



ES
Magazine

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WHAT IT MEANS TO BE
A WOMAN TODAY
By Natasha Walter

HELP!
BREXIT *is*
RUINING
my LOVE life

Plus:
CATHY
NEWMAN
YOUR ULTIMATE
MEXICAN RETREAT
*& the rise of
the remarkler*

NEW
DAWN

Heralding the arrival of spring
(well, almost)

ESCAPE



PERFECT ESENCIA

On Mexico's Riviera Maya, *Dipal Acharya* unwinds at a heavenly boutique hideaway

Holbox is the new Tulum, while the latter is a new wellness hub to rival Ibiza. Playa del Carmen is still in desperate need of an image makeover — and Cancun? Well, the never-ending stream of party buses and bachelor parties say it all. Much noise has been made over the years about Mexico's Riviera Maya but recently one hotel has cut through it all: Hotel Esencia, once the party palace of the Italian Duchess of Ferrari and only an hour away from Cancun airport.

After being bought by hip hotelier (and sometime Hollywood producer) Kevin Wendle, it has had a multi-million dollar facelift that's made it one of the coast's most fabulous boutique hideaways. The bones were always there, as Wendle explains to me: 'stunning classic Mediterranean architecture, bungalows housing ample bedrooms and bathrooms, a sublime palm forest immersed in nature, and the most spectacular whitewashed beach I had even seen with no big neighbouring hotels. I always say, "Start with the best beach, everything else can be fixed."'

Ah yes, the beach — nearly 400 metres of it, all private; a ribbon of white snaking down the Caribbean coast. It's unsurprising that Esencia is a hit with the New York fashion crowd looking for a little winter sun and wind-down (Jason Wu, Ashley Graham and Gwen Stefani are fans).

The sheer scale of the



Lucky dip: a jungle-fringed pool villa at Esencia. Left, breakfast at the hotel

property and unfailingly sunny service left us feeling we had total run of the place when we checked in. Or perhaps that was the midday mezcal; the hotel's outdoor bar boasts an impressive local selection, each shot served with a dish of bright sliced oranges to take the edge off.

"AH YES, THE BEACH — A RIBBON OF WHITE SNAKING DOWN THE COAST"

Meanwhile, the interiors have a laid-back minimalist flavour. Wendle enlisted the help of eclectic French interior designer CS Valentin to design the communal spaces, which also house some of his most treasured mid-century modern furniture, including originals from Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand and Serge Mouille.

In the rooms, which range from the lush, jungle-fringed variety to smart, new beach bungalows, the attention to detail is superlative. There's the standard-issue

Havianas for flip-flopping around the property, citrusy organic bath products from the Yucatan Peninsula and personalised

Lap it up: sip a cocktail at the outdoor bar before relaxing at the private white sand beach



iPods with playlists curated by DJ Michel Gaubert for every mood. And then there's the morning delivery of fresh pastries and a thermos of coffee (left in a hidden *Robinson Crusoe*-style box to avoid the resident peacocks interfering with your provisions).

Still hungry? Mistura Xpu-Ha, a new Peruvian-Japanese fusion spot, has opened on site with a head chef who's an alumnus of El Bulli. Breakfast varies from berry-studded açai bowls to eggs sunny side up, while it's ceviche and catch-of-the-day for supper. Add to this an outstanding spa (under a traditional palapa roof, specialising in temazcal treatments) and we were quite happy to stay put and swerve the madness of Tulum. In Esencia, we'd found our own little slice of paradise. *Dipal was a guest of Hotel Esencia. Rooms from £440 per night on a room-only basis (hotelesencia.com). British Airways flies direct from London Gatwick to Cancun from £596 (ba.com)*

WHAT TO PACK

1. BOOK *The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border* by Francisco Cantu. A brilliant debut from a former US border agent.

2. DRESS Alice Temperley Riviera dress, POA (temperleylondon.com)

3. SHOES Simone Rocha slides, £350, at matchesfashion.com

4. BEAUTY Clarins Moisture Rich Body Lotion, £31 (clarins.co.uk)

