

# Hidden gem retains traditional character



One of the most beautiful beaches on Oaxaca's Emerald Coast - Carrizalillo. PHOTOS SUPPLIED BRIAN K. SMITH

## Oaxaca's Puerto Escondido on Mexico's southwest coast keeps its fishing village charm

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**On the South Pacific coast of Mexico there is a little gem that has resisted the trend to give way to large mega-hotel/resort destination that are so common to Mexico's tropical paradises. Against the odds, Puerto Escondido has managed to retain its cute, quaint fishing village charm to this day.**

Perhaps it is partly due to its name, which when translated to English is "Hidden Port." The first time I traveled to Puerto Escondido (PE) was 29 years ago. My hotel was on the beach in the middle of the village and the only restaurants available were a few palapas (temporary shelter) where fresh grilled fish was plentiful. Today it is a little larger, but still qualifies as a small town. It retains that quaint fishing village feel, with the local people being warm and friendly. Changes that have happened are all positive with the addition of a variety of ethnic restaurants and the bonus of more activities available to experience.

Puerto Escondido boasts wonderful year round warm temperatures of 25C to 30C, refreshing sea breezes and a complete lack of rain from December through June make it a welcomed break from our wet and bone-chilling winters. Even in summer the rainy season is very pleasant with the lowest risk of hurricanes in all of Mexico.

In the town you will find local markets where fish, meat, organic vegetables and fresh tortillas can be found. Check out the many stands

that sell local Oaxaca cheese, dairy products and sweets. It is easy to pick up all the ingredients for your own cosina (kitchen) if you desire to be your own chef. In the evening explore the tourist walking street, Alfonso Perez Gasga, where you can find all sorts of Oaxacan artisan crafts, souvenirs and food carts with traditional delicious snacks.

During my stay, I had lunch at Espadin Restaurant, overlooking the Playa Carrizalillo. The view of the clear, shallow emerald bay below was breathtaking. To start off I ordered a fragrant mint mojito – certainly a wonderful way to ease into the afternoon as you drink up the scenery. For lunch we were offered the catch of the day – a huge grilled fish on a platter, covered in a roasted pepper sauce. We couldn't leave without trying their famous coconut prawns and pecan crusted fish – as promised by our guide Jesus - it was amazing!

After lunch we walked down a stone pathway to the pristine beach below. The

water was warm and the fine sand felt soothing on the feet. Between the crashing of the waves the air was full of laughter of children playing in the sea. Many palapas populate the white sand cove and you can purchase snacks, fresh coconut water or other refreshments. Be sure to return to Espadin for happy hour refreshments and an evening meal to experience it's vantage point for the best sunset viewing in town (reservation recommended).

The next evening we had the pleasure to have dinner at Fresh Restaurant & Lounge in the centre of town on Zicatela Beach. The energetic couple that runs the restaurant are originally from Comox, B.C., and have lived in PE for 12 years. Their bearded, soft spoken 17-year-old son was our waiter. I recommend to start off by trying one of their specialty cocktails – frozen mojito or a Margarita Tamarindo, while enjoying the wonderful relaxed atmosphere. Their food is amazing – ceviche, coconut prawns, grilled tuna, steak and extra rich cheesecake for dessert. Make sure to try some local rich Oaxacan coffee with your dessert. I could have sworn I heard Jimmy Buffett's "Margaritaville" song drift

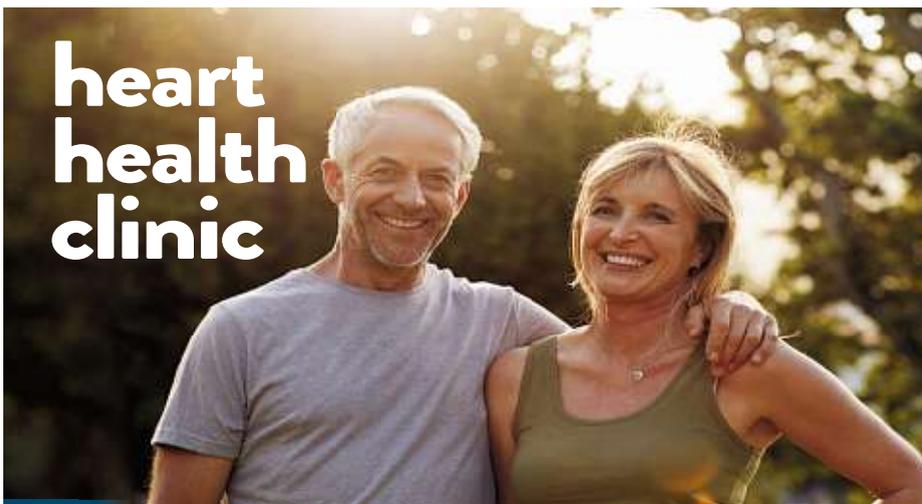
See Surfers page 32



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