

**Punta Costa:  
Adam arrives in the Yucatán  
and begins to have doubts**

*Now I understand the concept of chaos.* Somehow every flight arriving at the Cancun airport that day managed to arrive at exactly the same time. People with an eclectic sense of appropriate vacation attire, from the chic to the shameful, were scurrying about with little apparent purpose in a great mash-up of social unrest and fashion blasphemy.

Which may have explained the attitude of the immigration officer who sullenly greeted me.

I handed him my passport. He flipped it open, compared me to my picture, down, up, down, up, then read from the top line. “Adam Alexander McCay.”

I couldn’t tell if he was asking me or telling me, so I didn’t respond.

“This is your name?” he stiffly asked. “Adam Alexander McCay?”

“Yes.”

“Business or pleasure?”

“I’ll take pleasure for two hundred, Alex.”

I thought that was funny, but he looked me over like he was sizing me up for an orange jumpsuit. Then he stiffened his lips and repeated deliberately, “Are you here for business or for pleasure, Mister McCay?”

“Business.”

“And what business would that be?”

“Photography. I’m here shooting a story about diving in the cenotes.”

Now he brightened up like he’d met an old friend. “Ah, so you are diving the cenotes?! You are a fortunate man that you have such a job.” Then he stamped the page and promptly handed the passport back to me. “Enjoy your stay, Señor McCay. Welcome to Mexico!”

I stepped outside into a cloak of hot humid air, and was immediately greeted by an enthusiastic man in an equally enthusiastic flowered shirt. He promised I could get a private van to my destination “for much less than an unsafe taxi, señor.” I was tempted to ask him how much compared to a safe taxi, but I’d promised Jason Hargreaves to stifle my cynicism for at least one day, so I took him up on his offer.

As it turned out, “private” meant that I and five other gullible schlubs were jammed into the same van carrying a season’s-worth of luggage and heading for four different resorts, the last of which, naturally, was Punta Costa.

Jason could've booked me into any of maybe a hundred different resorts that stretched along the coast south of Cancun down the Riviera Maya, so why he had to pick this one, I didn't know. But it certainly wasn't the first time his thinking left me in a lurch.

Since I was the last stop, I was in the back seat, so every time the driver slammed on his brakes—which seemed like every ten feet—three garment bags came sliding forward into the back of my head. I should have taken this as a sign of how the rest of my trip was going to go.

Punta Costa was just south of a little town called Playa del Carmen. I probably would have enjoyed it more if I'd been able to see it from my cramped position in the back. But by the time we'd woven through the streets to drop off the other passengers, my legs were numb and my mind was blank.

When we finally arrived at resort, the attendant flung open the door of the van ready to greet a bus-load of tip-happy tourists only to find a cranky six-two man kinked-up in the back seat. But once I stepped outside and saw the place, everything, body and mind, relaxed.

Jason Hargreaves, I decided right then, wasn't such an asshole after all. The circular drive was lined with palm trees and led up to an arch-covered entrance. Everything that wasn't white stucco was glass, so even from the entrance I could see the green terraces, the white beach, and the blue sea beyond. Here I was, a guy who actually lived on a beach on an ocean, having my breath taken away by the stunning beauty.

After I checked in, I was escorted to a golf cart to be given a little orientation tour before being taken to my room. The resort was basically U-shaped, with the main facilities at the bottom of the U and the rooms arranged along each side, leading down to the beach and the sea.

The rooms were built in free-standing white-stucco cubes of eight suites each, four up and four down, each with a little courtyard in the center. Each cube was connected by pathways that wandered among the grasses and tropical plants and palms. It gave the whole place a sense of privacy and calm.

At the end of the right side of the U were a first-floor snack shop and a second-floor dining room, where breakfast, lunch, and dinner were served. At the end of the left side of the U was the dive shack, where I'd be heading tomorrow to start my big underwater photographic adventure. In between were the pool, the beach, and the Caribbean.

And people. Lots of people. This was an "adults-only" resort, meaning that no kids were allowed. Meaning in turn that the adults acted like kids. I never saw so many people who shouldn't be wearing bathing suits in

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public wearing bathing suits that couldn't have been held together by more than two or three stitches of thread.

And then, of course, there was the complementary contingent of beautiful people who spiced up the human landscape like pepper in a bowl of potato salad. I didn't know skin could come in so many shades of brown, nor be so uniform over so many nooks and crannies, which no one seemed to take too much time to try to cover up.

Once in my room, I avoided the damn huge mirror in the bathroom. I didn't need to see myself in blinding-bright splendor to know that my waistline was starting to sag and my pects were starting to flab and gray was starting to infiltrate my hair like crabgrass in a nice lawn. I was fifty and looked like I had lived every day of it.

Besides, I was here to spend my time diving around the Caribbean in a wetsuit not strutting around a pool in a Speedo. My objective was to take Jason Hargreaves' readers someplace they'd never been before, to photograph the rare and exotic and unusual, including the underwater caves called cenotes—and to spend his money as quickly as I could. It all looked so appealing when he first told me about it.

But for a guy who'd spent his whole career as an advertising photographer, using light and illusion to create substance out of shadow, I of all people should have known that appearances have nothing to do with reality.

# CARLETON PRINCE