

First Look: Chablé Resort & Spa



Deep in the Yucatan Peninsula, surrounded by sleepy towns and lush, humming jungle, Chablé Resort opened its floor-to-ceiling glass doors in early 2017.

The vision was ambitious: a secluded haven combining modern luxury with Mayan mysticism, where guests can indulge in shamanistic spa treatments and sip century-old tequila, swim in a mythical cenote and sleep under canopy in the tropical forest. And while this hedonistic, one-of-a-kind retreat seems borderline fanciful, Chablé delivers, offering exquisite accommodations and local authenticity in a way few resorts can do.

The property's *raison d'être* is its ancient Mayan heritage. "We don't bulldoze nature, and we don't bulldoze culture," says Chablé's visionary and acting manager, Nicolas Dominguez. With a nod to the area's former civilization, every element of the resort, from the landscaping to the cocktail menu, has been thoughtfully designed to pay homage to local culture. Ancient Banyan trees snake around medieval stone walls; colorful stucco buildings dot the property in vibrant shades of burnt orange, baby blue and yellow; all materials are sourced locally, employing indigenous techniques and made with natural, plant-based products; and hammocks hang outside every guest casita, a Mayan symbol of peace and home.



The resort embraces its recent history, too. Set in a restored 19th-century estate, Chablé retains many of the property's original structures, including a wine cellar and chapel featuring a painting of the hotel's namesake, Saint Chablé. Thoughtfully updated for the 21st century, the gorgeous Hacienda is the resort's main hub, complete with a library, lounge bar and boutique and is surrounded by 75 of acres of manicured grounds. Designer Paulina Moran (known for Esencia and Casa San Augustin) was granted complete aesthetic freedom in outfitting the hacienda with the very best artwork and furnishings—and it shows. Décor is whimsical, ornate and authentically Mexican, and spaces are bursting with color and filled with handmade furniture and vintage touches. A dreamy verandah wraps around the hacienda and seems to be straight from a fairytale, complete with wicker chairs, intricate tile work and stately stone columns.

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A five-minute walk along a cobblestoned, tree-lined pathway brings guests to Chablé's 'village' of 40 casitas, each surrounded by verdant forest and abuzz with friendly sounds of the jungle. Modern and understated, casitas are decorated minimally, emphasizing fluid, indoor/outdoor layouts and the luxury of open space. Rooms feature auburn-colored wood doors, light stone surfaces and accents in sea green and blue, with floor-to-ceiling windows, which give guests the feeling that they are sleeping in the jungle. Each casita has a private pool and hammock that invites breezy afternoon naps.

The core of the Chablé experience is the spa, which is expected to draw savvy wellness seekers from around the world. Built into a cenote, a natural sinkhole considered by the Mayans to be a sacred spiritual gateway, spa area is filled with rippling streams and overgrown greenery, and the setting is vibrant and alive; the energy palpable and positive. Mayans believed the cenote granted vitality to all those who swim in it, and Chablé's spa echoes this philosophy, encouraging guests to embrace the location's mysticism as part of their personal wellness journey.

The spa, too, is a masterpiece: a sleek and contemporary structure filled with over-water walkways and infinity pools, the space smells of burning incense and echoes with soothing music. Upon arrival, visitors are welcomed with a traditional ceremony conducted by the resort's resident shaman who, together with the spa director, plans a customized program for each guest. This can mean morning yoga in the cenote, walking meditation, chakra treatments, astrology consultations and detoxifying massages, all of which (in typical Chablé fashion) are deeply rooted in ancient techniques.



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Days at Chablé—while always relaxed—are not limited to spa treatments. The flow of the resort is peaceful and leisurely, and there is no set schedule: each evening, visitors receive a program of the next day's classes (complete with a fresh juice offering and a spiritual mantra for the day) and are invited to partake in as many or as few of the wellness programs as they choose. Guests may spend their time poolside, snacking on tostadas at the casual **K'ol** restaurant, exploring the grounds by bicycle or taking an afternoon cooking class with a jolly local chef. Many visitors venture off property, as the resort's surrounding area boasts Mayan ruins, beaches and nature reserves that make for wonderful day trips. For a culture moment, visitors should head to the nearby **Merida**, a historic city that is just hitting its stride and is filled with colonial architecture, museums and charming souvenir shops.

Chablé's culinary program is another of its crowning achievements, and for foodies and cocktail aficionados, the resort is a destination in itself. Headed by acclaimed Chef Jorge Vallejo (the force behind Mexico City's Quintonil), the restaurants feature organic, seasonal fare and local produce—much of which is grown from the on-site garden. The fine dining restaurant, **Ixi'm**, elevates farm-to-table cuisine to a sophisticated level that will impress even the pickiest of gourmands. There, dishes like octopus in squid ink and venison tartare are complemented by sensational wine, and tequila fiends will rejoice at the hotel's collection of over 3,000 unique bottles.



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Still, the magic of Chablé exists in its distinct personality, which will no doubt distinguish itself from other Mexican resorts. Visitors will be struck by the property's authenticity and originality from the moment they arrive, especially when greeted by the warm and enthusiastic staff (most of whom hail from the surrounding area). With the aim of redefining the 'wellness escape,' Chablé's creators were careful not to pigeonhole or limit the resort's potential, curating exciting gastronomic and cultural programs to augment the spa experience. At the end of a long dirt road, Chablé welcomes guests to a unique paradise: a harmonious blend of ancient and cutting edge; of luxurious and mystical; a unique, restorative retreat.

Interested in planning a stay at Chablé? Contact Indagare to book.

Who Should Go: Spa-lovers, couples, relaxed families and those who appreciate an authentic Mexican sense of place and a unique approach to wellness.

Who Should Not Go: Those looking for a 'scene' will be ill-suited to Chablé's über-relaxed, quiet atmosphere. Active travelers who like a packed schedule of activities should opt for larger beachfront properties.

Getting There: Guests must fly to Merida, which is a 25-minute drive from Chablé. There are no direct flights from the US, so visitors will likely connect through Miami or Houston.

Ideal Length of Stay: 4 days. Due to the Chablé's serene, tranquil atmosphere, it is recommended to stay a few days in order to immerse oneself in the resort's experience and make the most of the wellness offerings.

— Blair West on March 15, 2017

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