



Tom's Message Board

Mexico

James Taylor's song "... *Oh Mexico, it sounds so sweet with the sun sinking low, moon's so bright like to light up the night, make everything all right...*" kinda says it all! Just back from a week on Isla Cozumel with our close friends Sue and Ed (big thanks!), who have a fabulous place on the beach, I feel refreshed, recharged and realigned.

Cozumel is a jungle island rimmed with sandy beaches and coral shorelines. San Miguel, the main town, and where most islanders live, is the largest cruise ship port in the world. Jacques Cousteau labeled Palancar Reef as having the best scuba diving in the world. While commercialism has grown over the years, Cozumel's original roots and charm can still be found... which we did on this trip.

We like to find the local flavor when traveling and after asking around, found a couple of interesting places to eat. We tried several, with El Pique, an open-air tacqueria away from the central district, becoming our favorite. We savored the tacos filled with slow-roasted pork, chorizo sausage, and marinated flank steak that were simply plated, dense in flavor, and priced for locals. These, along with the pork and bean soup and a few cervezas, left us full and fulfilled. On each occasion, Francisco, our waiter, helped us with the menu (in Spanish) and made us feel like, well... locals!

Sue and I explored the area by bike one day. The neighborhoods in San Miguel are a mix of dwellings from upper class to desperately poor, painted with bright, cheery colors. Scooters abound and it's not uncommon to see a family of 3 or 4 on one scooter! We loaded up with fresh fruits at the local market and scoped out luncharias where el almuerzo del día or *lunch of the day* (the locals main meal) is served. Hmm...big lunch, hot days...siesta! We rode along the coastal route to Chankanaab National Park located on a coral reef where the snorkeling is legend. We cooled off on the ride back with a refreshing smoothie from a small juice bar owned by a charming young Mexican entrepreneur named Martha who shared her small business story with us. It's all the same everywhere, isn't it?

The next day the four of us drove our rented jeep (top down of course) to the other side of the island where the secluded beaches stretch for miles. Due to the incessant wind, pounding surf, and rip tides, it's undeveloped – save for the occasional thatched roof restaurant/bar with fresh-caught fish sandwiches served beach-side. It doesn't get any better.

While Cozumel and its turquoise waters make it a true tropical paradise, it's the Mexican people that make it what it is. Yes, at times the merchants can be a little pushy, but only in the tourist spots. Otherwise, we were met by friendly people who wanted to help us feel comfortable and happy. It's very clear that family is everything to these folks; supporting each other is not only a matter of livelihood and survival, it's simply part of them. One day, after returning from snorkeling with a ray, an eel, trumpet fish, angel fish, and schools of sergeant majors, a poolside waiter asked me how my snorkel was. With a big smile I responded with what a paradise he lives in. His response back was "we're poor, but we're rich in other ways"... to which I couldn't agree more.

I always bring home a memento from our travels, but for this trip's memento... no luggage was necessary.

Buenos dias,

Tom Brassard, President

