

GENTRY DESTINATIONS

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An aerial photograph of a tropical beachfront resort. The image shows a series of overwater bungalows with thatched roofs and wooden decks, built on stilts in the clear, turquoise water. The bungalows are arranged in a line, extending from the sandy beach towards the open ocean. The sky is a clear, bright blue, and the water transitions from shallow, light green near the shore to deep blue further out. In the foreground, the top of a palm tree is visible, partially obscuring the bottom right corner of the frame.

Set on Mexico's Riviera Maya, the award-winning El Dorado Maroma Beachfront Resort raises the bar with the debut of Palafitos—Mexico's first and only overwater bungalows. Gentry Destinations takes a tour of this new romantic resort destination designed with couples in mind.

CLOUD NINE



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Discerning travelers once had to fly for hours over the Pacific in search of Instagram-worthy five-star resorts huddled over brilliant turquoise waters. But now newlyweds, or any couple for that matter, can just head south to our neighboring Mexico for a truly magnificent experience equal to or, perhaps, even exceeding any of the island oases found in places like the Maldives, Fiji, and Bora Bora. Karisma Hotels & Resorts recently unveiled an exclusive new addition to its renowned El Dorado Maroma Beachfront Resort—30 luxury overwater bungalows lovingly named Palafitos (Spanish for stilthouses). Inspired by the structures built by the ancient Aztecs over Lake Texcoco through the ages, the bungalows boast traditional palapa-style roofs, but with interiors that are decidedly luxurious and contemporary. Hearing the rave reviews, I jumped at the opportunity for a personal visit. A tough job, indeed, but someone had to do it.

Long considered one of the most romantic warm weather destinations, Mexico, and in particular its Riviera Maya, will impress even the most seasoned tourist. Upon arriving at Palafitos, I was compelled to take off my shoes and dip my toes in the silky white sand of Maroma Beach, which was voted one of the top 10 beaches in the world by the Travel Channel, and provides a beautiful foundation for the long, wood-slat path leading to the new overwater bungalows that appear to be magically suspended above the bright turquoise waters of the Caribbean. Not surprisingly, the thoughtfully designed bungalows built along this pristine coastline perfectly complement the idyllic landscape. With one hand holding my husband's and the other, a refreshingly delicious margarita, I could tell the top-notch service mixed with a laidback atmosphere is just what the doctor ordered. This is the beginning of a dream, anything-your-heart-desires vacation.

BUNGALOW HEAVEN

No matter which one you choose, each of the 30 bungalows at Palafitos over delivers. As if breathtaking views of the Caribbean Sea weren't enough, our villa's glass-bottom floor offered an insider's glimpse of life under water. Opening the door to our floating nirvana, Tomas, who was our personal butler, welcomed us, explaining the resort's endless amenities while showing us the indoor Jacuzzi and the in-room refrigerator pre-stocked to our exact specifications. We were then escorted outside onto our private oversized deck, donned with equally oversized (and comfy) chairs, where he pointed out our outdoor shower, private infinity pool (just the right size for two), and direct ladder access



Just off the silky white sands of the Maroma Beach, these sumptuous overwater bungalow suites offer an idyllic blend of outdoor and indoor luxury, including an oversized private deck with wooden lounge chairs, glass-bottom floors, and an indoor Jacuzzi built for two.



to the sea below. Tomas is just one of a team of private butlers promising to attend to your every need, from delivering room service to complimentary sunscreen, reading materials, refreshments, or even gourmet bites from wherever you like and whenever you wish. It's immediately obvious that a stay here means access to one of the world's most elite resorts—one that values outstanding service and casual sophistication in an exquisite environment. Inhale; hold it. Exhale and smile.

A NEW DAY DAWNS

With ultra high thread-count sheets, black-out blinds, and peaceful sounds of water lapping under your bungalow, it's impossible not to sleep in at Palafitos. When your eyes eventually open, a simple body roll toward the phone starts the day in motion. While Tomas (your new best friend) hunts down your every wish, including coffee, mimosas, and a local favorite—huevos rancheros—your only task is to slip on a robe and stay comfy in bed. For those who prefer a more dramatic awakening, choices include a quick dip in your private infinity pool or a dive off your private dock into the warm, welcoming Caribbean. As you perfect your backstroke, you may look up through the bungalow's glass floor just in time to see Tomas delivering breakfast.



Each overwater bungalow, above, comes complete with a private infinity pool and awe-inspiring views of the Caribbean Sea. The Overwater Grill and Wine Bar, opposite, is an exclusive restaurant for guests staying at Palafitos, serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner in distinctly Mexican chic atmosphere.

When it's time to venture out, there is plenty of action just a swift walk across the beach to the main El Dorado Maroma Beachfront Resort, which boasts three pools, six premier restaurants, and four bars. This intimate resort with 157 suites is ideal for adults, ages 18 and older, seeking the simplicity of an all-inclusive option with personalized service, phenomenal cuisine, romantic atmosphere, and unforgettable adventures. Palafitos' guests are the ultimate VIPs, having access and free reign to partake in all resort activities from dancing, yoga, and beach volleyball to cooking lessons, kayaking, and bocce. Whether you two choose a private cabana in the shade or a drink at the swim-up bar, the social scene (ideal for people watching) is excellent.

A visit to the main resort mandates a stop at the "24" Swim-Up Bar offering a generous selection of Mexican beers and tropical drinks in a casual Caribbean atmosphere. After sipping a perfectly crafted pina colada while bonding with newly found friends, the water entices you to play. Maroma Adventures is an elite, comprehensive outfitter that aims to please. Under the expert coordination of its activity gurus, one of the most beautiful beaches in the world becomes an epicenter for adventure. Offerings include horseback riding, snorkel and scuba diving, deep-sea fishing, and swimming with the dolphins. We



appeared our “need for speed” and chose to head out for a private speedboat ride. Laughter filled the air as we took a thrilling cruise across crystal clear waters at adrenaline-inducing speeds.

BODY BLISS

When you’ve tired of mingling with the masses, the smart move is to return to the restricted access at Palafitos. The best way to further your decent into total relaxation is to visit the Náay Spa, exclusively reserved for guests at Palafitos. Like the bungalows, the spa’s four spacious suites float over the water. The spa designs its treatments around the four elements once held sacred by the ancient Mayans—fire, earth, water and wind—finding the synergy between these elements to bring about healing. The choices for skin and body treatments are endless, all with a focus on traditional Mayan herbal practices or the region’s marine life (most notably the benefits of “Maroma’s Sea Moss”). Found only in the Caribbean, this sea moss is rich with mineral salts and is thought to have antioxidant and detoxifying powers. You can indulge in a couples massage incorporating the Maroma Sea Moss as your astute therapist begins to gently massage the moss into your skin. You can feel its magical powers at work as you listen to the sounds of the gentle waves below your outdoor treatment room.

For those seeking a pure beach vacay, let’s not forget the simplicity of soaking up the sun on Maroma Beach—one of the world’s best. We picked an ideal spot on the white sand, and Tomas remained nearby, ever ready to assist. You might begin to think he could be psychic given his uncanny ability to appear at just the right moment—often anticipating your needs before you do. He will keep you well fed and happy with an endless supply of gourmet bites and creative tropical concoctions. On this peaceful end of the beach, single thatched-roof villas sit nearby, available at your pleasure for a Sky Massage. Its deep rhythmic pressure seems perfectly timed to match the soothing ebb and flow of the water.

The beach will seduce you, but it’s the entire experience at El Dorado Maroma that will make you fall in love. The resort is intimately scaled, so you’re never more than a short stroll from anywhere, whether the variety of fun water activities on one end of the beach or the quiet respite at the other.

We wound down our afternoon with a private paddleboard lesson and a dip in the sea before stepping into a long and lazy shower outside our bungalow deck. As if on cue, Tomas delivered two exquisite cocktails for us to enjoy as we dressed for dinner. The resort offers several dining and entertainment options. Only a short walk away, Palafitos’ private restaurant, the gourmet inclusive Overwater Grill & Wine Bar, has the look and feel of a trendy hot-spot, yet the relaxed vibe is distinctly Mexican chic with sleek furniture and breathtaking views of the surrounding Caribbean, sparkling in the night sky. Guests can enjoy specially selected menus of succulent dishes inspired by the sea. With the cocktails flowing and soft light at every table, this is notably an unsurpassed romantic dining experience.

Another dining option is an evening dinner cruise. After a romantic walk down the beach, you step aboard a state-of-the-art catamaran for a sunset sail. With music rocking and an open bar, this truly is a floating party boat. If you’re feeling adventurous be sure to fly in a spinnaker, a sail fastened to the catamaran that gently lifts you by the blowing breeze some 20 feet above the sea. Just as the sun is setting casting a brilliant pink and orange across the sky, the party settles down and gourmet dining begins with lobster, steak, or you can order the Surf & Turf selection for a little of both. At this point in your adventure, you’ll find yourself making a new vow with your partner: to make this destination an annual treat that guarantees to keep your romance alive. After all, everyday at Palafitos is a Cloud Nine kind of day. ♦

Rates for The Palafitos at El Dorado Maroma start at \$950 per adult, per night, and include the Gourmet Inclusive® Experience of a la carte dining, premium alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, full-service concierge, and 24-hour room service. Reservations can be booked through Karisma Hotels & Resorts by visiting www.karismahotels.com.