

LAX

magazine

Holiday Issue
2011

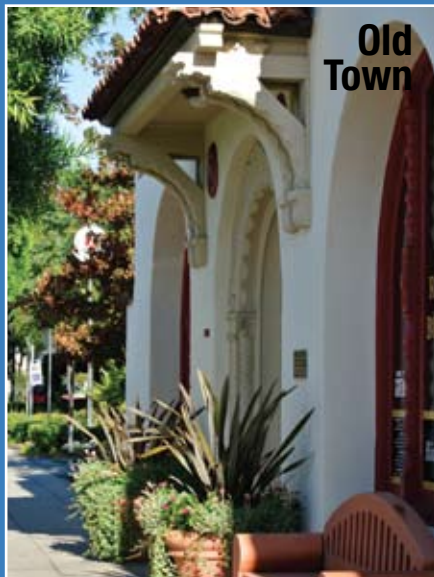
Art &
Culture



Lodging & Dining



Old
Town



TORRANCE

The Place To Be!

Please be kind,
don't put me to waste,
pass me on or put me
back in my place.



Mazatlán

La Perla Del Pacífico

Story and Photos by
Frank DiMarco



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, after all, 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 Mazatlan 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 Altas Beach, enjoying popularity with vacationing movie stars.

The heartbeat of this enchanting city is strong. The First Friday Art Walk (from November to May) is a great way to experience a bit of the Centro Historico; attend a concert at the multi-tiered Teatro Angela Peralta (we attended a splendid performance here of Mozart's *Requiem* on the eve of el Día de los Muertos); and perhaps discover a great meal at La Bohemia or Pedro y Lola's, two of the many sidewalk cafes around the Plaza Machado.

While on the subject of dining, close to venerable Olas Altas Beach is a delightful courtyard restaurant, La Bahia, overseen by hostess Maria



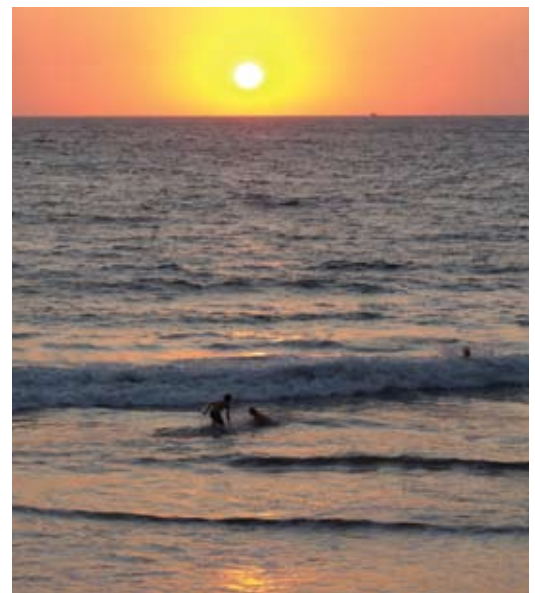
Lourdes, aka “Malu.” A few dishes we sampled were Pulpo A la Diabla (octopus) and a great rendition of Aquachiles con Camarones.

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 in Centro Historico speaks to this with butchers at work on fresh meats, and fishmongers selling the day’s fresh catch. Food stands fill with locals and the feel of a community-gathering place is tangible.

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



(Clockwise from top) The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (1875), Pércival Álvarez conducts the Mazatlán Concert Orchestra and Chorus in Mozart’s “Requiem”, performed in the Teatro Angela Peralta (1874), Mazatlán International Center, a brand-new, full-service convention facility, Palapas at the private beach of the El Cid Marina Resort



(Clockwise from top) Cliff divers make the risky dive in six feet of water near Olas Altas Beach, Sunset at Olas Altas Beach. Sunsets like this are typical as Mazatlán sits just south of the Tropic of Cancer



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 (marinaelcidmazatlan.com).

Many cities in Latin America have what is known as *The Malecon*, a broad promenade along the beach. Mazatlán's *Malecon* is one of the longest in Latin America, stretching miles along Olas Altas and recently widened with new monuments. In Mazatlán they love their monuments. There exists the Pacifico Beer monument that embodies a dramatic copper top of a beer cooking vat; the Continuity of Life monument which is a fabulous sculpture of leaping dolphins; the delightfully, whimsical monument of the Pulmonia, the ubiquitous, open-air alternative to taxi cabs; the monument of Jose Angel Espinoza Aragon, aka "Ferrusquilla"; and so many more. All the monuments serve to enhance a long amble along Mazatlán's beautifully upgraded beachfront *Malecon*.

For a little more immersion into Mexico, Pronatours (www.pronatours.com.mx) can help. One destination that a day-trip will cover is the nearby country town of El Quelite (25 miles northeast). Most of El Quelite's residents are engaged in ranching or agriculture and the town has a feel of "real Mexico." It is in El Quelite that Dr. Marcos Osuna built El Meson de Los Laureanos, a terrific restaurant in a venerable, history-rich building. An excellent host, Dr. Osuna's kitchen serves meals from recipes handed-down through generations. These delectable dishes are prepared with a home-cooking touch that reflects the cuisine of southern Sinaloa. As you walk around El Quelite, you can visit a wonderful bakery with a huge stone oven and delicious treats for sale. You will also find the *Our Lady of Guadalupe* church, and a monument of an ancient Aztec game, *The Ulama* — still played by locals.

Pronotours offers an array of other tour options, including a hugely fun cooking and dancing experience called Salsa y Salsa (www.salasandsalsa.com), rated the top tour for Mazatlan on Tripadvisor. In addition to Pronotours, hotel concierges also work hard in Mazatlán to connect visitors with fun experiences, 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 are always a bridge-builder. ¡Vámos a Mazatlán! ■

◀ *Statue of famed musician "Ferrusquilla," one of many monuments along Mazatlán's Malecon, one of the longest beachfront promenades in Latin America*