

Sustainable Cancun!

Posted At : October 2, 2012 12:03 PM | Posted By : Yessenia Soto

Related Categories: Certification, Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, Mexico, sustainable tourism, beach, luxury



When you think of Cancun and the Riviera Maya, the first thing that comes to mind may be dozens of megahotels and the sprawling, enormous infrastructure that's required to accommodate millions of tourists - in 2011 alone, 3.6 million people vacationed in this region of Mexico.

However, this region is more than enormous cruise ships, spring breakers, and huge hotels. Off its magnificent beaches lies the Mesoamerican Reef, the second largest in the world. Also nearby are majestic, ancient Maya archaeological sites such as Chichen Itza, Cobá, and Ek'Balam, as well as the charming colonial city of Valladolid and other Mexican towns rich in culture and history.

Unfortunately, the ecosystems in the surrounding area have suffered from negative impacts due to an overdeveloped tourism industry, such as depletion of natural resources, pollution and destruction of coral reefs, and habitat fragmentation.

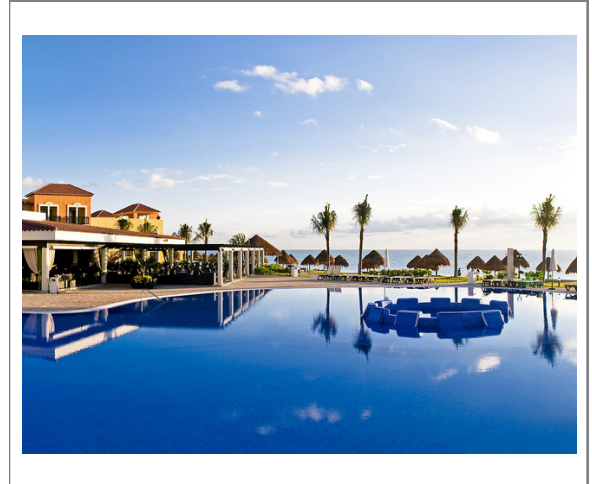
Many tourism businesses have recognized the need to transform their business practices to alleviate some of these negative impacts, and have made a commitment to take steps toward creating a more sustainable industry.

One such effort is the **Mesoamerican Reef Tourism Initiative** (MARTI), formed in 2006 by stakeholders from the tourism industry (hotels, cruise ship companies, and more),

several conservation NGOs, and the government of Quintana Roo, where Cancun is located. The goal is to transform tourism in the Riviera Maya, Cancun, and Cozumel. MARTI encourages the region's hotels to meet strict international standards for sustainability by adopting best practices such as protecting coastal habitats, conserving electricity and water, protecting wildlife, and supporting the economic and social development of local communities.

The initiative also works with stakeholders working in marine tourism, such as cruise ships, navigational services, marine protected areas, and tour operators by developing tools such as treating wastewater, educating passengers, and setting up guidelines for activities like snorkeling, in order to protect fragile marine habitats.

After receiving training, technical assistance, and incorporating best practices, 21 hotels and large hotel chains in the Mexican Caribbean have adopted the MARTI Environmental Management System and some also have acquired sustainable tourism certifications from **Green Globe**, **Earth Check** and the Mexican Standards for Ecotourism, as well as the **Rainforest Alliance Verification for tourism businesses**, all of which are aligned with the **Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria**.



Thanks to this work, it is estimated that some 30,000 hotel rooms are already managed sustainably, more than 60 marine recreation companies are participating in MARTI's Environmental Walk-Through program, more than 900 dive and snorkel guides are trained in MARTI's best practices, as are more than 300 construction professionals, among others.

If you have thought twice about visiting the Mexican Caribbean, it's time to consider it again! There are many beautiful, luxurious, and most importantly, sustainable hotels and tour operators to choose from. Visit SustainableTrip.org's hotel database to find many of the **hotels in Cancun and the Riviera Maya** that are participating in MARTI, and/or are certified, or Rainforest Alliance verified.