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MAGAZINE



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Appeals ban for migrants who reach UK illegally

Law to curb asylum claims — and court wrangles

Matt Dathan Home Affairs Editor
Jonathan Ames Legal Editor

Rishi Sunak is gearing up for a battle with the courts over plans to prevent migrants who have crossed the Channel in small boats from appealing against their deportation.

The Home Office has drawn up two options to achieve the prime minister's goal of automatically barring people who arrive in Britain illegally from claiming asylum, The Times has learnt. The more radical proposal would take the unprecedented step of withdrawing the right of illegal arrivals to appeal against their automatic exclusion from the asylum system. A second proposal under consideration would only allow them to lodge an appeal after they had been deported.

At present, asylum seekers have the right to remain in the country to have their case heard. Critics of the appeal proposals said they would "start hitting problems from day one".

Sunak has made his pledge to "stop the boats" one of his five priorities amid anger at the government's failure to tackle the issue. A record 45,756 migrants crossed the Channel last year, a 60 per cent rise from 2021.

A separate proposal would bar migrants arriving illegally from using parts of the Human Rights Act to avoid deportation, such as claiming their

right to family life or right to liberty was being breached.

Draft legislation is still being worked on but Sunak is hoping to present it this month. In an interview with TalkTV on Thursday, he said the new law would enable the state to detain migrants who arrived illegally and deport them to their home country or a safe third country, such as Rwanda.

However, a report by the Refugee Council said that, based on last year's crossings, it would cost nearly £1 billion a year to detain all those who arrived.

A government source said: "The prime minister and home secretary are working flat out to bring forward the legislation as soon as possible and ensure that it is legally watertight."

The legislation will make all individuals who arrive illegally permanently inadmissible to the asylum system, as previously revealed by The Times.

Home Office lawyers warned that this would simply lead to each individual lodging a judicial review, claiming it breached Britain's obligations under the UN Refugee Convention. Suella Braverman, the home secretary, has drawn up the two proposals to avoid this scenario, which would delay removals and clog up the courts.

A source familiar with the thinking said: "There is a need to neutralise the right to challenge because effectively

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Police theory Officers have a "working hypothesis" that Nicola Bulley, 45, a mother who vanished while walking her dog in Lancashire on January 27, may have fallen in the River Wyre. Search teams were no closer to finding her last night. Page 5

British Gas investigation
Exclusive
Debt collectors boasted of disconnecting families

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Luxury Mexico

See a greener side of the Riviera Maya

A new hotel in a biosphere reserve marks a move to nature tourism for the coastal region.

By Graeme Green

From my beachfront villa it takes just a few dozen steps (66 to be precise) to cross the soft, white sand to where the waves of the Caribbean Sea collapse onto miles of glorious shore — a shore I have all to myself. This soon becomes my morning routine, and as the sun rises over the ocean I enjoy coffee and conchas (a sweet Mexican bread left on a tray of “eye-openers” on the terrace before dawn) in total peace, watching formations of pelicans glide across a pinkening sky. Each evening I cross the thin spit of land with a mezcalita cocktail to watch the sun go down over the Campeche lagoon.

I’m deep in the Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve, a 2,039 square mile protected area and Unesco world heritage site on the Yucatan Peninsula’s east coast. Here wild-life, including dolphins, turtles, jaguars, howler monkeys, butterflies and birds, thrives within a landscape that mixes beaches, lagoons, coral reefs and rainforests. It is also where, on a thin sandy strip between the sea and the lagoon, the Casa Chablé hotel has just opened, and I’m the first British journalist to visit what is one of Mexico’s most isolated hotels.

Getting here involves a two to three-hour drive from Cancun, and then from the entrance of the reserve it’s a drive along rough tracks, which can take up to three hours, depending on the weather. Alternatively — and this is infinitely more tempting — you can arrive at the hotel via a 50-minute speedboat trip. I opt for the latter and race across the reserve’s open blue lagoons at an exhilarating 50mph — suddenly turning into a mangrove swamp where a night heron perches like a sentinel. The captain steers slowly and carefully

through the shallow water, down a canal and more waterways to the vast, open lagoon, where a little pier protrudes from dense tropical greenery.

Casa Chablé’s manager, Ronald Cruz, welcomes me, leading me down a path through the rainforest as an iguana scampers out of the way. As it happens I’ve been here before. Casa Chablé has been built on the site of an old hotel I stayed at in 2018. Mukan, as it was called then, had the same astonishing setting and similarly lovely, personable staff, but the whole experience here has been lifted significantly. I step through the bright green doors of the whitewashed Casa Principal, the hotel’s main hub, into a space with a high thatched roof from which chandeliers dangle like giant pearl necklaces. Rattan armchairs are decked out with ocean-blue cushions and the terrace leads to a cool, white 20m swimming pool.

The main house has five bedrooms, but I am staying in one of five thatched villas set along the shore, with smart interiors — more “refined beach house” than “rustic cabana”.

Mine, called Hunab Ku after a Maya god, features marble sinks in the bathroom, chocolate-brown sapodilla-wood floors and walls, and intricately stitched throws from Oaxaca. A wooden deck has a crescent sofa, an outdoor shower and a view that instantly makes me want to stay forever: a hammock strung between the two palm



Vesica cenote club



Casa Chablé's main hub

trees with the ocean behind. It feels like a desert island.

The nature-based tourism on offer here couldn't be more different to that found along the coast in Tulum or Cancun.

“We’re in the middle of nowhere,” Cruz tells me. “The nearest fishing village, Punta Allen, is 15km away. There’s some camping and basic cabanas, but we’re the only luxury hotel in the reserve.”

This is the third hotel from the Chablé chain; the first, Chablé Yucatan, has jungle bungalows set around an original hacienda in the countryside outside Merida, while Chablé Maroma is a 70-room beach pad on the Riviera Maya. More are coming, with Chablé Sea of Cortez in Baja California and Chablé Casona in Merida confirmed for 2024, another set for Mexico’s Guadalupe Valley wine region due in 2026, and sites being looked at in the tequila state of Jalisco and other countries.

Chablé’s 33-year-old CEO, Diego Gutierrez, who I also meet and who runs the company with his father and brother, hopes the brand could become the Mexican answer to Aman or Banyan Tree.

“The company is 100 per cent Mexican — something we’re very proud of,” he says, explaining that as it expands he wants to keep nature, sustainability and attention to detail at its heart. “Luxury is nature itself,” he adds.

The Chablé is an example of how this part of the Mexican Riviera is changing.

Before arriving I spent a couple of nights in Tulum, 18 miles away to the north. It’s a place I’ve visited more than 20 times over

the past decade, having lived in the Riviera Maya for a few years. The town has been steadily losing some of its laid-back bohemian “traveller” vibe to the DJ and beach-party scene, with more hotels, shops and businesses, but the transformation since my last visit, pre-pandemic, in 2019 is startling. There has been rapid expansion, including massive construction projects of luxury apartments across the jungle, new roads and clogged traffic, and it’s seemingly on its way to becoming the next Playa del Carmen.

Yet I still get a jolt of excitement every time I turn onto the beachfront road and see the surf crashing against the rocks, or step onto the powdery white sand of Tulum beach.

One of Tulum’s longstanding hotels, La Valise, has just opened Il Jungle suites across the road from the original beachfront boutique hotel. Mine’s a creamy cube in limestone and concrete, with a rattan heron on the lampshade and a patio with an outdoor shower and corner plunge pool. As well as a spa, yoga classes and tours, there’s a shared 20m swimming pool.

At night I head next door to NÜ, part of Tulum’s thriving foodie scene, where hypnotic house music plays and sea bass on fried yucca tubes and smooth cocktails made with mezcal, chilli, agave honey and ginger are served (mains from £15; nutulum.com). It’s about as “Tulum” as it gets — no bad thing.

A little way east out of town is Vesica, an inland beach club built around a cenote,



EDGARDO CONTRERAS



Casa Chablé in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve



La Valise hotel, Tulum

one of the Yucatan Peninsula's natural freshwater rock pools. There's faint music coming from speakers somewhere, but it's overlaid by a natural soundtrack of water trickling into the cenote from an urn and a breeze rustling through palm trees and the drapes of the four-poster cabanas (day passes from £24, redeemable against purchases). It's peaceful at lunchtime, gradually filling through the afternoon with an international crowd. Kids leap from the high deck into the water, adults chat over icy cocktails, shrimp aguachile and Baja-style fish tacos.

Delicious food is also on the menu at Casa Chablé, where each day I eat at the open-sided beachfront restaurant, K'uum: modern Mexican dishes — Tikin Xic fish (spiced sea bass with sweet potato mash and black beans), and a "taco trilogy" (lightly charred crispy corn tortillas stuffed with shrimp, dorado and vegetables). Coconuts for the creamy sorbet come from trees metres away. "Our intention is to respect Mexican ingredients and pre-Hispanic techniques, to give a sense of the power of our Mexican culture," says the chef Williams Saurina, who is cooking a menu created by Jorge

Vallejo, the chef and owner of Mexico City's much-lauded fine-dining restaurant Quintonil. One night plates of lobster, shrimp, vegetables and green Calasparra rice are served on the beach, beneath the stars and a string of lightbulbs between palm trees.

Even at dinner the sense of nature here is ever-present. One day I take a boat tour to San Jose, "the island of birds", where a swarming cloud of magnificent frigatebirds, brown pelicans and roseate spoonbills fills the sky, then continue past the lighthouse beyond Punta Allen, spending time with bottle-nose dolphins and green turtles as we head out to sea. I snorkel along a section of the Mesoamerican Reef, the second largest in the world, coming face to face with a spotted eagle ray with a 2m wingspan.

Another morning I ride a fat bike to a little Maya ruin, one of 23 pre-Hispanic sites across the Sian Ka'an reserve. I follow it with a Mayan Deep Awakening spa treatment on the beach, which combines Swedish and shiatsu massage, with local rebozos (scarves) used to stretch me out. Later I paddle a kayak along the coast. There are no people on the beaches, no boats on the

ocean, just ospreys, pelicans and terns. It's not perfect, though — beaches are scattered with rubbish that has drifted in from the sea, a symptom of the global plastic problem.

At night, with the skies utterly clear, the stars are spectacular, the lack of light pollution from any hotels or towns revealing hidden layers of the universe. You don't get this in Cancun, Playa del Carmen or Tulum.

On my final morning I walk, as usual, down to the beach, as the orange disc of the sun rises on the horizon. Pelicans soar over the waves. But there's a deviation from my routine. With a storm coming, a rainbow forms over the lagoon behind Casa Chablé, just to give this tropical paradise one last memorable touch of magic.

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Graeme Green was a guest of Journey Latin America. Chablé and La Valise. Eight nights' B&B (four in Casa Chablé and four in Chablé Maroma) from £5,928pp, including flights, transfers, some meals and excursions ([journeylatinamerica.com](https://www.journeylatinamerica.com)). B&B doubles at Casa Chablé from £860 ([chablehotels.com](https://www.chablehotels.com)) and from £323 at La Valise Jungle ([lavalisetulum.com](https://www.lavalisetulum.com))

More places to stay in the Riviera Maya and Tulum

Galopina, Merida

Opened late last year in the Yucatan forest, this good-value guesthouse is built on a bedrock of thoughtful architectural principles, combining sharp irregular angles with an earthy feel and terracotta-hued exterior. Guests can help to gather honey from Galopina's hives. There's also an organic vegetable garden, circular swimming pool and hammocks. Exotic foliage and heavy wooden furniture create a cool tropical aesthetic and there are cenotes — swimming holes — to explore nearby. **Details** B&B doubles from £168 ([galopina.com.mx](https://www.galopina.com.mx))

Motto, Tulum

Motto hotels are part of the Hilton group but tend to be nicely low-key and incorporate sustainable elements of design. Opened in November, this one has a beachside setting among shops and restaurants, ten minutes from the centre of Tulum. Some of the 115 rooms are accessible for people with mobility issues, and all have a gentle, neutral decor. A rooftop bar brings the party atmosphere, alongside two pools and jungle views. **Details** Room-only doubles from £113 ([hilton.com](https://www.hilton.com))

Susurros del Corazón, Punta Mita

Just down the coast from Naviva, this romantic retreat — its name means "whispers of the heart" — is a sign of how on the up Mexico's central west coast is. There are 59 hotel suites, a 280 sq m fitness centre and three scallop-shaped pools looking out over 600m of white-sand beach and surf. Days can be spent relaxing at the Auberge Spa and in the beach club's poolside cabanas, or on trips to the jungle, with yoga sessions, hiking and birdwatching. Food ranges from fine dining to a laid-back taqueria, and it's family friendly, with a kids' club. **Details** Room-only doubles from £820 ([aubergeresorts.com](https://www.aubergeresorts.com))

Palmaia, Playa del Carmen

At the quiet end of Playacar beach, the 234-suite Palmaia (also known as the House of AiA) has lush greenery all around and is home to iguanas, spider monkeys and capybara, with views across the Caribbean to the island of Cozumel. The six restaurants have creative plant-based menus, and there are four infinity pools, a spa, cacao ceremonies, t'ai chi, gratitude rituals, meditation and more. **Details** Doubles from £610 ([thehouseofaia.com](https://www.thehouseofaia.com))



Susurros del Corazón, Punta Mita