

Río Secreto - Exploring the Riviera Maya Cenotes

The Adventure Kids travel to the [Riviera Maya, Mexico](#) to go caving and learn about the fascinating cenotes, the underground rivers, and sacred places of the Maya people at [Río Secreto](#).

Sometimes even one of our adventures begins with an adventure, and such was the case with our expedition to Río Secreto with [Alltournative Off Track Adventures](#) where in order to reach the site, once we left the main road, we rode in an open truck over rough roads for several minutes, because let's face facts here, in Spanish, Río Secreto means secret river, so we did not exactly expect it to be waiting for us on the side of the road. Riding over the dirt packed road past the jungle scenery only served to heighten our excitement of our approaching adventure, and although located only 15 minutes from Playa del Carmen, Río Secreto's location is totally remote.



After our exciting truck ride, finally we arrived at the site where our guide, Moises, was waiting for us. However, before we could begin our caving adventure, we needed to be prepared. Step one was donning neoprene shortie wetsuits over our bathing suits, which is tantamount to torture on a hot day as we struggled into our wetsuits that stopped mid thigh and just above the elbow. Next came putting on neoprene water shoes, followed by a shower to remove any oils or suntan lotion from our exposed skin as Río Secreto is a protected natural reserve and Alltournative Off Track Adventures is a sustainable tourism company focused on ecotourism to help promote and preserve the Maya culture. As our final steps of preparation, we donned lifejackets and secured our hardhats with mounted lights, and now fully dressed, we were ready to go exploring.



As we walked along the jungle trail to reach the cave, Moises told us about the cenotes and the underground rivers of Río Secreto, which has routes of up to 500 meters (0.31 mile). The cenotes have always been sacred to the Maya as they are their primary source of water as there are almost no rivers or

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lakes in this area. Cenotes are also called sinkholes and are filled with ground water, and the Maya believed that they were a connection to the afterlife.

According to the **Quintana Roo Speleological Survey**(QRSS), a special project of the [National Speleological Society](#), as of November 18, 2007, they had "explored 162 underwater cenotes or cave systems with a total length of 694 km (431 miles), and 21 caves above the water table with a total length of 11 km (7 miles) within the state of [Quintana Roo](#)."



Armed with our newly acquired information, we were eager and ready to begin exploring the limestone cave. Illuminated by strategic lighting placed at various points throughout the cave, and with our mounted helmet lights on, created an ambience of mystery, intrigue, and anticipation. Feeling like Indiana Jones, we walked over the uneven, twisting, and winding limestone floor, moving through large and sometimes narrow passageways to have a better view of the stalactite formations hanging like candle tapers from the ceiling of the cave created by calcium carbonate. Long thin finger-like formations, others that were as thin as hair, or as thick as an arm, and in some places the stalactites and stalagmites were reaching out to each other as if in an effort to create a majestic column, captivating our imaginations by the beauty created by nature.



After walking through the dry sections of the cave, we soon learned the reason for wearing wetsuits and neoprene water shoes, as we waded through the cool shallow water that just covered our ankles, to other places in the cave where the water level reached waist high level and we could swim. Moving through the cave with the water passing over our bare skin and taking care not to touch or bump into the stalactites hanging from the ceiling or the stalagmites rising majestically from the floor, added another level to the sensory experience of discovering Río Secreto.

As we passed each area of the cave, Moises instructed us on the history of the Maya and the cenotes,

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pointed out that the white residue floating on the water was calcium, and that scientists discovered that the reason that the Maya are short in stature is because of the high calcium and mineral content of their water, which gives them shorter and denser bones.



The 90-minute underground tour was an experience that will have a lasting memory for us, and of course, we will certainly look at caves and cenotes differently after exploring Río Secreto.

Leaving the dimly lit cave, we blinked in the strong sunlight remembering the magic of our mystical experience as we made our way to the picnic tables to enjoy a light lunch before we left for our next adventure.



Río Secreto small group tours are conducted at 9:00 am, 11:00 am, and 1:00 pm. To learn about other tours offered by Alltounative OffTrack Adventures, please visit their website.



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For information on **Riviera Maya, Mexico**, please visit the website: www.RivieraMaya.com.

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