

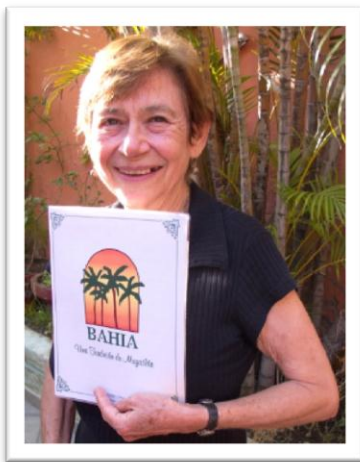
Mazatlán - Pearl of the Pacific

April 8, 2012

They had me with the Mime. When you deplane from a packed flight onto a hot tarmac in Mazatlán and all you really want is a cold, local-brewed Pacifico on the way into the terminal (super-clean with gleaming floors and nice art) at least there is the charming Mime to welcome you. He's really good. He just needs a case of cold ones to hand out to arriving passengers. We are, afterall, about 20 miles south of the Tropic of Cancer.

So began a return to Mazatlán after a 10-year hiatus. What I found was the charm and friendliness of the Mazatlécas alive and well.

New hotels and yacht harbors have been built as well as a world-class Mazatlán International Center, smartly located near The Golden Zone. This beautiful facility is a testimony to Mazatlán's serious pursuit of the convention business.



Mazatlán translates as "place of deer" and the Totorames tribe had the place to themselves until they disappeared many years before Spaniards first showed up in 1531. You can see some artifacts in the Museo Arqueológico in Centro Historico. It was many years until the city emerged from a fishing village. Gold and silver shipments transited Mazatlan's port from the mines in the mountains during the 1700's, attracting pirates to the area. In the latter part of the 19th century, the city grew significantly, upgraded its port and buildings and, in the first few decades after the 1910 Revolution, Mazatlán became a modest tourist destination, with several hotels establishing themselves in the old town near Olas Atlas Beach, enjoying popularity with vacationing movie stars.

The heartbeat of this enchanting city is strong and the First Friday Art Walk (from November to May) is a great way to experience a bit of the Centro Historico, discover a great meal at one of the sidewalk cafes around the Plaza Machado (1837) and perhaps attend a concert at the multi-tiered Teatro Angela Peralta (1870). We attended a splendid performance there of Mozart's "Requiem" the on the eve of El Día Del Muerte(...).

While on the subject of dining, close to venerable Olas Atlas Beach is a delightful courtyard restaurant, La Bahia, overseen by hostess Maria Lourdes, aka "Malu." A few dishes we sampled were Pulpo a la Diabla (octopus) and a great rendition of Aquachiles con Camarones.

Not only a fun and sun tourist destination, Mazatlán is a huge shrimping port and the state of Sinaloa, in which Mazatlán resides, is Mexico's top agricultural producer. A trip to the French Colonial-style Pino Suarez Mercado (1899) in Centro Historico speaks to this with butchers at work on fresh meats and fish mongers selling the day's fresh catch.

Food stands fill with locals and the feel of a community gathering place is tangible.



This is one of my favorite destinations in Mazatlán and over the years it has become a more comfortable place to wander around.

Born in Spain, Julio Berdegé was a man of vision and personal achievement in Mazatlán's modern history. Arriving in Mazatlán as a young man, he built Mexico's largest commercial shrimp fleet and created the first master-planned resort community in Mexico, known as the El Cid Resort and Country Club. As a marine biologist and conservationist, he also had a prominent voice in matters of Mexico's fisheries management. The El Cid development, now in command of his son Carlos, is dominant in the Zona Dorado of hotels and restaurants which takes off north of the Olas Altas Beach area. One of the newest properties is the El Cid Marina Hotel, which sits along the channel for the marina, has two beautiful pools, a splendid, attentive staff and a unique, private ocean beach accessed by a short water taxi ride. Party fishing boats come in and out of the harbor and the curious can catch a glimpse of what kind of luck prevailed on the day's fishing adventures. It is my favorite of the El Cid properties. <http://marinaelcidmazatlan.com>



Many cities in Latin America have what is known as "The Malecon," a broad promenade along the beach. Mazatlán's Malecón is one of the longest in Latin America, stretching miles along Olas Altas and newly widened with new monuments. In Mazatlán they love their monuments.

There are monuments to Pacifico Beer (the dramatic copper top of a beer cooking vat), the Fisherman's Monument, The Siren Monument, The Continuity of Life Monument (fabulous sculpture of leaping dolphins), famed musician Jose Angel Espinoza Aragon aka "Ferrusquilla", a delightful, whimsical monument to the Pulmonía, the ubiquitous open-air alternative to taxi-cabs and many more. All the monuments serve to enhance a long amble along Mazatlán's beautifully upgraded beachfront Malecón. For a little more immersion into Mexico, Pronatours <http://www.pronatours.com.mx> can help.

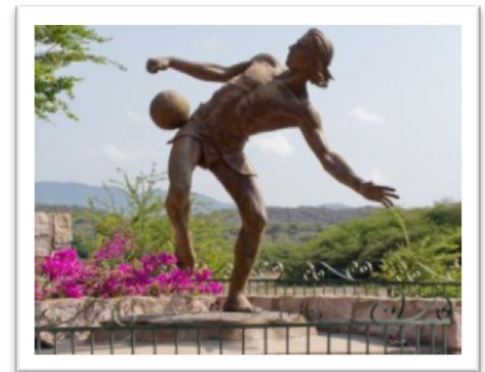
One destination that a day-trip will cover is the nearby country town of Quelite (25 miles northeast). Most of Quelite's residents are engaged in ranching or agriculture and town has a feel of "real Mexico." It is in Quelite that Dr. Marcos Osuna built El Meson d' Los Laureanos, a terrific restaurant in a venerable history-rich building. An excellent host, Dr. Osuna's kitchen serves recipes handed-down through generations and prepared with a "home cooking" touch that reflects the cuisine of southern Sinaloa.

As you walk around Quelite, you can visit a wonderful bakery with a huge stone oven and delicious treats for sale, Our Lady of Guadalupe church and a monument to an ancient Aztec game of "The Ulama," still played by locals.

There are additional tour options available, including a hugely fun cooking and dancing experience called Salsa y Salsa rated the no. 1 tour for Mazatlan. Hotel concierges work hard in Mazatlán to connect visitors with a fun experience and are there to make sure you want to come back.

Some quick study of online sites and a little Spanish brush-up can enhance your trip.

Many Mazatlécas speak excellent English, of course, but attempts at conversing in the local language is always bridge-builder. ¡Vámos a Mazatlán!



To read the full article visit <http://frankfoodandtravel.com/?p=58>