out to the huge outdoor tub. The resort's "bath butler" will happily set up a romantic evening bath, complete with candles, wine, and rose petals. I opted to have a solo bath set up during the day, with a bottle of tequila and some flowers. I also asked that they relocate the Bose music system within reach, so I could blast the sweet sounds of George Michael. "Careless Whisper," may have been on repeat for an hour.

The other building in my private complex was an entertainment room with a massive couch and television and enough space to host a mini-party. I threw a Saturday Night Live viewing party. Everyone came, fresh chips and guacamole were delivered and we all had cocktails in hand—only to discover that SNL wasn't available on any of Mexican networks we had. (No Kate McKinnon!)

The dining at Banyan Tree was over-the-top, and I felt like I ate more than I should have each day (possibly because I was distracting myself from not getting romantic). One night, we all experienced HAAB, an unbelievably unique dinner experience that incorporates true Mayan cuisine with an interactive dinner show, all while they overflow your glasses with tequila, mescal, beer, wine and cocktails. Drinks are unlimited and part of the set menu price, so they didn't shy away from over-serving. My memory is thus a little hazy, but there was fire and dancing and lots of traditional costumes. This was also the night where I cashed in those free cuddles from a couple of the guys while we were lounging in a rooftop cabana after dinner.

We didn't leave the resort much during the visit except for a quick morning trip to Tulum to see the Mayan pyramid ruins and hang at the beach. There was also one dinner in Playa del Carmen, which validated our decision not to leave Mayacoba: it was a bit too touristy for us, and we missed our villas.

Back at Mayacoba we hit the amazing, award-winning Banyan Tree Spa Samui, and experienced The Rainforest, a private hydrothermal circuit compromising of alternating hot and cold thermal cabins. It was perfect way to end the weekend. (👉)



COACHELLA IS HELLA QUEER THIS YEAR

Beyoncé and LGBT artists grace the Coachella Music & Arts Festival stage

Spring is a fabulous time to visit Palm Springs, Calif., all the more so because the world famous Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival takes place nearby. The outdoor festival occurs over two consecutive weekends (April 14th–16th and 21st–23rd) in Indio, California, about a half hour drive from downtown Palm Springs.

This year's musical lineup is more diverse than ever, with big names and indie favorites, including LBGTQ artists like Shura, The xx, Miss Honey Dijon, and Kaytranada. This year's headliners include Radiohead, Kendrick Lamar, and yes—the Queen Bee herself—Beyoncé, who by April will be very pregnant with her twins. The pop diva's appearance is a special treat, as she rarely performs at festivals.

Coachella's also about art and the local desert environment is home to—and inspiration for—artists of all persuasions, from landscape painters to steampunk sculptors craftsmen who creates tree-like electrical burns on wood. There's something for everyone. With seasonally gorgeous weather, and one of the country's highest populations of LGBT residents, Palm Springs is the perfect place to visit while you're enjoying all Coachella has to offer. (For more information visit coachella.com.) —**DESIRÉE GUERRERO**

ABOVE: The crowd at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival near Palm Springs, Calif.