

DESIGN REPORT: THE WORLD'S BEST STYLE

# BOAT

International

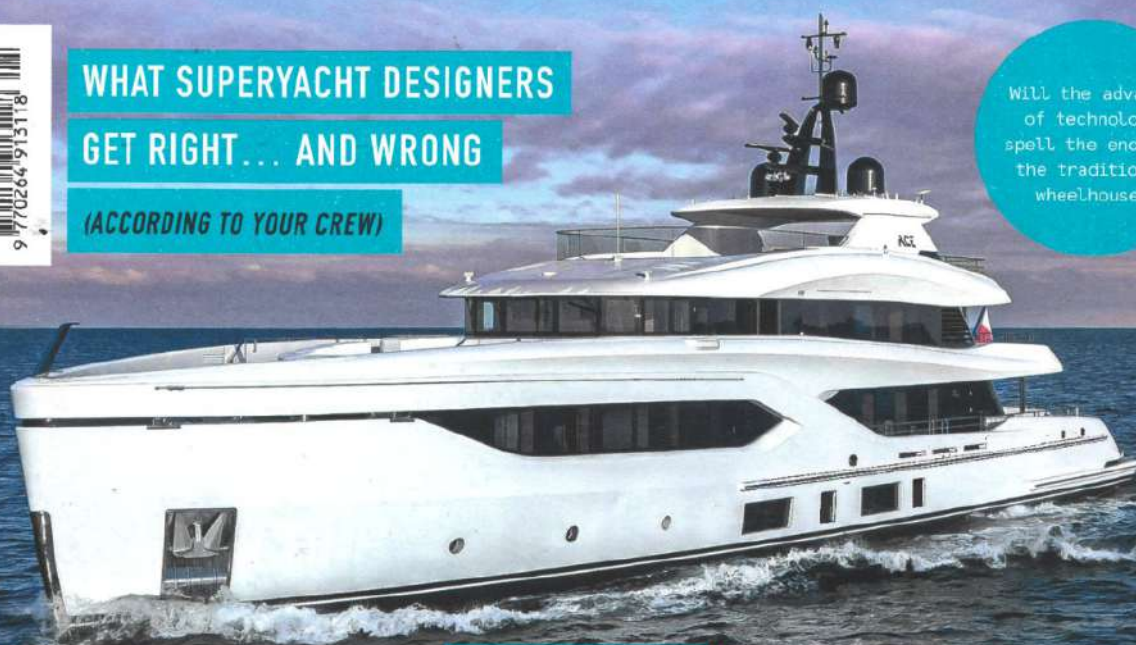
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WHAT SUPERYACHT DESIGNERS  
GET RIGHT... AND WRONG

(ACCORDING TO YOUR CREW)

Will the advance  
of technology  
spell the end for  
the traditional  
wheelhouse?



EXCLUSIVE

## ACE OF HEARTS

INSIDE POLAND'S BIGGEST-EVER YACHT

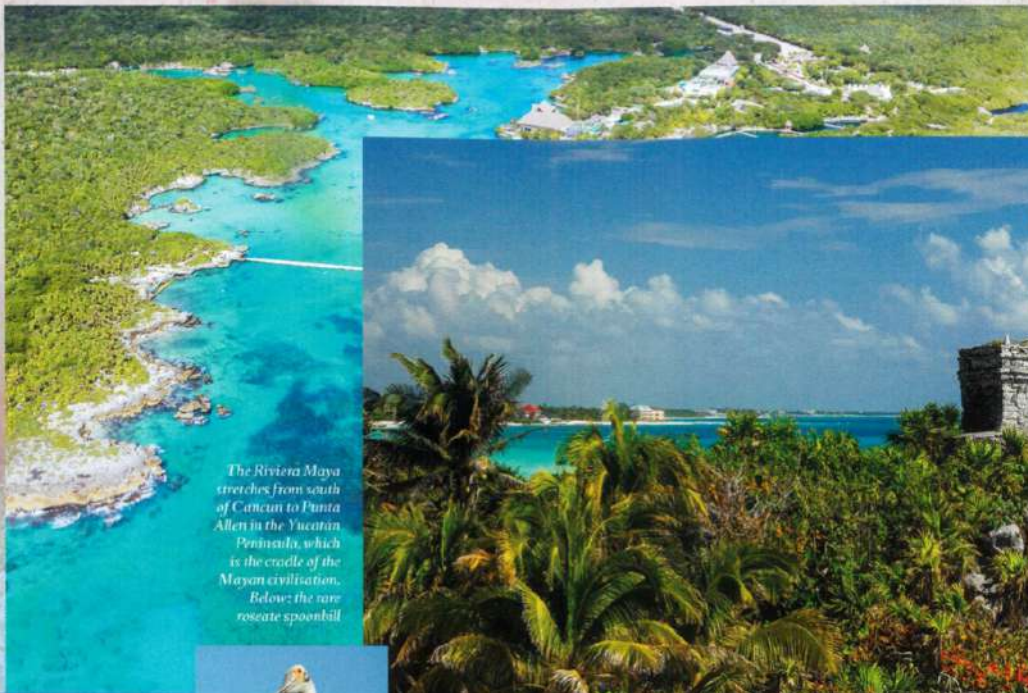
SUPERCATS  
SPECIAL

The freshest designs on the  
drawing board and hottest  
new models on the water

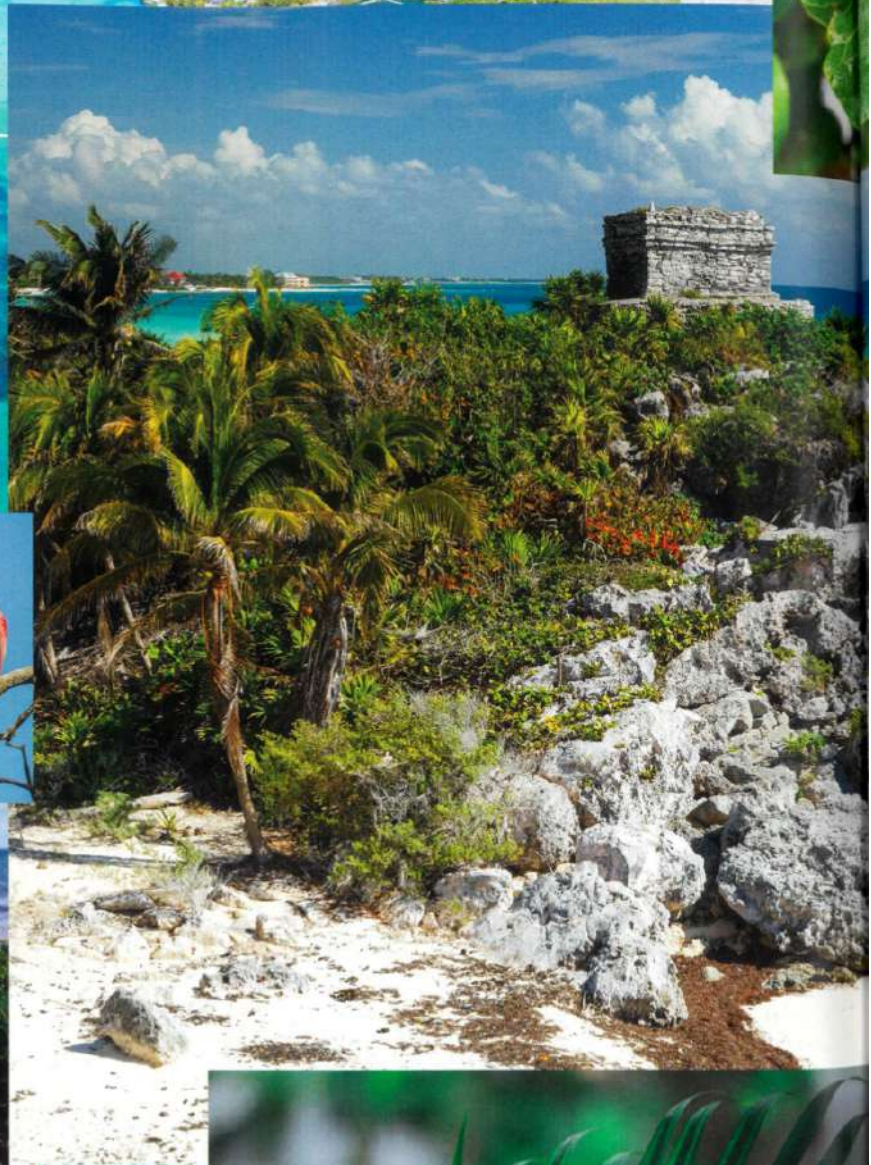
Going flat out in the new  
Espen Øino-designed  
Vandal Explorer catamaran

Why Formula One star Fernando  
Alonso chose to slow things  
down in a Sunreef multihull





*The Riviera Maya stretches from south of Cancun to Punta Allen in the Yucatan Peninsula, which is the cradle of the Mayan civilisation. Below: the rare roseate spoonbill*



*Above: the Temple of the Wind God in Tulum*





VOYAGE

# Hidden in plain sight

As Mexico's Riviera Maya sees a surge in luxury travel, *Georgia Boscawen* discovers a surprisingly tranquil retreat, sequestered in nature

Cenotes, or sinkholes, are common along the Riviera Maya









PHOTOGRAPHY: THESE PAGES: DANON ON ROAD/UNPLASH; MARY WATSON/UNPLASH; TYLER MARTON/UNPLASH

“W

“We don't actually use lime in the classic Mexican margarita,” says one of Casa Chablé's mixologists, while continuing to squeeze a manifestly green citrus fruit into the cocktail shaker. “No, this is the green lemon. It's sweeter and there are no seeds,” he adds, addressing my quizzical expression from the other side of the marble bar in this stunning hotel in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, 35 kilometres south of Tulum. Evidently, I've spent many years serving up excessively sour or – heaven forbid – sickly frozen margaritas to unsuspecting guests, who, like me, have never experienced the real thing. Here in Mexico this lemon-based drink is sweet, aromatic and a little spiced, with a well-balanced flavour, served in a lightly salted tumbler. The world has really butchered this cocktail – much like the food that many of us consider Mexican, which is a million miles from the delicate seafood cuisine you'll find in the high-end restaurants here.

For many years, Riviera Maya – Mexico's Caribbean coast on the Yucatán Peninsula – has been buzzing with tourists, with more than 300 all-inclusive hotels in the region. It's also a spot whose popularity is increasing, with 8.5 million international visitors arriving at Cancun

International Airport in 2022, which is 53 per cent more than in 2021. There's even a new Tulum airport in the pipeline, which expects to see around four million visitors annually. The area is also a magnet for yachts, with 248 visiting vessels in the last year, congregating largely around the Yucatán Peninsula.

If you're after a beachfront escape, then the bustling hotspot of Riviera Maya can certainly offer that. It is also an increasingly good choice for those seeking luxury. The surge in interest – and investment – in high-end travel is palpable, with new properties, such as Belmond's Maroma and The St Regis Kanai Resort, arriving on the scene. In terms of infrastructure, Mexico is already equipped to handle burgeoning superyacht interest, with several marinas such as Puerto Isla Mujeres in Cancun and Puerto Aventuras closer to Tulum, both with capacity to accommodate yachts with an LOA over 40 metres.

What's more surprising is that this vastly popular area also offers seclusion thanks to the Sian Ka'an Biosphere. Just one hotel is permitted to operate in this reserve – Casa Chablé, which welcomed its first guests in the final months of 2022. Isolated among the mangroves and bordered by shallow Caribbean waters, it accommodates a controlled number of visitors each year.

Set on a thin sliver of white sand, it feels like a forgotten corner of the earth. The property is offered in its entirety as well as for individual stays and there are just 10 rooms here: five in the property's main house and the remainder strewn across the sand within thatched villas, from which you can hear the waves lapping on the beach.

Having woken up at seven in one of the main house rooms, I contemplate whether to go off-menu for breakfast (very much an option), before I hear a gentle knock at the door. When I open it I'm greeted with a hamper filled with fresh homemade pastries and a pot of coffee, part of the morning ritual here to ease you into the day. The simple gesture encapsulates Casa Chablé's







Below: just opened in late 2022, Casa Chablé blends in among its tropical surroundings



character – an unflustered escape with immensely personal service. The restaurant is equally personal. You can leave the choice to the chef and expect to see the best of real Mexican food, or choose from the menu. "We try to make honest food here," says the chef, Will Saurina. "It involves respect and tradition in our ingredients, and I love to show off the authentic food of my country." With more than 160 types of pepper, local seafood and an array of different corns, the food here is intricate and complex.

For those arriving by sea, you'll have to part with your yacht off the coast of nearby Tulum and switch to a relatively unglamorous reserve-approved boat. But as two bottlenose dolphins peek from the quiet lagoon within reaching distance of the boat, it doesn't seem like such a problem. Sticking with us on our short trip to Bird Island, the dolphins frolic alongside, indifferent to our flat-bottomed boat.

As we close in on Bird Island, it looks like something from *Jurassic Park* as hundreds of red-throated frigate birds – with wingspans of around two metres – swoop inches from my head. It's mating season here, so they're puffing up their bright red chests and clacking their beaks for the courtship ritual. With no direct predators to speak of – and few humans – the birds have taken over this particular mangrove. Brown pelicans clamber in the trees, scrabbling on the flimsy branches to feed their young. The rare roseate spoonbill is also here, which we spot deep in the vegetation, preening its striking magenta feathers and taking refuge from the frantic mating rituals occurring above.

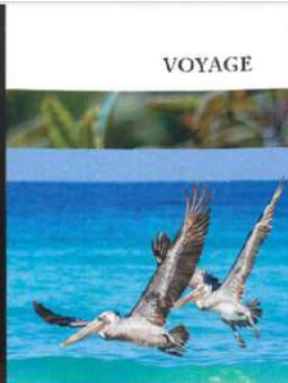
Stretching around 120 kilometres, the Sian Ka'an Reef is also a busy spot for marine life, and as we pass within it a huge green turtle pokes its head out from the waves before continuing its pursuit of food. "There are several initiatives to protect them," explains our biosphere guide. "We have beach patrols to protect nesting mothers and many conservation efforts to help them survive out in the wild; there are certainly a few around now."

Left and above: the hotel's guest spaces were designed by Mexican architect Patricia Morán





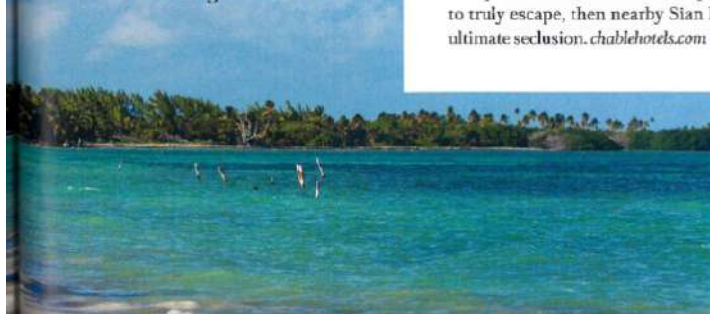
## VOYAGE



Casa Chablé can be booked in its entirety of five main house rooms and five beachfront thatched bungalows



*Set on a thin sliver of white sand, it feels like a forgotten corner of the earth*



It's abundantly clear that this is a theme, not just in the biosphere, but across the coastal resorts near Tulum. The ocean currents work in such a way that beach clean-ups on the east coast of Mexico are essential. It's something that Chablé has invested in, not just to keep the beaches clear, but to maintain it as a thriving habitat. Further north, the painstakingly refined Chablé Maroma is Casa's beachfront sister, with villas hidden away from one another under palm trees, surrounded by lush vegetation. It lies in the hugely popular Maroma region, but this property, too, offers seclusion.

Centred around the beach, Maroma's huge poolside terrace glows in candlelight as I walk past diners enjoying a performance of Latin guitar at the poolside restaurant, Kaban, en route to the rooftop Raw Bar by Bu'ul. While the sun bleeds into the horizon, I notice that the beach is deserted. Like many of the hotels along this popular spot, the beaches are reserved for guests of the hotel. There is a sense of tranquillity, seclusion even, despite its proximity to the hundreds of other hotels. The property offers that laid-back yet refined – and romantic – luxury that suits the region so well, and a couple could be fooled into thinking they were alone here.

"Food here in Mexico is very much about sharing and bringing everyone together," says the hotel manager, Ricardo Mondragón, as appetisers are placed on the table, alongside pink peppercorn margaritas. Classic sikil pak (a toasted pumpkin seed dip), guacamole and spiced crunchy beans are set down with, to my surprise, Brussels sprouts, which have been fried and served with guajillo julienned chillies and parmesan bread.

As more luxury hotels open their doors, the region will draw more and more superyachts, and those who want to experience the hustle and bustle of the Riviera Maya can certainly do so. But be sure not to miss out on the tranquil side of this remarkable spot – and if you want to truly escape, then nearby Sian Ka'an can offer the ultimate seclusion. [chablehotels.com](http://chablehotels.com) ■



Established in 1982, the biosphere is a refuge for hundreds of species of birds, such as the yellow-crowned night heron (below), frigatebirds (bottom) and pelicans (top centre)

