

Mazatlan

Pearl of the Pacific Where Everything Old is New Again

Article and Photography by Jack Tyler
Publisher and Editor-in-Chief Mexico Travel and Life

The state of Sinaloa boasts the the only seaport on Mexico's west coast that offers cruise ship passengers and visitors a carefully-restored historical district.



Photo by Bernadette Galicia



Photo by Oscar Alvarez

Monuments along the malecon honor Mazatlan's heroes and idols



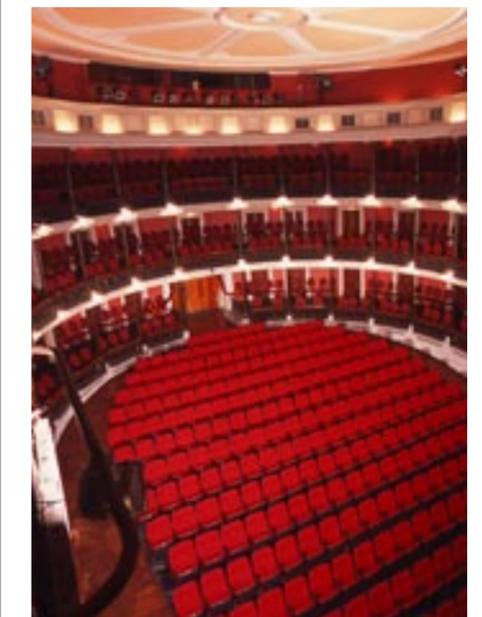
Within that district also rests the pride of Mazatlan, the Italian-style, 1874 Angela Peralta Theater, named for a famous 19th century opera star. Once sitting disgraced and roofless, the theater, now fully restored, provides a showplace for dozens of amateur and professional literature, music and dance performances throughout the year.

Mazatlan has grown into Mexico's headquarters for cultural tourism. This part of Old Mazatlan, known as El Centro Historico, comprises 479 buildings designated national historic landmarks. The district is home to art galleries, shops, museums, jazz clubs, al fresco dining and examples of neoclassical architecture.

Within a block of the Angela Peralta Theater the square that is the focus of Mazatlan's historical district glows with richly colored, European-influenced architectural gems. Bordering the square, fine restaurants and quaint shops draw visitors and locals alike. To stroll the perimeter is like promenading among classic European neighborhoods.

But that's just the architecture. The music also changes with each restaurant and just as quickly do the cuisines. Diners and casual strollers ease through various Caribbean, Mexican and European atmospheres crowded with sidewalk cafés and pleasantly competing bands and sidewalk musicians.

Cuban music, mariachis, and, of course, Mazatlan's own unique musical style, Banda! Banda is, at once, Mariachi and German "oom-pah-pah" music. Imagine tradi-



The Angela Peralta Theater



Valentino's at end of the malecon

tional mariachis, but add tubas and crank up the tempo. Influenced by Mazatlan's German immigrants in the 1800's, this Mexican polka music exists nowhere else!

Within easy walking distance of the historical district is Mazatlan's 10-kilometer boardwalk, or malecon. A trip from one end of the malecon to the other (take a cab; it's a long walk) offers, among comfortable cool breezes, spectacular views of the ocean and of crisply landscaped gardens. Unique monuments honor Mazatlan institutions such as Pacifico (the local beer), such celebrities as Pedro Enfante, a beloved Mexican singer, and naturally

to another uniquely-Mazatlan institution, the Pulmonia open-air taxi in one of which you may be riding! In fact, there's likely no more exhilarating way to enjoy the malecon than from the breezy little, golf cart-sized Pulmonia found only in Mazatlan.

As Mazatlan began as a fishing town, the malecon monument, El Pescador (the Fisherman), is one of the city's most famous sites. So, too, is the small, outdoor seafood market run by ladies with children in tow. Just blocks off of the malecon and under tarps, these local women start early in the morning hawking fresh shrimp, scallops and other local delicacies bought



Seafood fresh off the boat

Photo by Sally Tyler



Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Dominates Mazatlan Skyline

right off of the boats. Incidentally, Mazatlan boasts the largest shrimping fleet in the Pacific. As you zip along the malecon, the kaleidoscope of restaurants, silver shops, cafés and nightclubs is an experience that you must enjoy, and your Pulmonia driver acts as a willing tour guide.

You can be sure that he will pull over to show you Mazatlan's surprise treat, cliff divers right on the malecon. Since 1969, Mazatlan has robbed her big sister, Acapulco, of the pleasure of being the only Pacific seaside resort with cliff divers. There is no admission charge to watch the divers, but they all appreciate well-

deserved propinas (tips). While near Old Mazatlan, make sure that you visit La Catedral Basílica de la Inmaculada Concepción (The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception). This cathedral is the world's only Roman Catholic Church with the Star of David displayed in each of its 28 stained-glass windows.

Take time to visit the zocalo (town square) across the street from the entrance and visit the vendors that are set up side by side in every available spot, chase the pigeons that are everywhere and watch the lovers on the park benches. Within a two-block walk from the cathedral is the



Pulmonia is found only in Mazatlan

Photo by www.DennisSylvesterHurd.com/blog



Photo by mhbaker.com



Mazatlan has miles of beautiful beaches

El Centro Mercado, a huge market where one can browse literally hundreds of vendors' shops and buy everything from Mazatlan shot glasses, to typical Mexican clothing, to fresh produce, to tee shirts.

The mercado is a true Mexican experience, and this is a big one. I would also make this a scouting stop on your first day in Mazatlan and put off buying trinkets and gifts until you have seen the goods and gotten some sense of market's competitive quality and pricing.

With all that's going on in and near Old Mazatlan, this city of 600,000 people, Mazatlan (or Land of the Deer) might seem like a culturally rich artist's colony in the interior of Mexico -- if you had never seen the Malecon and the Pacific -- as all of the restoration and the charming Historical District might mislead you.

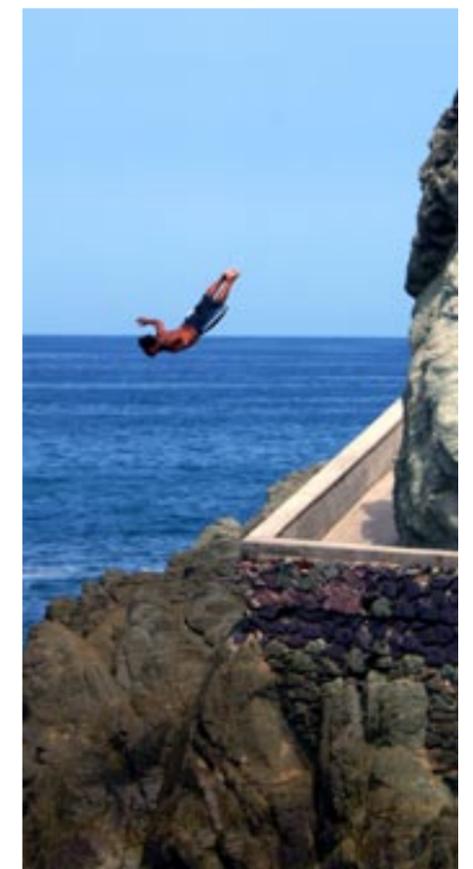
Mazatlan, founded in 1531, is divided into two main sections. One section, Old Mazatlan, is what I have been talking about to this point. However, when you head farther north along the malecon, you enter a second area, La Zona Dorada, or The Golden Zone. This is when

you remember why you really came. This is a serious beach resort. Delta, Mexicana Alaska, Continental, Frontier, Northwest, U.S., Sun Country and other airlines all bring visitors here to celebrate the fact that Mazatlan is a world-class beach and sport-fishing destination. There are more than 130 hotel and condominium properties in Mazatlan, including nearly 50 four- and five-star resorts. There are nearly 10,000 rooms, up from 9300 in 2006.

As a sports-fishing mecca, it has Mexico's largest sports-fishing fleet. Fishing expeditions may be booked from several operations with over 70 boats available. Mazatlan's beaches stretch for over 16 miles as one of Mexico's longest stretches of beach. Zona Dorada has the most popular beach fronts.

While a couple of beach areas produce huge waves ideal for surfing, such as Playa Bruja, where an annual international surfing tournament is held, most of the beaches are quite smooth and perfect for swimming.

A variety of cuisines is prepared in Mazatlan's many restaurants. They include tra-





Pedro y Lola in Historical District

ditional Mexican, Spanish, seafood, Chinese, barbecue, Italian and Continental. While excellent choices exist for the best of the world's cuisines, don't overlook local Mazatlan specialties, such as aguachile (bay shrimp marinated in lime juice and hot peppers), Mazatlan spiny lobsters, peel-and-eat boiled shrimp, pajaritos (seasonal small flying fish) and my favorites, huge, tender, buttery scallops! If you decide to eat in the historical district, try Pedro y Lola or Café Pacifico, both within a block of the opera house.

For entertainment, venues range from contemporary clubs, bars and lounges to hotel fiestas. Some that I have enjoyed and can recommend are Bali Hai, Bora Bora, Canta Bar, El Caracol Tango Palace, Mangos, Tequila's Sports Bar and Restaurant, Mikonos and the reigning queen of nightclubs and the renowned malecon landmark, Valentino's. Among numerous, excellent hotels and resorts, two of my favorites are El Cid El Moro and El Cid Marina. 🇲🇽

For reliable information, contact the Mazatlan Hotel Association.
Phone 011-52-669-913-8181.
Email mazatlan@mzt.megared.net.mx.

For more information about Mazatlan and Sinaloa, visit to these Internet websites:
www.gomazatlan.com
www.vivesinaloa.com

