

TRAVEL

# Romantic Maroma has secluded suites, perfect beach

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## Mayan-themed Mexican resort and spa caters to couples

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RIVIERA MAYA, Mexico — In a slight twist of an old Chinese proverb, it's better to light a thousand candles than to curse the darkness. Or at least that's the philosophy of the general manager at Maroma Resort, the unapologetically sensuous property on Mexico's Riviera Maya.

Every night, as dusk falls in this part of the Yucatan Peninsula, resort staff sets about the task of lighting the candles — floating some in reflecting pools; setting others on walkways leading to the beach; placing still more, luminaria fashion, on paths meandering from the guest villas to the main house.

When all is done, Maroma is transformed into a candlelit paradise.

It is, however, equally spectacular by daylight. About 30 minutes south of Cancún, it is light-years removed in style. In contrast to the hustling, bustling disco beat of Mexico's splashiest resort, Maroma is a peaceful oasis on 25 acres of what was once a coconut plantation — facing on one side one of the most beautiful beaches on Mexico's Caribbean coast, and on the other, the lush Yucatan jungle.

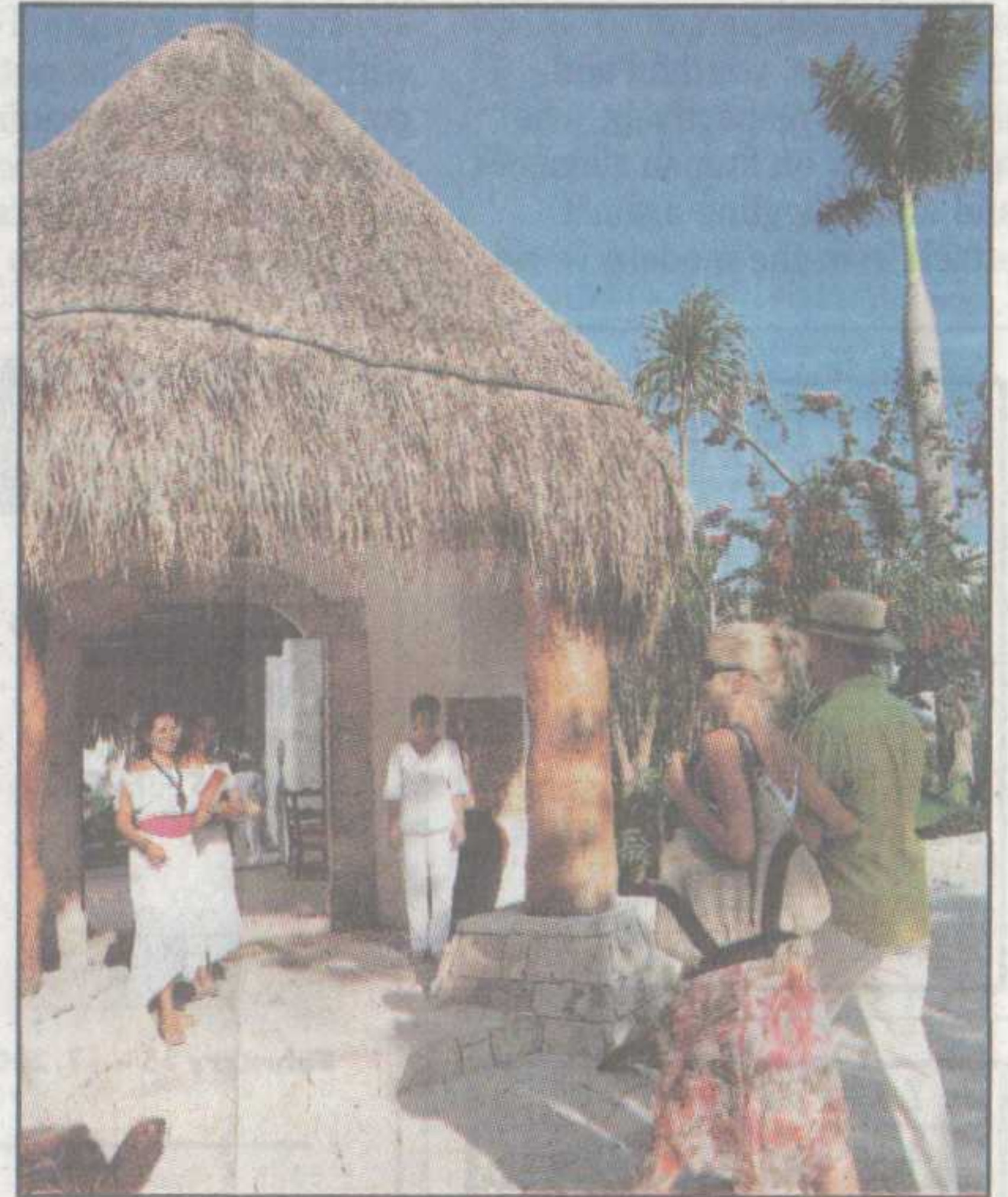
Coming from the airport, you might be tempted to think the driver has lost his way, as he turns off the main highway onto a dusty dirt road and passes through a dense stand of mangroves. But this is part of Maroma's charm — an isolation that lets vacationers feel as if they have been gently removed from the outside world, and all that remains is the sand, sun and sea.

And, of course, the hotel. For at the end of the dirt road, like a mirage, rises a replica of a Mayan

temple, in front of which, a lineup of linen-clad employees is waiting, armed with cool tropical drinks and ice-cold chilled face towels. You just know you're going to like this place.

That feeling is intensified upon reaching the entryway, part of an 18th-century hacienda that was physically moved here to serve as the reception area. Large and airy, in typical Mexican fashion, with splashes of bold color, terra cotta pottery and brilliant oils by resident artist Bertrand Castelli (often referred to as the Paul Gauguin of Mexico), it opens to a sweeping terrace overlooking the chalk-white sand and turquoise sea.

Everything about Maroma whispers romance. Things seem to be done in twos here. You can have a couples massage in a beachfront pavilion accompanied by sound effects of swishing palms and breaking surf. You can watch the sunset over cocktails in a private beach



GENIUS LOCI | MAROMA RESORT & SPA

The Maroma Resort and Spa's staff greet you with ice-cold beverages and chilled face towels as you arrive.

See MAROMA, A7

