

Terry Bremner

LORENTO, Mexico - Jan2016

We found Loreto on the WestJet Vacation website in late 2015 and booked our two week trip for Jan/Feb of 2016. As it turned out, it may have been a bit too early in the season as some days the winds off of the water were quite cool but it was not a real problem and most days reached +25C. We booked our round trip flights Calgary/Loreto/Calgary and then addressed getting to Calgary. Because we had booked a WestJet vacation, we were offered and accepted round trip flights Toronto/Calgary/Toronto on the red-eye for an additional \$63 per person. The local WestJet agent in Loreto was very quick and effective in responding to our complaint about a noisy neighbour in the next room. The airport is served by 2 or 3 Mexican airlines, Alaska Air and WestJet. I no longer have my receipts but considered this a well-priced holiday that most could likely afford with a little pre-planning at most. (I seem to recall that the entire vacation, including ground transportation to and from Toronto, came in just under \$4000.00 Canadian.)

Loreto is a very old town among others that were served by Jesuit missionaries, with some facilities dating back more than 700 years. (There are historic sites to which visits can be arranged. e.g. Mision St. Javier, situated in the hills.) It is located on the east side of the Baja Peninsula on the Sea of Cortez/Gulf of Mexico and is known as the home of the giant squid (up to about 35kg) which, by the way, is delicious and is much more than the tentacle rings served in North American restaurants. Squid steak is excellent! The Sea of Cortez is also a whale birthing ground and the arrival of pregnant blue whales calls for public announcements that the huge cetaceans have arrived.

In response to increasing tourist traffic, the Government of Mexico made sizable investments improving local infrastructure including the airport, runway, hospital, local highway and most of the urban roadways. However, many of the sidewalks in the "downtown" area were a bit treacherous and in need of repair/replacement. We chose a modest hotel (Hotel Santa Fe) about a 20 to 30 minute walk from the waterfront along an ancient, scenic cobble-stone roadway that is also lined with shops and restaurants. There is an internet/e-mail facility in the restaurant - time can be purchased at the hotel front desk. (There was a much fancier hotel on the waterfront, La Mision, at much higher rates, but while we were there fewer than two dozen guests occupied the place which could likely accommodate almost 200 guests. There is a Starbuck's in the lobby.) Note that good walking shoes are essential and high heeled footwear strongly discouraged. This is probably not a great place to visit for anyone with mobility problems. Our hotel featured a great restaurant, pool, hot tub, laundry facility and convenience store. A concierge desk in the main lobby was a good source of information and a place to make bookings for outings. A short walk down the main street, Salvatierra Boulevard, is an excellent bakery/coffee shop (Etta's bakery). Right next door to the hotel is a restaurant that serves several variations of squid dinners, ocean fish (sea bass), steak, etc. The hotel restaurant served excellent breakfasts, tasty soups, fresh, lemonade, etc. Cheerful polite staff! (Some specialty restaurants, such as pizza places, were not as good as genuine Mexican eateries.)

Loreto was very peaceful and regularly patrolled by military, state and local police. We never

heard or saw any problems and the only siren heard was an ambulance. While there are numerous bars and restaurants we found no casinos or noisy night clubs and very little in the way of entertainment for visiting children. We suggest that this is an excellent get-away location for those in the 50+ age bracket. Almost everyone speaks passable English and all were pleasant and polite. Even local teenagers were very polite and happy to offer suggestions, directions and information about almost anything and were more than pleased to speak English, finding Canadians particularly interesting. Bargaining for goods in some stores was possible while others were steadfast with fixed prices. We also found a very good book store with some English language novels. There was a book swap rack in the hotel lobby. Restaurant meals were generally very good, reasonably priced. We took a small amount of Mexican currency with us for immediate expenses and purchased more, as needed at a bank in the town square. A Canadian passport and Canadian currency is all that is necessary and the rates were very fair and markedly better than in Canada.

Good restaurants:

- The Mediterraneo Bar/Restaurant on the waterfront walkway
- Mia Loreto - authentic Mexican restaurant owned/operated by a family - son Eddie, spoke perfect English - located on the cobble-stone route
- Hotel Oasis - Special "Chocolate Clam", chicken and rib barbeque on Saturday night - located on the beach
- La Casita - a tiny restaurant, located on Salvatierra, near the beach - excellent service and excellent food at modest price
- Papagayou Garden Restaurant - excellent dinner and wine - located on town square

Loreto is very good for people that like to move at their own pace and choose their own pastimes and activities. There are many opportunities for socialising in restaurants with folks from all over the world. Alaska Airlines often carries groups of Russian citizens whom we found to be rather crude, rude, demanding and bothersome even though most did not speak English. None stayed at our hotel as they all seemed to prefer "iffy" bargain basement joints on the side streets of the downtown area.

A most enjoyable change of pace!

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