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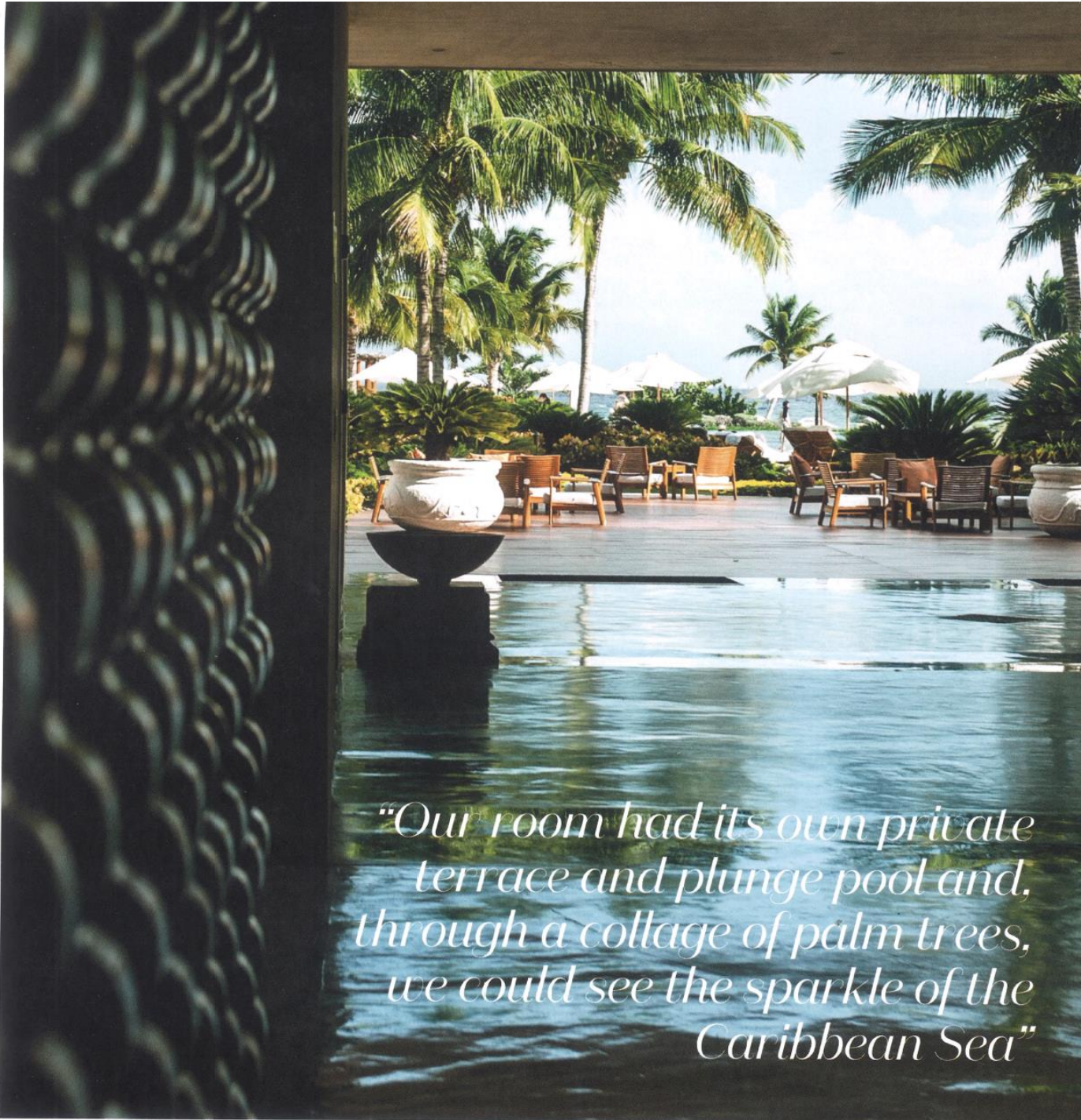
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MAYAN WONDER

With lush jungle and sparkling Caribbean vistas, lavish rooms and an extraordinary feast of culinary choices, the luxurious Grand Velas Riviera Maya in Cancun offers an indulgent taste of paradise

Words **SANDY CADIZ-SMITH**



"Our room had its own private terrace and plunge pool and, through a collage of palm trees, we could see the sparkle of the Caribbean Sea"

From the instant we saw the spectacular water feature that is the entrance to Grand Velas Riviera Maya our hearts soared. We could tell we were in for something special. The resort, just a 30-minute drive from Cancun international airport, has these sparkling surprises around every corner. And there are a lot of corners – the 200-acre piece of paradise is like a small (and very welcoming) town where natural beauty and ultimate indulgence come together. This is where the Caribbean Sea meets the Yucatan jungle, and where you can look across the blue towards the island of Cozumel in the distance or watch the white cruise liners

gliding lazily across the horizon.

Gleaming marble floors, a profusion of pink bougainvilleas and smiling faces greeted us. Personal service is all-important at Grand Velas and we were soon whisked off to our room by our own concierge, on hand at all times to make sure we had everything we desired. Cool and contemporary, our room redefined luxury, with a huge double bed on one side and a large, comfortable seating area on the other. Best of all, it overlooked our own private terrace and plunge pool and, through a collage of palm trees, we could see the seductive sparkle of the Caribbean Sea. And then we saw the splendid bathroom. An immense walk-in shower, double basins and a whirlpool bath for lazy post-beach relaxation completed a picture of





total and immersive luxury.

At Grand Velas Riviera Maya, guests can choose to stay beachside or a short drive away in a magical jungle setting – and it can be a tough call to choose between lush greenery and the ocean. This means the property's facilities are spread across the two very different natural settings, and you can pick and choose to match your mood. Dotted around the resort, there are eight restaurants and a different bar to suit every appetite. From the informal buffet-style Azul and casual poolside dining to the inventive gourmet experience of Cocina de Autor, and with plenty to tempt you in between. We felt as if we were finding food heaven at every step. Azul's buffet is no ordinary buffet, with an array of dishes that never failed to astonish us – including a memorable cornucopia of fabulous fresh sushi that seemed to be magically replenished. The pool-side shrimp tacos (freshly made to order, of course) tasted to us like the food of the gods – and so we kept coming back for more.

Two huge pools with swim-up bars overlook the glistening white-sand

beach where you can head for a change of scene to while away the hours sipping cocktails from the indulgent menu. Or, if you head jungle side, another stunning pool surrounded by lush vegetation awaits. This is where you'll also find the state-of-the-art spa. Named one of Forbes' 30 most luxurious in the world, it offers a dizzying range of therapeutic treatments. It also has a fabulous spa water journey – basically a massive indoor whirlpool with different water jets to soothe away every last bit of stress you may have had on arrival. There are also two large and well-equipped gyms – good for calming yoga classes as well as more energetic training if you feel the need to work off all that indulgent food.

Outside the resort – that's if you can drag yourself away – you



will find some of Mexico's most celebrated historical and natural treasures. The Mayan ruins at Tulum are around an hour's drive away, while the underground rivers at Xcaret are less than half an hour away. If you're feeling adventurous and want to venture a bit further afield, the Mayan ruins at Chichen Itza are under three hours' drive. These include the amazing Jululkan Pyramid – recently named one of the new Seven Wonders of the World. While these sights only add to the magic of any trip to this region, we did feel as if we had discovered the eighth wonder of the world in our own private paradise at Grand Velas Riviera Maya. 



GRAND VELAS RIVIERA MAYA

Grand Velas Riviera Maya offers all-inclusive holidays and special honeymoon packages. Wedding co-ordinators are available to tailor-make on-site celebrations. We flew with AeroMexico from London Heathrow.
rivieramaya.grandvelas.com

