

Chris Cruises

Inside Cruise Vacations

Mazatlan is a great place to visit by land or sea

We were in Mazatlan, Mexico recently for their 17th Fiesta Amigos, an annual event that invites travel agents, writers and bloggers to visit and experience what they have to offer. On a Monday through Friday visit, I learned a great deal about the city of Mazatlan, the people of Mexico and a few things about myself.

Right up front I have to tell you: Mazatlan is safe to visit.

The notion that Mazatlan is not safe comes from real-life horror stories involving drug-related incidents mostly in the far-away (like 20+ hours drive time) Northern part of the country. Tourists visiting Mazatlan by air or sea (nobody really drives there from the US) would have to try really hard to get in trouble. Still, all of Mexico continues to be picked on by the press in a guilt-by-association sort of way which is really unfair. After visiting Mazatlan and seeing the place first-hand, I felt a whole lot safer walking down the street at night there than here in our suburb of Orlando where real shootings occur rather frequently.

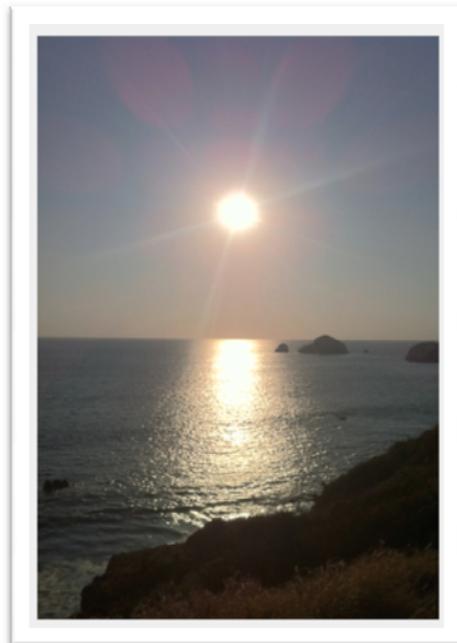
Safety aside, let's talk geography. Briefly. I know: boring.

But if we knew geography better we would know that Mazatlan is not even close to the US/Mexico border that breeds stories of horrible crime events. Mexico is made up of a bunch of states, much like the United States, each with their own government. Mazatlan is located in the state of Sinaloa, a long, thin state located on the western coast of Mexico. That location is important because in addition to being far away from the bad stuff it locks in year-round nice weather, along the lines of southern Florida. The location also produces some impressive waves which have carved out a beautiful shoreline and draw world-class surfers.

That makes Mazatlan a great place to learn how to surf for just about any able-bodied person. That "able-bodied" part is the key to making it work though, as I found out first-hand.

Here is my surfing experience, summed up in 7 points:

1. Surfing is way harder than it looks.
2. It is far easier to travel in the direction of waves than against them.
3. Old surfers did not start surfing when they got old.
4. People who have occasional back pain only think they know what back pain is all about until they attempt to surf.
5. Mexican surf pros have the patience of Job.
6. The correct position for standing on a surf board also works for pretending to be a Ninja Warrior or the beginning position in a game of Bear Wrestling.



7. Any position other than lying down on the surf board counts as "I did it".

Mazatlan offers a variety of other ocean-related activities too like catamaran sailings to a private island, water sports and deep-sea fishing. These are available as cruise ship shore excursions as well as day trips for all-inclusive hotel guests.

That same ocean also supplies some of the best seafood restaurants in the world and will be the subject of a series of other posts coming up. For now let's just say that there is something to be said for seeing a shrimp boat out in the ocean from your seat at a seaside restaurant, then watching as that boat comes to shore then unloads its catch which is cooked for you right then.

During our visit we stayed at one of the all-inclusive's, the El Cid Marina hotel, one of several in the city that are all reciprocal with the others. In a very much cruise-like way, our package included all the food and activities we could handle, even golf at several championship courses plus they threw in unlimited beverages of any kind.

Yes, any kind. Yes, that means tequila. People who smuggle booze on to cruise ships would love this place. People who don't want to worry about incidental charges on a vacation will also love this place: The hotel did not even want my credit card on file and there were no check-out charges. I'm pretty sure that's the first time I checked in to a hotel without giving up both my credit card and drivers license.

Better yet, Pesos, the national currency are actual usable bills that translate very nicely into great value. Converting at about 13 to one right now, Pesos to US Dollars, the value is there. A 20 Peso tip works for room service, 30 Pesos is standard for the hotel's maid to do the dishes if we should happen to use the room's kitchenette and a nice refrigerator magnet goes for 65 Pesos.

I bought \$200 worth of Pesos from my local Orlando bank before leaving, insuring the best conversion rate, at the suggestion of a friend. Once in Mexico, I needed more Pesos and paid a bit higher processing fee and got a bit lower conversion rate but not the Frito Bandito-style robbery rate and conversion I'd feared.

Compared to Cozumel, Mexico, the commonly-visited cruise port, merchants played fair. Looking back and comparing, its the difference between night and day when it comes to the people of Mazatlan that tourists see compared to those of Cozumel. Maybe it's because Mazatlan has so much more to offer. Maybe its because Cozumel depends so much more on cruise business that they know will be a one-day shot, in and out, and that cruise passengers are easy prey. That could be as Mazatlan's bustling hotel business is quite capable of sustaining the city with cruise ship calls being more like icing on the cake. Tasty icing. Icing they want and need. But icing nonetheless.

Like the giant waves that have carved out this Mexican paradise will go on for a long time to come, so will Mazatlan and it's friendly, proud people. That will be the topic of part two in this ongoing series about Mazatlan, a nice place I hope to visit again some day.

Subscribe to this blog and get notified when each of the remaining posts in the series go live:

- Mazatlan's biggest asset: The People who live there
- Amazing Restaurants in Mazatlan, Mexico
- Mazatlan as a port of call: What to do and see in a day
- 7-day West Coast Cruise vs 7-day all inclusive Mazatlan hotel stay

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