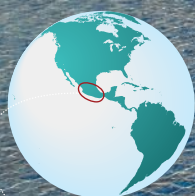


LODGING

JW MARRIOTT CANCUN RESORT & SPA

MEXICO



Mexico

WHERE ON EARTH

JW MARRIOTT CANCUN



THIS PHOTO The infinity pool and beach.

A **JAUNT TO** tried-and-true Cancun is a fine antidote to the many months of uncertainty, turmoil and cabin fever this past year. Although face masks and hand sanitizer will accompany swimwear, tee shirts and sunscreen in our beach totes, 2021 is the ideal time to re-discover Mexico's home-grown Caribbean resort town in a more relaxed, "grown up" context removed from the destination's rollicking reputation of old. While night clubs, American chain restaurants and souvenir emporiums still dominate Cancun's downtown, JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa (a mile up main drag Avenida Kukulcan) offers a surprisingly satisfying and sophisticated place to dip one's toes back into international resort travel.

The JW Marriott Cancun is ready for its close-up, thanks to a \$40 million 2019 renovation executed by Mexico City-headquartered G+G Interiorismo's Martha Gaos and Claudia Gonzalez. Even with 447 generously sized ocean-facing rooms and suites (including the heavenly Presidential Suite), the designers' approach to colour, texture and subtle use of Mayan and Yucatecan folkloric motifs, hummingbirds, *quetzales* (a local bird species), four-petal flowers and snail fossils juxtaposed with clean-lined furnishings to create an ambiance that's airy and modern, yet never stark. Shapes inspired by undersea vegetation and water rendered in pops of blue, from pale cerulean to navy, are offset with warm gray and sand tones in public and private areas.

Should one choose to stay within the quiet sanctuary of the resort area, there are several upscale international dining options as well as casual eateries with street-food inspired dishes you can enjoy at the pool or on your private terrace overlooking the beach. The JW's restaurants include BeachWalk (serving sandwiches, salads and freshly grilled tacos stuffed with octopus or shrimp), Sedona Grill (Mexican breakfast offerings) and fine dining venue Gustino Italian Grill (a la carte and tasting menus elegantly converging regional Italian culinary techniques with Mexican ingredients). A separate open-concept pasta kitchen just inside the entrance previews Gustino's menu as well as its pasta-making classes. The adjoining four-star Marriott Cancun Resort's restaurants include Kasai, a Japanese izakaya, and Sasi Thai, specializing in Southeast Asian cuisine.

Along with the décor, the JW's mixology program has also received a major upgrade. While the fine dining and ethnic restaurants all abound with classic margaritas and tropical drinks, the recently introduced '150 Margaritas' menu at the JW Lobby Bar is a full-on mixology showcase. All 150 cocktails are »

RESORT & SPA *by* ELYSE GLICKMAN



SERVES 2

Tuna Pōke Salad

THIS IS A SIMPLIFIED version of the elegant tuna salad served at HANA, the JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa's Polynesian fine dining restaurant.

Sushi Grade Tuna 240 g
Ponzu¹ ½ cup, divided
Vegetable Oil 1 Tbs
Red Onion finely chopped, 2 Tbs
White Wine Vinegar 1 Tbs
Edamame ¼ cup, blanched and cooled
Cucumber peeled, seeded and chopped, ½ cup
Carrot 1, julienned
Cocktail Tomato 2, chopped
Mayonnaise ¼ cup
Dijon Mustard 1 tsp
Fresh Lemon Juice 1 Tbs
Jalapeño Pepper ½, de-seeded and very finely chopped
Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste
Micro Greens for garnish
Cilantro leaves for garnish

¹ As a substitute for ponzu, combine 2 parts light soy sauce with 1 part fresh lemon juice.

- 1 MARINATE** the tuna in half the ponzu while you prep the remaining ingredients.
- 2 IN** a small bowl combine the chopped red onion and white wine vinegar and allow to stand for at least 5 minutes.
- 3 HEAT** the oil in a skillet until shimmering.
- 4 REMOVE** the tuna from the ponzu and pat dry with paper towel. Discard the marinade.
- 5 SEAR** the tuna briefly on both sides, until the surface just starts to brown and the centre remains raw. Remove from the skillet and cut into 1 x 1 cm cubes.
- 6 PLACE** the tuna, edamame, cucumber, carrot and tomatoes in a mixing bowl. Drain the red onion and add to the bowl. Add the remaining ponzu and toss gently to combine.
- 7 WHISK** together the mayonnaise, mustard, lemon juice and jalapeño. Season with salt and pepper.
- 8 DIVIDE** the salad between two serving plates and drizzle with the spicy mayo dressing. Garnish with micro greens and cilantro. Serve immediately.



« built on a foundation of top-shelf tequilas and mezcal, either neat or infused with black tea, beetroot and serrano chile. Although the cocktails are being promoted as Instagram-able, imbibers simply after a great drink made with quality ingredients and techniques will not be disappointed.

HANA, Cancun's first-ever Polynesian white-tablecloth restaurant, is set to open in fall 2021 next door inside the Marriott Cancun Resort. Under the direction of Executive Chef Pedro Maldonado, the kitchen delivers a fresh spin on Polynesian and Pan-Asian dishes using Quintana Roo region's rich variety of produce, fish and seafood. Those coming later in 2021 can look forward to such dishes as spice- and smoke-forward sweet-and-sour pork ribs; luscious sushi-grade tuna pōke; grilled and smoked octopus with squid-ink rice, and lobster cakes with fruity accoutrements.


"Polynesia is made up of 1000 little islands with recipes that vary from island to island, just as Mexico has recipes varying from state to state," says Chef Maldonado. "That said, there are several common flavour profiles our two countries share as well as common ingredients — especially with produce and spices. Our research involved eight of our chefs traveling



THIS PHOTO
The Lobby Bar.

back and forth over the course of six months to the South Pacific, and with so many interesting recipes, it was a challenge to figure out what (flavours) would define our Polynesian kitchen. The fact that Mexican cuisine, like Polynesian cooking, is also built out of the influences of indigenous groups as well as the French, Italians, Spanish, Indian and other Asian countries provided us an interesting perspective."

HANA's cocktail menu shifts away from predictable Tiki standbys in favour of original recipes integrating Southeast Asian and Caribbean Mexican sensibilities. HANA's wine menu, meanwhile, boasts an playful roster of Mexican, Argentine, Chilean and New Zealand wines that pair beautifully with the kitchen's globally informed dishes.

While there are countless dining establishments along Avenida Kukulkan, Harry's Prime Steakhouse & Raw Bar is a stand-out — and a five-minute walk from the JW's front door. While it has a lot of the bells and whistles of a big city North American steakhouse (tableside salad and tartare preparation; the refrigerator with Kobe, Black Onyx and USDA Prime cuts; the raw bar and seafood display), it deserves kudos for taking a more minimalist approach to condiments allowing the natural flavours of Quintana Roo's produce bounty to shine through. Although the steaks are cooked to perfection, pescatarians will not want to miss dishes with freshly grilled octopus, lobster and shrimp. A short bus-ride along the avenue towards downtown, meanwhile, stops near the fun, no-fuss Mercado de Tortas, grilling up tasty sandwich fuel for souvenir shopping or a bite after a beach day. 

ELYSE GLICKMAN is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.



SERVES 1

Strawberry Lime Margarita

A GORGEOUS TIPPLe FROM the new 150 Margaritas Menu at the JW Lobby Bar.

Reposado Tequila 45 ml

Grand Marnier 20 ml

Lime Juice 15 ml

Simple Syrup 15 ml

Strawberries 4

Sparkling Water ½ cup

Sugar to rim glass

- 1 MACERATE** three strawberries in the tequila for at least 30 minutes.
- 2 POUR** the strawberries and tequila into a cocktail shaker with the Grand Marnier, lime juice and simple syrup. Shake.
- 3 RIM** a glass with sugar and pour in the contents of the shaker through a strainer.
- 4 ADD** sparkling water and ice and mix with spoon.
- 5 GARNISH** with the reserved strawberry.

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to

JW Marriott Cancun Resort & Spa
www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/cunjw-jw-marriott-cancun-resort-and-spa

Harry's Prime Steakhouse & Raw Bar
www.harrys.com.mx

Mercado de Tortas
www.mercadodetortas.com.mx/es