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Travel

Section **5**

CHECK IN/CHECK OUT

RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO
MAROMA RESORT AND SPA

THE BASICS

A five-minute ride down an unpaved road through dense jungle might leave a visitor worried that the Maroma Resort and Spa may be more of a back-to-nature campground than the luxury escape promised by the travel agent. Yet when the taxi suddenly emerges from the dense green into a classic hacienda courtyard with a reflecting pool and a bevy of white-clad staff members in attendance, that worry evaporates. Maroma, a 65-room hotel and a four-bedroom villa set on 25 acres on a mile-long stretch of beach in Mexico's Riviera Maya, is made up of a series of brilliant white stucco buildings and palapas — huts with thatched roofs made of local palm leaves. Initially, Maroma was a boutique hotel with just 32 rooms clustered around an indoor-outdoor restaurant. Then five years ago, Orient Express took control of Maroma and added new rooms as well as two new swimming pools and the Kinan Spa. After Hurricane Wilma in 2005, the company spent \$16 million to finish the upgrade and make repairs.

LOCATION

Ideal. The hotel is just a 20 minute taxi ride from the Cancún airport, and the trip to the ancient Mayan site of Tulum takes an hour. (Chichén Itzá, the best known ancient site, is three hours away.) Playa del Carmen, with its myriad shops and restaurants is a 15-minute ride.

THE SCENE

Despite its upscale surroundings (and an equally upscale pricetag), Maroma's atmosphere is surprisingly casual. The hotel attracts a relatively young crowd: largely American but with a sprinkling of Britons, Europeans and a handful of South Americans. Even when the hotel is full (as it was on a recent visit), there always seem to be ample chairs and futons on the beach where one can order either breakfast or lunch. (Children under 16 are allowed only May to Dec. 22.)

THE ROOMS

The rooms feature local materials, like hand-painted Mexican floor tiles and mahogany bedroom cabinets. Beds are enveloped with soft white netting, and new guests find their beds covered in elaborate designs of local flowers. Though some of the older rooms are small, most rooms have terraces or balconies. There are eight new Sian Nah suites (Mayan for House of Heaven) with private gyms, mas-

sage areas and plunge pools. Any seaside room — new or old — is more expensive than a comparable room facing the gardens, but the views are mesmerizing. (Couch potatoes beware: TVs are provided in the rooms only if requested, and then can only play DVDs; there is TV signal and no cable.)

AMENITIES

Maroma's 7,000-square-foot spa, with treatment rooms that are both elegant and spacious, offers more than 30 treatments, many based on what the hotel calls "ancient Mayan healing." (The hotel's Website also points out that the treatment rooms point directly east and west, "representing the balance of the day and night.")



The view from one of the Maroma's Sian Nah suites.

ROOM SERVICE

Steaming pots of coffee are delivered every morning to any guests not quite ready to face a full breakfast. We picked several different times during our stay and found our coffee arrived like clockwork every time. And our waiter actually returned to see if we wanted a second pot. The single morning we ordered breakfast in our room, it, too, arrived a shade ahead of schedule. It must be the lure of the dawn light on the water: but our 6:30 order was far from the first. We noticed a number of waiters scurrying to drop off trays.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Maroma is expensive. Rooms, with breakfast, start at \$480 a day, plus 22 percent for taxes and the service charge. Still the price seemed well worth it: not just for the setting and the service, but for the feeling of immersion in a totally foreign culture that is just a few hours away from the United States. Maroma Resort and Spa, Carretera 307, Riviera Maya, Solidaridad, Quintana Roo; www.maromahotel.com; (866) 454-9351.

GERALDINE FABRIKANT