



Gran Tulum is more than halfway pre-sold and will be ready in approximately 24 months.

**taste, trek, tour** By Beverly & Steve Smirnis

# EXPERIENCE PARADISE and MAKE MONEY DOING IT...

## Riviera Maya Provides Plenty of Examples of People Doing Just That!

Back home in Dallas, our daydreams take us back to the beach club at Tulum, where we're sipping on our favorite new drink that a local introduced us to, the Caipirinha, and indulging on the freshest guacamole we've ever tasted. As we fall asleep at night, the live music from our evening spent at a Cuban bar in Playa del Carmen replays in our heads. We awake from the dream and think for a moment that the light sweat on our brows might have come from the Latin dancing we perfected there after several rounds of mojitos. Alas, as we rise, our normal breakfast back home is practically nothing, certainly not the wonderful chicken enchiladas on the breakfast menu at the Reef 28 hotel. All we can think about is our next trip back.

Our Mayan Riviera addiction was exacerbated by a real estate trade

mission to the Riviera Maya area of Mexico with Dallas-based real estate broker Ed Eakin of The Eakin Group. We were guests of Simca Development, the largest developer in Southeast Mexico. With more than 15 years of history in the area, Simca has delivered 30 developments which include 695 luxury apartments, 1333 residential lots, 811 houses, more than 2000 owners. Their projects in process will deliver another 941 luxury apartments, 2300 residential lots and 42 houses.

We've long admired that Ed Eakin accomplishes his dream in spending much of his time on the world's best beaches and promoting opportunities for others to do the same. How fabulous is it that he's "on vacation" yet earning money at the same time? And now, as more people have become "digital nomads" capable of working anywhere they



Tulum is consistently ranked as having one of the world's top beaches.

choose to base themselves, more and more of us are saying "Why not?"

Ed is an international real estate sales specialist and partners with developers in various paradise locales to promote their properties to his network of followers in Texas, making him the go-to expert for those looking to invest in properties outside the U.S. While Ed reps properties elsewhere, too, and for other developers, Riviera Maya is where he chose to live full-time at one point in his life. And it's also obvious that Chris Gill of Simca is a favorite client.

Born in England, Chris Gill is another example of one who chose not only to live his life here, but also to



A2-bedroom lock-off ground floor unit with private plunge pool is our pick!

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base his business here. That's right, while Chris looks like one of the Mexican natives, but he is actually of Spanish descent. He moved overseas at a very young age and became an expat, living and working on three different continents. So, why here? was the first question we asked when we sat down on the first day after our arrival for an interview with Chris. He shared with us that he had an opportunity very early in life to invest in land purchases. Some 20 years ago, he could already see the writing on the wall and was able to buy the land that he has since developed into Simca properties.

"In 1974, it was Cancun. Then Playa del Carmen became the hot spot starting around 1998, and becoming the world's fastest growing real estate market in the world in 2014. And the path of progress is still happening, with Tulum only starting to develop in 2008, and named the world's fastest growing city in 2016. Up and down this peninsula are versatile destinations with attractions and activities for all ages and lifestyles, and they check every box," Chris explained.

We put on our real estate industry hats for a moment to ask Chris a few questions about land development activity and he tells us that Playa developed rapidly in response to the desire to develop it differently from Cancun. While Cancun still thrives with beautiful beaches and nightlife akin to South Beach in Miami, Playa strived to remain more family-oriented and low key with fewer high rises and spring breakers. And, Chris promised, Tulum is more like the Florida Keys—wild and rugged, but still with a lot of culture and nightlife.

"Wherever you pick, you can't lose," Chris continued. "There is sunny weather 90% of the year, the cost of living is very accessible, it's easy to communicate in English, gastronomy is recognized as the best in the world,

peak season lasts 9 months, and there is a thriving expat community thanks to favorable foreign ownership laws. Tourism has accelerated from 18 million to 29 million in the past two years. Hotel occupancy rates average 90% and vacation home rental property at 65-79% a year provides the perfect two-step investment scenario (appreciation and passive income)." Texans, in particular, benefit from the fact that what has become a world-famous international destination is only about a two and half hour flight from DFW and airfares are extremely reasonable. But what isn't so obvious is that there are now more than 170 direct flights to Cancun from all around the world.

We could be sold entirely on the emotional appeal of life in paradise alone, but we really start to consider it more seriously as we learn more about the investment opportunity and the idea of setting ourselves up for an attractive retirement opportunity. What's the risk? Buy at a preconstruction price, flip it for profit (28% average but possibly up to 40%) when finished if change our minds. Ideal scenario—go as often as we want, and still earn annual profit from rental even after paying management and maintenance fees, HOA dues, 1% property tax and utility bills (also cheap).

Now our next question: What about the instability of the Mexican government? Enter Ivan Catillo, attorney and general manager of Securetitle Latin America. Ivan is a part of every Simca transaction, helping investors through a process that involves setting up a trust to purchase their property through. He explains why and how, including protection against capital gains. Each and every question or concern that an investor might have is addressed. This and Simca's long history are reassuring.

So then, we were off to see the properties with Sonja Sigurdson, a young lady from

Vancouver, BC in Canada, who moved here to follow her own dream when she was 21 years old, never dreaming she would still be here so many years later. She was just recently hired by Simca and thrilled to be part of the real estate team for the company that everyone calls the area's premier developer. We visit a wide range of properties in Playa del Carmen from luxury condo penthouses to more affordable condo/hotel units. Playa is a bustling international city, with excellent walkability on the Mexican Caribbean Sea and hundreds of shops, restaurants and entertainment venues along Fifth Avenue. Yes—it checks boxes on our personal list—lower key but still with a very active nightlife. But we were anxious to see Tulum. Having not been there since the Mayan Ruins and snorkeling at Xcaret were about all that was happening there, we couldn't wait to see how it had grown. And Sonya made us even more curious about it when she told us about its eco-chic vibe and said that the people who live there had been dubbed "Tulumines."

We expected Tulum would be beautiful and were hopeful that it might also be exciting. Sure enough, it surpassed our expectations on both fronts. If, like us, you dig less concrete and appreciate the extra attention paid to preserving the natural habitat along with a wildish jungle vibe, this is your spot. Life here focuses on wellness, nature and clean cuisine.

Stay tuned and subscribe to our blog as we detail our own journey toward owning a piece of paradise in the Mayan Riviera. And make sure you're on our list to be notified about the opportunity to join us on our next trip to the area where we'll celebrate all that the area, its people and their fabulous culture have to offer and attend a ground-breaking event for Simca's latest project in Gran Tulum.