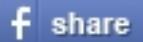


The Riviera Maya Rocks

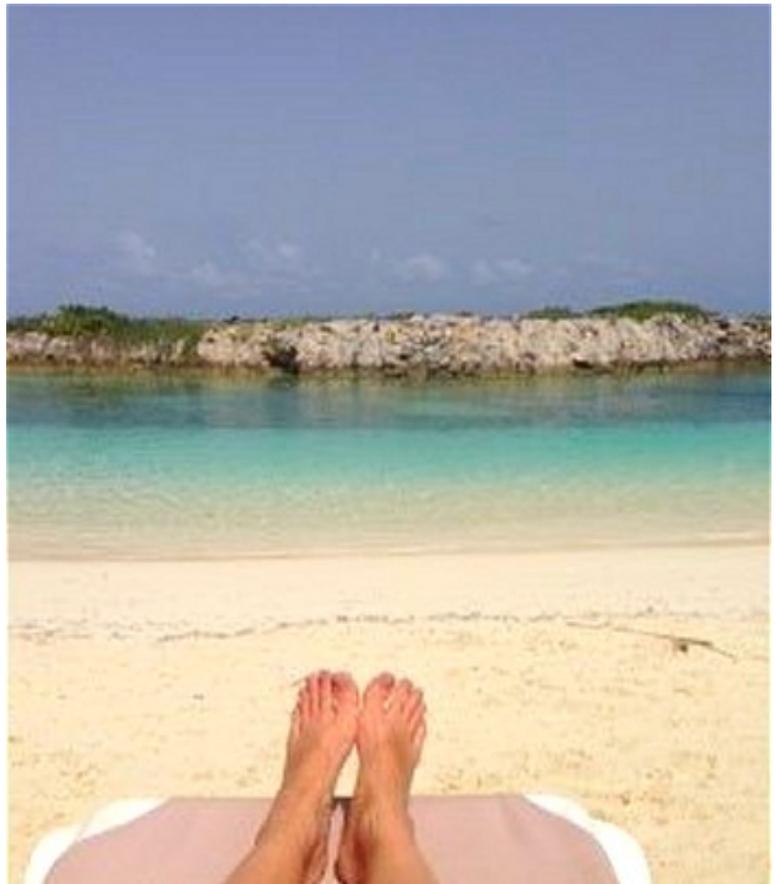


by Camille Pepe Sperrazza

The stairway to heaven exists.

It is at the Hard Rock Riviera Maya, at the entranceway to the beach/pool area of the all-inclusive adults-only section of the resort. This area is named, "Heaven," fitting because it capitalizes on the resort's rock and roll theme as well as the beauty and serenity of the area. "Your stairway lies on the whispering wind," is written on the wall above the stairs, quoting Led Zeppelin's immortal words to the song, "Stairway to Heaven," setting the tone for guests' expectations.

Famous lyrics appear on walls throughout the resort; pillow cases feature small guitars; and lampshades encourage people to "rock around the clock." Yet, it is all done tastefully and subtly, creating a destination that appeals to people of all ages.



View from "Heaven" section of Hard Rock Riviera Maya.

The resort celebrated its grand opening May 2014, with a concert by Jon Bon Jovi, a helluva good way to say, "Let's get this party started." The resort is divided into two sections - Heaven and the family-friendly Hacienda. Adults who are housed in Heaven have access to pools, restaurants, and beach areas that are child-free. Yet, they can rock both sides of the resort and may dine at all restaurants, a shuttle bus available to transport them across the sprawling property. Families stay on the Hacienda side, where there are plenty of appealing amenities and activities for adults and children.

There are so many restaurants, my four-night stay did not allow time to try them all, but the ones at which I did dine were excellent - Italian, French, Mexican, and Asian. The latter has 12 hibachi tables, where chefs create meals in front of guests, with Benihana-type fanfare. The other restaurants create visual excitement, too, preparing specialty coffee drinks and desserts with flaming liquids. These are all sit-down dining experiences. There are buffets, too, and a number of casual dining options for pizza, sandwiches, chicken wings, and the like. One of them, Cafetto, located on the Hacienda side, displays cakes and sweets all day and evening. The chocolate-covered marshmallows on a stick were extremely popular. Cappuccino is also served here.

Mexico does all-inclusive like nowhere else in the world, the wait staff everywhere - at check-in, at the beach, by the pool, and throughout the resort - asking what you would like to drink. Wine is surprisingly good, a feat not always achieved at all-inclusives. You're in Margaritaville so order Margaritas as they are meant to be enjoyed - made with fresh lime juice, sour rather than sweet. In-room refrigerators are fully stocked with soda, juice, and bottled water. There are full bottles of booze at your disposal. Another outstanding feature: a Jacuzzi in every room.

Be aware that the resort is about an hour and 15 minutes from the Cancun airport, about 20 minutes further from the busy Playacar area of the Riviera Maya so one does need to take tours or a taxi to leave the resort. It is important to note, too, that while the beach area is gorgeous - the water so clear, you can watch fish swim - it is more like a lagoon, the ocean separated by barriers that break the waves, contributing to the serene setting that many find appealing. On the other hand, there is no massive beach or endless ocean view when you are at eye level. But some outdoor beach bars are built above sea level, and one can sit there, taking in the ocean view and a cool breeze.

The evening entertainment I caught was a rock band in the Heaven lobby; a Broadway-style show in the Hacienda showroom; a very good magic show; and an outdoor Mexican fiesta at Woodstock, an area that is in between both sides of the resort. There's a late night disco on the Heaven side. The exercise room is top-notch.

There are many appealing shops throughout the resort, and when you stay here, you get resort credit - up to \$1800 - that can be used for shopping, spa treatments, tours, and more. Taxes on these purchases must be paid by guests.

Be sure to catch the free monkey tour. Follow a guide on a stroll of the grounds and watch the trees. The very smart monkey we saw looked down on us, turned its back, and positioned itself on a palm tree leaf that tilted downward, making a deposit that landed too close for comfort. While the monkey tour is fun for us, it seems the monkeys enjoy it even more.

Ready to book your vacation here? [Contact](#) "Commodore" Camille today.

This article was accurate when it was written, but everything in life changes. Enjoy the journey!