



Guide to the Akumal/Yucatan Area

I have owned my condo in Akumal now for 20 years and have visited often. During these 20 years, we have tried to see and experience what the area offers the tourist. Most renters spend a week at the condo which is OK but limits what you can do. If you spend 7 days, you usually lose most of the first day and depending on when your return flight is scheduled, a lot of the last day. That gives you 5 full days and a part of 2 other days. If you can afford to stay for 10 days to 2 weeks, you would be able to explore more of the area. At this time, my rates are \$160/night for high season (January through mid April) and \$100/night for low season (mid April through mid December). This is a real bargain for the condo and the area. Mexico on the whole is a great bargain for the tourist. Even rental car rates are very low. The dollar and the euro are very strong in Mexico and the drug war basically only effects the tourist by lowering rates which is to the advantage of tourists to Mexico.

There are many wonderful excursions available for the visitor to the area using Akumal as a base. Here is a review of some of the available excursions:

Akumal: In Akumal there are many activities available. Right in front of the condo is Half Moon Bay. Half Moon Bay is about 1/2 mile from end to end. It is protected by a reef that is home to thousands of fish. Visibility is excellent and the bay is calm because waves break on the other side of the reef. On the beach side of La Iguana condos, the builder constructed a path of coral stretching right into the water so that snorkelers could easily enter the bay. You never know what you will see when you enter the bay. We have seen turtles, large schools of fish, barracuda, morays, eagle rays, nurse sharks, giant parrot fish etc etc. The best way to snorkel Half Moon Bay is to swim straight out to the reef and then follow the reef to the right. It is never very deep. We ask snorkelers to not touch the coral so it maintains its health. You need foot protection in the bay because of all the coral heads throughout.

Yal Ku Lagoon is located about 250 yards from our condo. This lagoon is a highlight of the Akumal area. At this time, entrance to the lagoon costs about \$6/person. There are bathrooms, tables, paths and entry steps into the lagoon as well as an amazing sculpture collection throughout the beautifully landscaped area. You must see it to appreciate what has been developed here. The snorkeling is excellent.

Akumal Bay is the bay located near the entrance to Akumal south of the condo. In front of Lol Ha Restaurant and the Palapa Bar is a wonderful beach to lay on. The highlight of snorkeling here is to view the giant sea turtles that live here and feed on the grass patches that grow in Akumal Bay. It is also very calm here. You can bring a towel and lay on this wonderful beach. You can also eat at the Palapa Bar and after lunch, snorkel

in the bay. This is a wonderful activity.

Definitely, the visitor to Akumal should drive over to the Pueblo (Akumal Pueblo) on the other side of the highway where the locals live. There are restaurants, markets, a laundry, a drug store and doctors. Prices are lower over there. The produce is very good. Check it out.

Great Beaches near Akumal: There are many amazingly beautiful beaches near Akumal that are wonderful visits. Two great beaches just north of Akumal that are worth a visit and lunch are Paamul & Xpu-Ha. Perhaps the most beautiful beach I have ever seen is X'Cacl, a hard to see beach just past the local pueblo of Chemuyil. X'Cacl was set for development when a huge protest by environmentalists (mostly Green Peace) stopped the construction because X'Cacl is a spot where sea turtles have laid their eggs for thousands of years. The Mexican government was bowed by all the international protests. The result is an amazingly beautiful undeveloped beach to walk on and swim in. Bring your camera.

Tulum: There is a city of Tulum (Tulum Pueblo) which is right on the highway #307 the main highway that goes north/south from Cancun to Chetumal near the border of Belize. Tulum is about 20 minutes south of Akumal. There are a number of good restaurants in Tulum and some good places to shop. Just before entering Tulum Pueblo on the left side of the highway are the ruins of Tulum, the ancient Mayan city which is built on a promontory overlooking the Caribbean. The ruins are not so great but the location and the views will knock your socks off. When you come to the first traffic light on the highway south of Akumal, if you turn left, you will go toward the wonderful beaches of Tulum. If you turn right, you go toward the more impressive Mayan ruins of Coba. Coba is a more extensive ruin in the jungle with a great pyramid to climb. Coba is about 50 minutes from Akumal and you go through a couple of Mayan villages on the way. The beaches of Tulum are a must to visit. They are among the nicest beaches in the world. The quality of the sand and the depth of the beaches are perfect. Add to that some wonderful restaurants on these beaches. My advice is to visit one of the restaurants for lunch and then walk on the beach or go swimming. You can use the beach in front of whichever restaurant you choose. They have lounges set up on the beach for their customers. Bring towels. If you continue south on the beach road, you will come to the Sian Ka'an Biosphere. There are tours of the Biosphere available at the CEA office in Akumal. I would be glad to answer any questions.

Playa Del Carmen: Playa is and has been the fastest growing city in all of Mexico for the last number of years. Many call it Cancun south. It went from a sleepy village in 1992 to a very large growing city now. There are many shops and markets etc in Playa. Fifth Avenue is the main tourist street very near the water. There are many very good restaurants in Playa along with all the shopping possibilities. Playa is 30 minutes north of Akumal.

Cenotes: Cenotes are sink holes or pools of fresh water. There are many in the Yucatan and they are fascinating! Each one is different from others. The geology of our area

(Quintana Roo and the Yucatan) is limestone. The water table below the limestone is very high. If you dig down a few feet, you hit water. If there is a break in the limestone surface, you get a pool of fresh water. Limestone is a great filter for the water so these cenotes are crystal clear. Gran Cenote is just off the main highway about a mile or two on the way to the Coba ruins. Gran Cenote has caves that you can swim into and view the stalagmites and stalagmites. It is beautiful. On the west side of the highway south of Playa Del Carmen, there are a number of very lovely cenotes to visit. They are very close to one another. There is Cenote Cristalina, Cenote Eden and Cenote Azul. All are worth a visit. Bring swimming suits and towels.

Valladolid: Valladolid is a colonial city with a 17th century Cathedral around the Zocalo (plaza). It definitely is worth a visit. It takes about 1 hour and 45 minutes to get to Valladolid. It is a great day trip from Akumal. There is some very nice shopping at prices less than in Playa Del Carmen and a wonderful old mission to visit. We usually have lunch at the Meson Del Marquez, a hotel on the Zocalo. You can eat authentic Yucatan cuisine at this hotel/restaurant. Dishes such as Poc Chuk, Pollo Pibil, Papadzules and Pavo Relleno are typical Yucatan dishes. They are delicious. While in Valladolid, stop and see the Mission San Bernardino. It is about a 15-20 minute walk from the main plaza or you can drive a few minutes.

Isla Holbox: Isla Holbox is an island in the Gulf of Mexico. You drive in about 2 hours to the village of Chiquila and then take a boat over to the island. The island is very close and can be seen from Chiquila. Holbox is mainly an island of fishermen but because of tourism to the island, some hotels and restaurants have opened. You can find hotels on tripadvisor.com or by doing a google search. I think that expedia, and hotels.com show some choices for hotels on the island. When I visited a few years ago, the boat captain first took us to see the bird island just to the east of Holbox. We saw many sea birds including pelicans, roseate spoonbill, ibis, and many kinds of herons. Flamingos are located just off the island. We also saw black stilt and many egrets and cormorants among others. The fresh fish meals you can get on the island is alone worth the trip. All of this can be done in a day trip from Akumal. Another reason to go to Holbox is to book a trip to see the whale sharks. Whale sharks can get to 40' long and feed in summer months in the Gulf. The tour operators will pick you up at a designated spot on the island and take you in their boat to see and snorkel with the whale sharks.; This is a life's experience. People that have done this tour rave about how amazing it is to see these creatures. Hotels on the island can help you book a tour.

Merida.: A trip to Merida, the capital of the state of Yucatan, is a great side trip from Akumal. This is not a day trip. You should spend 1 or 2 nights in Merida to make the trip worthwhile. Merida is a colonial city of about 800,000 people. There is much to do and see in this lovely city. There are very nice hotels at reasonable rates and some wonderful restaurants to visit. There are city tours and much history to learn about this city. The French were here as well as the Spanish and indigenous peoples. The area is surrounded by Mayan ruins and villages. Merida can be used as a base to visit Chichen Itza and Uxmal among many other sites. On my last visit to Akumal in December of 2011, we visited Uxmal and were astounded at what we saw at this site. I highly

recommend a visit to Uxmal which is much less visited than Chichen Itza but I think Uxmal has more to offer the visitor. You cannot climb the main pyramid at Chichen but at Uxmal, there are many edifices to climb. Another of the highlights of a visit to Merida is to experience Domingo En Merida. On Sundays, the hacienda (government) closes the downtown area to vehicles so that pedestrians can visit the zocalo and the merchants that sell their wares there. There also are many musical groups that perform in the downtown area free of charge. We had a great time dancing with the locals at a downtown park. You can also buy food off the carts on the zocalo. This food is not dangerous to the tourist. It is fresh and cooked right in front of you. The elote (corn on the cob) is a highlight. Another great excursion you can take from Merida is a trip to Celestun which is an estuary in a national park located about an hour from Merida. If you are interested in seeing a large colony of flamingos as well as many other species of sea birds, Celestun is a great place to visit. You drive to the pier and hire a boat for a trip on the estuary. You can also go swimming there so if you like, bring your bathing suit. Shopping is also a great thing to do in Merida. Prices are very reasonable.

A visit to the Flycatcher Inn in Santa Elena: On our last trip to Akumal, we took a few days to visit the Flycatcher Inn in Santa Elena, Yucatan. The Flycatcher (www.flycatcher.com) is owned and run by Kristine an American and her husband Santiago, a Mayan. They are wonderful hosts and we loved our 3 night stay there. The rate at the hotel is very reasonable and it includes a wonderful full breakfast. You can also have the Flycatcher prepare dinners for you. Book this in advance. The 2 meals we ate there were fabulous. We hired Santiago to take us around to see the sights. He took us to a fascinating local market in Oxkutschab. We also visited Ticul and Muna which are typical Mayan villages where you can see Mayan life. Santiago speaks great English as well as Spanish and Mayan. This is an off the beaten track place and that is one of the advantages of a visit to this area. Santa Elena is 15 minutes from Uxmal and just over an hour south of Merida. It is a 4+ hour trip from Akumal. Sights to visit in the area are cenotes, caves, a sisal plant as well as Uxmal and other Mayan sites. We loved our visit and recommend it to people that would like a different exciting adventure.

These are just a few of the many many things to do in the area. I would be happy to assist and advise about other possibilities.

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