



## Sun, Sand, SHOPPING

Mexico has its *OWN* Avenida Quinta, or Fifth Avenue, just one block from the beach in Playa del Carmen, a fishing village turned RESORT town known as the unofficial *capital* of the Mayan Riviera.

Playa del Carmen, some 40 miles south of Cancún, Mexico, was a small fishing village as recently as the early 1980s, serving as the ferry port to Cozumel Island. It soon began attracting its own multinational backpacking crowd in search of sun, sand and lack of Cancún-style glitz. Now the bohemian-chic Playa has expanded into an international resort town, where you're as likely to hear Italian, German, French, Portuguese and English as you are to hear Spanish.

The shopping, like everything but the snorkeling, revolves around Avenida Quinta—fittingly, Fifth Avenue—where it's so laid-back that there are no avenue numbers, and business locations are identified by cross streets. It's a dazzling, pedestrian-only thoroughfare packed with embroidered women's blouses, folk art, Taxco-mined silver, straw sombreros, shell necklaces, Cuban cigars, guayabera shirts and, naturally, the hustlers who want to sell them to you. ("Hello, friend-o!" cried one zealous Spanglish speaker.)



### GET LUCKY

Named after the popular sirena (mermaid) card in the Mexican lottery, La Sirena (at Avenida Quinta and Calle 26, 52-984-803-3422) sells stationery with lottery images, Day of the Dead figures, paintings of masked Mexican wrestlers known as "luchadores," Oaxacan carved animals and other gift-worthy surprises.



### SILVER VOGUE

Fashionista favorite Daniel Espinosa grew up in Taxco, Mexico, famed for its silver jewelry, and he accessorizes everyone from European royals to the Hollywood sort, including Halle Berry, at his namesake store (Paseo del Carmen No. 56, 52-984-803-0006, [www.danielespinosa.com](http://www.danielespinosa.com)).



**JUNGLE CHIC**  
Grab a table in an over-water, thatched-roof bungalow lit by a crystal chandelier at the tropically trendy Playasia in the Blue Parrot Hotel 5th Avenue (between calles 10 and 12, 52-984-879-4749,

[www.blueparrot.com](http://www.blueparrot.com)), a seductive spot for the Japanese maki-inspired Playasia roll, blackened sea bass and molten chocolate brownies.



### SHOPPING PLAY(A)GROUND

1. Ah Cacao
2. Ambar Mexicano
3. Artevelas
4. Caracol
5. Daniel Espinosa
6. Deseo Hotel + Lounge
7. Kin Mayab
8. Outdoor Market
9. Playasia
10. La Sirena
11. Spa Itzá
12. Xbaal
13. Zingera



Wedge between them are lively restaurants, bars and nightclubs. The shops wisely stay open late to capture diners, drinkers and clubbers who parade into Playa after spending their day at the beach.

Margaritas and merchandise? Porque no! **ILLUMINATION**—Uruguayan expat Alejandra Cabrera runs **Artevelas** (Paseo del Carmen No. 38, 52-984-859-1120, [www.artevelas.com](http://www.artevelas.com)), producing sand-cast resin pillars in a rainbow's array of colors that glow when candles are placed inside. It's a style decorating resorts up and down the Riviera Maya. Prices start at about US\$11 for fit-in-your-suitcase sizes.

**NATIVE ART**—Among the many shops that carry regional arts and crafts, **Caracol** (on Avenida Quinta between calles Seis and Ocho, 52-984-803-1504) stands out for its quality assemblage of embroidered table linens from Michoacán and Puebla, pressed leather purses by Alexis David, and colorful folk-art paintings from Jalisco.

**DARE TO WEAR**—The South American swim shop **Zingara** (at Avenida Quinta and Calle 10, 52-984-803-4504, [www.zingaraswimwear.com](http://www.zingaraswimwear.com)) sells slinky have-it-your-way tops and bottoms (US\$39–US\$79 each) to mix and match, plus beach cover-ups that range from modestly opaque to showoff sheer (from about US\$29).



**BREAK** Shoppers take a break at **Ah Cacao** (at avenidas Quinta and Constituyentes, 52-984-803-5748, [www.ahcacao.com](http://www.ahcacao.com)), a cafe that's known for coffee and desserts made from Mayan-grown cocoa, as well as cocoa nibs, bars and whole-bean coffee packaged to go.

**CHEAP SHOT** Haggle at the outdoor market stalls (at avenidas Quinta and Constituyentes) selling cheap and cheerful souvenirs including Panama hats, serapes, silver jewelry, Yucatecan hammocks, T-shirts, leather goods, soccer jerseys and more.

**GUY-YABERA**—The Wignall family runs the high-end **Kin Mayab** (between calles 10 and 12, 52-984-803-0904, [www.kinmayab.com](http://www.kinmayab.com)), specializing in handsome, lightweight guayabera shirts, the dress wear for men in the tropics. Classic styles with four patch pockets come in cotton (from about US\$38) or the more refined linen (from about US\$110) in beige, brown, yellow or pink.

**AMBER CLAMOR**—Chiapas-mined amber, in hues from pale yellow to red, orange and smoky brown, is fashioned into jewelry, money clips and small statuary at **Ambar Mexicano** (between calles Cuatro and Seis, 52-984-873-2357).

Splurge on the Mayan-themed chess set (US\$5,000) with playing pieces of castles and gods carved in amber.

**TOAST**—The rooftop lounge at the **Deseo Hotel + Lounge** screens Mexican Westerns silently on a wall to cocktailers sprawled on daybeds under the open stars (at Avenida Quinta and Calle 12, 52-984-879-3620, [www.hoteldeseo.com](http://www.hoteldeseo.com)).

**REST**—Get off your feet at **Spa Itzá** (Calle Corazón between Avenida Quinta and Calle 14, 52-984-803-2588, [www.spaitza.com](http://www.spaitza.com)), a small but smart day spa run by native Californian Sharon Sedgwick, who consults with spas up and down the coast but charges no more than US\$1.50 per minute for 30-, 50- or 80-minute massages, which includes access to the spa's rooftop open-air showers and sauna. Reservations are recommended but not required.

—Elaine Glusac

**BEACHY KEEN** **Xbaal** (Paseo del Carmen No. 5, 52-984-803-6107, [www.xbaal.com](http://www.xbaal.com)) deals in breezy, beach-ready sundresses (from US\$45) and shawls (US\$10) in muted colors of woven cotton. Despite its name—the Mayan word for “woman”—the store outfits the entire familia. Expect men's shirts and kids' clothes, too.



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