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Luxury Mexican Resorts: Chable, A Luxurious Enclave Buried In The Yucatan Jungle



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Travel

I solve the key hotel mystery: Which rooms are best?

The name Chable, a resort managed by Hamak Hotels in the Yucatan, may remind you of Chablis, the flinty French white Burgundy. Which is fine because they share one great characteristic: understatement rendered luxuriously. (Although in Mayan, Chable means 'the place where the anteaters live.')

Chable, a 40-room resort 30 minutes from Merida, an up-and-coming city in Mexico for its cuisine and its traditional feel, is the understated made audible. The resort occupies a 17th-century sisal plantation—you know sisal, it's that area rug in your apartment that feels great underfoot because it's so authentic. Cocktail party fact: Sisal is actually woven hemp but got its name because it was shipped from the Mexican port of Sisal and labeled as such. Hence, Sisal.

At Chable the past has been aestheticized. Hamak has beautifully salvaged the hacienda—put your hands together for Paulina Moran, who created the look, which has flashes of wit (those yellow armchairs piped in blue) but is constrained by a classic sensibility. Great. You feel you're in the estancia of a designer who knows all the rules and follows them, but every so often knows exactly how to break them. That's called brilliance. Tub chairs dance effortlessly under aristocratic ceilings with the requisite thick wood beams, and the great lawn preface to the building is crew-cut. You feel the then and the now.



The Hacienda at Chable CHABLE YUCATAN RESORT

This is not easy to do. It takes a fine touch, an unerring sense of the not-too-much.



The loggia of the Estancia, a great place for a pre-dinner cocktail. CHABLE RESORT YUCATAN

Chable bills itself as a wellness resort—you're in the middle of nowhere so you might as well relax. It has the spa to prove it, and the spa therapists with the training to right your wrong: One physical therapist is also a nutritionist—and she fixed my hip pain during my stay. There is even a space devoted to preparing the treatment ingredients, all of which are from the area. The spa itself is a melody of abstract shapes, a lullaby of pools, vegetation, and concrete. That deep-emerald floor of the spa pool thickly veined with red? It's made of tiles that come from a petrified Amazon forest. Every guest gets a spa consultation free.

You could easily spend a day here.

Hamak had to add buildings, of course, and it has done it well. Thus the restaurant is an elegant glass box with glass shelves that display the resort's scores of different Tequila labels. The consulting chef is Jorge Vallejo, who has a one-star in Mexico City, the seafood comes from Progreso, a port town not far away, the Kidney Scallop used in the tiradito is sweeter than one the one to which you're accustomed, and the chorizo comes from a small town near Chichen Itza, famous for its pyramids. (They're not far away: 2.5 hours to Chichen Itza, one hour to Izamal, and of course the resort will organize the trip.) The cigar bar occupies a former machine room and the muscular architecture of the small space reflects it. A perfect man-cave.



Chable Yucatan Presidential Suite CHABLE YUCATAN RESORT

The 40 rooms, of course, are new, glass-walled and stone-cut compounds that use the jungle as privacy. Three of them (1, 7, and 8), have the ruins of a house as the entrance. They are all buried in vegetation—they easily pass the walk-around-naked test--and have a plunge pool defined by a white rectangular stone tower astride it, outdoor sitting area, display architecture, and a built-in sound system controlled from an I-Pad. (Really want privacy? Book rooms 30 to 38, the most remote.) The interiors of every room are a harmony of white and dark brown, and the centerpiece is an indoor double-rainhead shower and an outdoor waterfall shower. (If this doesn't seem sexy, get help.) The floor-to-ceiling windows are sheathed in deeply pleated, semi-transparent, white-linen curtains--at night, drawn, they turn the room into a dark cradle. The louvered doors, the walls of white stone blocks, the terrazzo floors—they shape the space in a way that makes you want to stay home.

You are. Relax.