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El Quelite oozes so much charm, you may suspect that the adobe houses are merely facades placed by a tourist board.

Outside Mazatlan, authenticity awaits in El Quelite, Cosala

By Laura Del Rosso

Within only a half-hour's drive of the high-rise hotels of Mazatlan, travelers can get a taste of traditional Mexican village life in El Quelite, which oozes so much charm that you may suspect that the adobe houses, with their red-tile roofs and rockers on porches, are merely facades placed there by an overambitious tourist board.

But El Quelite is an authentic town of 2,000. Children ride burros along cobblestone streets and, on Sundays after Mass, families gather for barbecue at roadside eateries.

There isn't a T-shirt or postcard for sale anywhere, although a few tourists visit on day trips and shore excursions conducted



The winding cobblestone streets of Cosala boast brightly colored adobe walls and wrought-iron street lamps.

PHOTO BY LAURA DEL ROSSO

by tour companies, including Pronatours, a division of El Cid Resorts.

Stops are made at a small bakery run by the Martinez family, which bakes bread in a clay oven, and at the largest fighting rooster farm in northwest Mexico.

There's also time to stroll, enjoy the colorful houses draped in bougainvillea and have lunch at el Meson de los Laureanos.

Restaurant owner Marcos Osuna, a de-

scendant of a Spanish settler who arrived here in 1740, usually greets guests.

"People come here to see the real Mexico, and also for gastronomy," Osuna recently told a group.

Spanish flavor in Mexico

The restaurant, set in a hacienda-style building from the 1800s across the street from the picturesque town church and

main plaza, includes a lush courtyard where women knead *masa*, or corn flour, to make tortillas. The all-local menu includes a delicious drink made from hibiscus and dishes such as roasted quail and beef tongue stew.

For those wanting to immerse themselves more in authentic Mexico and with time for a longer Mazatlan side trip, there is Cosala, which was designated one of the Mexican

'People come here to see the real Mexico,' said El Quelite restaurateur Marcos Osuna.

Ministry of Tourism's "Pueblos Magicos," or magic towns, in 2005 (see sidebar, Page 38).

Set in a valley in the Sierra Madre foothills, about a two-hour drive north of Mazatlan, it's clear why Cosala was chosen.

A magical town

The city was founded in 1562 as a mining town, and 2,000 of its buildings were built between the 17th and 19th centuries. The winding streets have been repaved with cobblestones, adobe walls painted in bright colors, wrought-iron street lamps installed and other improvements made that high-

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PUEBLOS

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light its colonial charm.

Religious sites include the handsome stone chapel of Guadalupe and the Church of St. Ursula (the patron saint of Cosala), whose spire towers above the picturesque main square. Unlike El Quelite, Cosala of-

fers tourism infrastructure for an overnight stay.

There are several hotels, among them the Hacienda Quinta Minera, which is set around beautiful landscaped courtyards with fountains and a swimming pool.

On weekend nights, a folkloric dance troupe performs dances from all over Mexico at the Mining and History Museum

(where exhibits are only in Spanish). Admission is free.

Two restaurants serve excellent food: el Sazon de Dona Tichi, in a romantic colonial-era building, and el Pueblito, which has a rooftop terrace with views.

Ricardo Santos Aldana, the town's director of tourism, said Cosala hosted about 34,000 visitors in 2008, only about 10%

of them from the U.S. and Canada. As the word spreads about Pueblos Magicos, he said, "we hope to double that number in the next three years."

Mazatlan-based Vista Tours offers nine-hour trips from Mazatlan to Cosala twice a week and custom private tours. For more on Vista Tours, see www.vistatours.com.mx. For El Cid Resorts, visit www.elcid.com.



At el Meson de los Laureanos, a restaurant in El Quelite, women knead corn flour into tortillas.

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