

# TEN COMMANDMENTS *for Travelers*

I

Don't expect to find things the way they were at home.



II

Leave your troubles behind.

*"Respect for the rights of others is peace."*

BENITO JUÁREZ

VI

Do not poison your heart; few problems are fatal.

VII

Do not judge a country by its fools.

III

Never let other tourists get on your nerves.

VIII

Respect local customs, but never be ashamed of being a foreigner.

IV

Remember your passport and know where it is.

IX

Enjoy delays; a good trip is soon over.

V

Take half the clothing you think you need—and twice the money.

X

Honor your host.

# Cancun User's Guide

By JULES SIEGEL  
*with Anita Brown  
and Faera, Eli & Jesse Siegel*

*Honest advice from an American family  
living and working in Cancun since 1983!*

*The Communication Company*  
CANCUN, QUINTANA ROO, MEXICO

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*All illustrations, maps and photographs  
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*The Communication Company*

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READ THIS FIRST

# How to Use this Book

THE CANCUN USER'S GUIDE CONSISTS OF TWO MAIN PARTS:

## [I] The Real Mexico

An overview of Mexico—history, culture, politics, economy—leading to the creation of Cancun.

## [II] Cancun Directory

Survival secrets—your guide to finding the real Mexico in Cancun.

EACH is virtually independent of the other, but mutually supportive. We assume that you want to have a good time and to understand the meaning of what you experience here. The Real Mexico is designed to help you understand those experiences by putting Cancun in correct historical and cultural perspective.

Although the *Directory* is mostly devoted to survival information, you will find some items such as Books that might just as well have gone into *The Real Mexico*. The choice is based on the form of organization of the material. At the moment, anything that is not easily integrated into the rather discursive essay form of the *The Real Mexico* is handled alphabetically in the Directory.

The *Directory* is organized alphabetically by category, and mostly alphabetically within the categories, where information is presented in logical rather than alphabetical order wherever we felt that would be more useful.

## DEDICATION

*To the Children of Cancun*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The names of everyone who have helped us would fill several pages and not include all, as there were many whose names we never knew. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the public officials of the Republic of Mexico, the State of Quintana Roo and the Municipality of Benito Juárez for the courtesy and helpfulness they have extended to us over the years.

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## INTRODUCTION

# The Cancun User's Guide Story

**T**HIS book began in 1971 when I first visited Mexico with my second wife, Chris Jolly, and our daughter Faera. We returned twice during the next few years, with less desire to go back to the United States each time. Chrissie and I separated in 1976. I met Anita Brown in 1977 and we married in 1981. Anita and I visited Mexico in 1977 to help arrange a major *Playboy* pictorial feature on the West Coast beach resorts. In 1980, Anita and I prepared a very extensive proposal for Doubleday for a book to be called *The Real Mexico*. This was received very enthusiastically by the editors of the travel section, but failed to gain any support at the executive level.

Despite this, we decided to go ahead with the book on our own, confident that it would find a publisher when complete. On December 3, 1981, we landed in La Paz, Baja California Sur with Faera, then ten, Eli, seven weeks old, about a ton of books and research files and camera equipment, an assignment to seek a *Playboy* "Interview" with then President José López-Portillo, and the desire never to look back. I still haven't gotten a Presidential Interview, although I actually shook hands with Miguel De La Madrid while he was still running for office, and he spoke to Faera. "Get out of the way, little girl," he told her kindly "the bus is about to move." That's more than he said to me. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari nodded at me and said "Thank you" when I was the sole person applauding him as he entered a banquet with Japanese bankers celebrating the financing of the Cancun Ritz-Carlton in 1988. He wasn't very popular then and he certainly isn't now, so I'm sure he appreciated my demonstration of solidarity. Maybe history will eventually judge him (and López-Portillo) more kindly than Mexico does today.

We have been in Mexico continuously ever since, in Quintana Roo since April 1983. Faera returned to her mother early in 1982 and we left Cabo San Lucas for the city of Oaxaca, where Eli was res-



cued from the door of death by government doctors. Jesse was born here on Labor Day, September 3, 1984. Faera came back to stay in 1986. We were broke a lot of the time, had innumerable scrapes with greedy landlords and rapacious employers. I went to jail for three days, falsely accused of fraud for being too far behind on the rent while living in a furnished apartment—which the evil administrator told the District Attorney was a hotel. Justice triumphed. The jail was one of those experiences you really need to write a book like this, but not one that you tend to look for with the same zeal as a *Playboy* Interview with a head of state, which I have now decided not to bother seeking with President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, having learned a very important saying about the Mexican art of courtesy: “*Siempre dicen sí; nunca dicen cuando.*” — “They always say yes, but never when.” I am beginning to think *Playboy* is a little too risqué for Mexican presidents.

*The Real Mexico* turned into the *Cancun User’s Guide*. We genuinely feel that you will never understand Mexico unless you understand Cancun. Perhaps some future edition will become *The Real Mexico* again, but after having lived in this country so many years, we feel that it would be futile to attempt to produce a single volume that would fully express the reality of Mexico. The real Mexico is wherever you happen to be when you are in Mexico. It’s a big country with a lot of history. No Mexican will ever capture its essence in a single book. Far be it from mere *gringos* to presume to do any better. Despite this, Cancun is an excellent framework for seeing Mexico, as it is a microcosm of the country at large. Its inhabitants have come here from all over the Republic seeking a better life.

The book you have is the book we lived. We’re still living it, so the book will grow. Meanwhile you have what could be a very valuable early copy in your hands, set in type personally by Jules on a laser printer and bound by hand. Much other material is already written, but is still in the computer being formatted. We make these here things in small batches. No publisher is looking over our shoulders and telling us what to write or changing our facts and opinions.

Although it originally started out as an essentially informative work to be presented in a popular style, we realized after living in

Mexico that our adventures told more about Mexico than any dry history could, yet the academic information was invaluable as well. We had sworn not to include a single restaurant recommendation, but we finally decided to let some commercial good sense (and, perhaps, compassion) over-rule our professional need for academic uniformity. Here in Cancun, you need that survival advice more than the rest of the book. When you return home, it will be superfluous and you will perhaps turn to the book on its own terms.

I wrote most of this book, but much of the research, some of the writing and much of the copy editing is the work of Anita Brown, assisted by Faera Siegel and Jimmy Montague—but all of the errors are mine. The term ‘I’ refers to Jules Siegel; ‘we’—used throughout the Directory—is usually all of us, not the so-called editorial we. Where a given section is mostly the work of either Anita or Faera, it is identified with the appropriate by-line.

As a general rule, we have tried to avoid duplicating information or interpretations available in other guides and popular works on Mexico and the Maya area, except to correct and clarify what we believe to be erroneous material and misguided opinions.

#### WRITE TO US

We will appreciate hearing your comments and recommendations. You can write to us at Apartado 1764, Cancun, Q. Roo 77501.

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