

COUNTRY LIFE

EVERY WEEK

JULY 5, 2023

The pull of the sea

Puffins, paintings and bathing beauties

'It's got teeth!' The thrill of fossil hunting
Cockles and mussels: what to cook on the shore
Mermaids, Modernist France and life in Zone 1 

Travel New opening

Casa Chablé, Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, Mexico

THE best way to reach Casa Chablé from Tulum is in a flat-bottomed fishing boat, capable of skimming across the shallow, peppermint-coloured lagoon that separates it from the mainland. As you speed past gnarled mangrove swamps, majestic tiger herons—named for the dramatic stripes on their gullets—keep a beady eye on proceedings.

‘Egrets, blue herons and frigates glide past in pleasingly concentric circles’

The 12-acre site sits on an islet that separates the lagoon and Caribbean Sea, home to the second largest coral reef in the world, carpeting the seabed from Cancun all the way down to Honduras. There are 10 bedrooms, sprawled across the beach and main house, an open-air restaurant, gym and wellness *cabaña*. The whole thing can be taken on an exclusive-use basis—all the better for enjoying young and enterprising chef Williams Saurina's delicious family-style sharing plates around one long table—or on a room-by-room basis.

There's a sense of calm here that you don't get in similarly remote resorts (Casa Chablé is the only five-star hotel inside the UNESCO World Heritage reserve), likely because, unlike a lot of hotels in the Maldives, Mauritius and so on, there's absolutely no pandering to excess. The birdlife helps, too. Throughout



Above and below: **Escape from it all at Casa Chablé, a remote resort teeming with wildlife**

the day, but particularly close to sunrise and sunset, egrets, blue herons and frigates glide silently past in pleasingly concentric circles—the frigate's enormous, 6ft wingspan throwing shadow onto the beach below. This is their island. Guests are only here temporarily to watch, equally quiet and transfixed.

Spa treatments, enjoyed underneath gently rustling palms, can be arranged at a moment's notice, but it's more tempting to jump back aboard a hotel boat and head off in search of bottlenose dolphins, green turtles and migratory russet hornbills (on their own

winter-sun sojourn from Canada). And although the chance of spotting the elusive jaguar and sea-faring manatee is almost non-existent, the thrill that both are lurking somewhere out there in the wild only adds to the excitement of your own Robinson Crusoe adventure. *RP*

Black Tomato offers eight-night journeys to the Yucatan Peninsula from £6,750pp, including three nights at Casa Chablé and five nights at sister hotels Chablé Maroma and Chablé Yucatan, on a B&B basis, with private transfers (www.blacktomato.com)



In brief Top travel tips

- Mexican meals typically start with a traditional dip called *sikil pak*. It's made with onion, coriander and roasted pumpkin seeds, best scooped up on freshly fried tortilla chips and not to be missed
- It's tempting to breeze straight on down to the sea's edge as soon as you wake up, but take care not to miss out on your 'eye-opener', a pot of freshly brewed coffee and basket of pastries, deposited discreetly outside your room each morning

