



Travel Sellers Report: A Return to Mazatlan

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With close to home cruising a growing market, the popularity of Mexican Riviera sailings, visiting ports such as Mazatlan, has been growing. San Diego travel agent Dick Slaker brings us this update.

The last time I visited Mazatlan was twenty years ago. As I boarded my Alaska Airlines flight out of Los Angeles, I wondered how this Pacific Coast city had changed in those years, and if the Mexican culture, charming plazas, and special music and cuisine were still there.

After landing, just two hours and ten minutes later, the warm greeting from Julio, my guide from Pronatours, gave me the sense that I would not be disappointed. Julio announced that his assignment was to share the history and growth of the city of Mazatlan and the surrounding villages over the next several days. On the way to my hotel, Pueblo Bonito Emerald Bay, we drove through Old Mazatlan, and along the malecon, the city's palm-lined waterfront connecting the Zona Dorada with Old Mazatlan.

Mazatlan is divided into three sections: Zona Dorada (Gold Zone), Old Mazatlan (dating back to the colonial days) and El Centro Historico, with its famous squares, the Plaza Machado and the Plaza Revolucion, and the Catedral de la Inmaculada Concepcion, dating back to around 1856. The historic section has 479 buildings designated as national historic landmarks. Its cobblestone streets are lined by charming 19th century buildings with wrought-iron balconies, and at the Band Shell, locals gather for concerts during Sundays, Holidays and Carnival.

We continued past the Hotel Belmar, once Mazatlan's premier place to stay, to Glorieta Sanchez Taboada, the lookout point where the cliff divers plunge into the sea, hoping to gather a paying crowd before hitting water. Along the malecon, we observed several monuments dedicated to the history of Mazatlan, including the well-known Fisherman's Monument, dedicated to one of their largest industries. Visitors are welcome join in on a "catch of the day" trip for sailfish, black, blue striped marlin along with tuna, sea bass, dorado and grouper.

Leaving Old Mazatlan, heading through Zona Dorada toward New Mazatlan, I was amazed at the cleanliness of this city of more than 700,000. Yes, some graffiti, but I noticed store employees sweeping sidewalks and street fronts, making for a pleasant looking city. In the hotel zone, guests were shopping along the avenue, stopping to enjoy a snack or cool drink and people-watch at Senor Frogs, Shrimp Factory, and other eateries.

As we left the Zona Dorada, we reached the lovely Pueblo Bonito Emerald Bay, my "home away from home?". My house never looked like this. Golf carts drive you to your

room so you don't get lost in the many pathways, gardens, pools, and lit paths that lead to the sea.

My room on the third floor overlooked the Pacific Ocean. I glanced over the private beach, several pools and a perfect harmony of water, sun, and the oh so graceful architecture of the Emerald Bay Pueblo Bonito. My private balcony and room décor was a perfect end of a beautiful day. Yes, a fruit plate was waiting for me.

Day One: (Approximately 5 hour tour)



At 9 a.m., we departed for the Los Osuna tequila factory, about a one hour drive. The La Noria Blue Agave Tour also offers the chance to observe craftsmen working on machetes, purses, saddles, leather sandals and other handicrafts. Yes, I did buy some handicrafts -- painted red tiles plus one bottle of Blue Agave--not "Tequila" which is a trademark used only by certain bottling companies.

Lunch time took us to the El Meson de Los Laureanos and a tour of El Quelite. We were greeted by owner Dr. Marcos Osuna, who has worked to preserve the history and culture of this village, including the bakery with its hot fired ovens. Murals and a museum present a history of the village and Dr. Osuna shared much about the beauty of the village and his family. After a lovely lunch, we returned to Mazatlan.

Day Two: (Approximately 5-7 hour tour)

We set out the next morning for a tour of the colonial town of Cosala, called the "Magic Town." This quaint 16th century town is about a two-hour drive from Mazatlan nestled in the Sierra Madres. We stopped at Lake Comedero, with a dormitory type, 12-room, all-inclusive lodge for those seeking quiet bass fishing surrounded by water and mountains. Check it out at www.mexicobassadventures.com.

Day Three: (Approximately 7 hour tour)

Our destination: the mining towns of Malpica, Concordia and Copala. Here, the cobblestone streets, red tile roofs, and churches date back to 1500s. On this Colonial tour, you also visit at a furniture and pottery factory.

Stopping for lunch at Daniel's Restaurant, I was thinking, this must be a popular tour and luncheon as walking in came two loads of guests from Carnival Cruises and RCCL Cruises. Daniel's is huge and able to accommodate these folks and more with great service and food, finished off with complimentary banana coconut cream pie, one of their delicacies, and coffee, ice tea, or beer.



For my last day, I hired an open golf cart style taxi called a "pulmonia," stopping at the famous Pueblo Bonito Mazatlan hotel to take some photos. Walking from the Pueblo Bonito Mazatlan offered the opportunity to stop by a Señor Frogs for a quick Pacifico beer and be entertained by enthusiastic

waiters. Walking the city, I got an excellent feel for the community from historic downtown or Zone Dorado along the historic "malecon" by the waterfront.

That evening, I went to the Downtown Historic section, where I had the pleasure of dining with owner Ing. J. Alfredo Gomez Rubio at the famous Pedro Y Lola Restaurant in the Plaza Machado. Outside, quiet jazz played during dinner, and we admired the colored lights around the Plaza and the lovely Carnival Princesses, all hoping to be chosen as the next Carnival Queen. I enjoyed an excellent dish of Machaca de Camaron (shredded shrimp with spices), finished off with Filete Mignon and a cold cerveza, naturally.

After dinner we strolled through the lively historic area. This renovated downtown is a "must" for visitors to Mazatlan—a city that is vibrant, welcoming and yes, totally committed to maintaining its history and culture.

From city to villages, my trip gave me a different perspective on the Mazatlan, which in Aztec, means "Land of the Deer." However I never did have time for fishing, parasailing, zip-line, snorkeling, kayaking, horseback riding, so I must return again to truly finish this article!