

# TRAVEL • VIAJES

## Confessions of a surfer virgin

by Barbara Ann Roseberg

"Let's go!", our visiting friends, cheered gleefully! "Let's go!" I echoed, usually happily and headed for the phone to call the airline. Betty and Mary, the inveterate surfers, had just arrived at our rented casita (little house) in the beautiful mile-high city of Puerto Escondido (location of every surfer's dream wave, the Mexican Pipeline") was only a half-hour flight away.

Actually, my husband and I head to Puerto Escondido every year when the weather is incalculable in Philadelphia and we had only recently settled in for our month-long stay the Hotel Hacienda La Noria when the first of our guests showed up to urge us toward the "Pipeline". I didn't take much coaxing.

Ten minutes later we were all confirmed for a flight on one of Aero Mex's nine-seater planes that flew through (not over) the majestic coastal range of the Sierra mountains to Puerto Escondido, the appealing fishing village/resort, where we hoped to experience the pipeline "thrill".

The next morning at the unholy (for the laid-back timetable of a snowbird in Mexico) hour of 8 a.m. we were on our way, lugging small, lightweight flight bags crammed with lighter weight cotton clothing, bathing suits and sunscreen that would withstand prolonged immersion in the none-too-gentle Pacific surf.

Within an after-touchdown hour we were happily settled into the beautiful, comfortable Santa Fe Hotel, ideally located at the point of land where Zicatella, the "Pipeline" beach meets Marinero, the regular "town beach". It is at Marinero where swimmers swim and fishermen fish and vendors vend but, since we had a mission to accomplish, we headed directly to Zicatella to check out several of the little specialty tiendas (shops) that rent the necessary gear to people not provident (or affluent) enough to have brought their own.

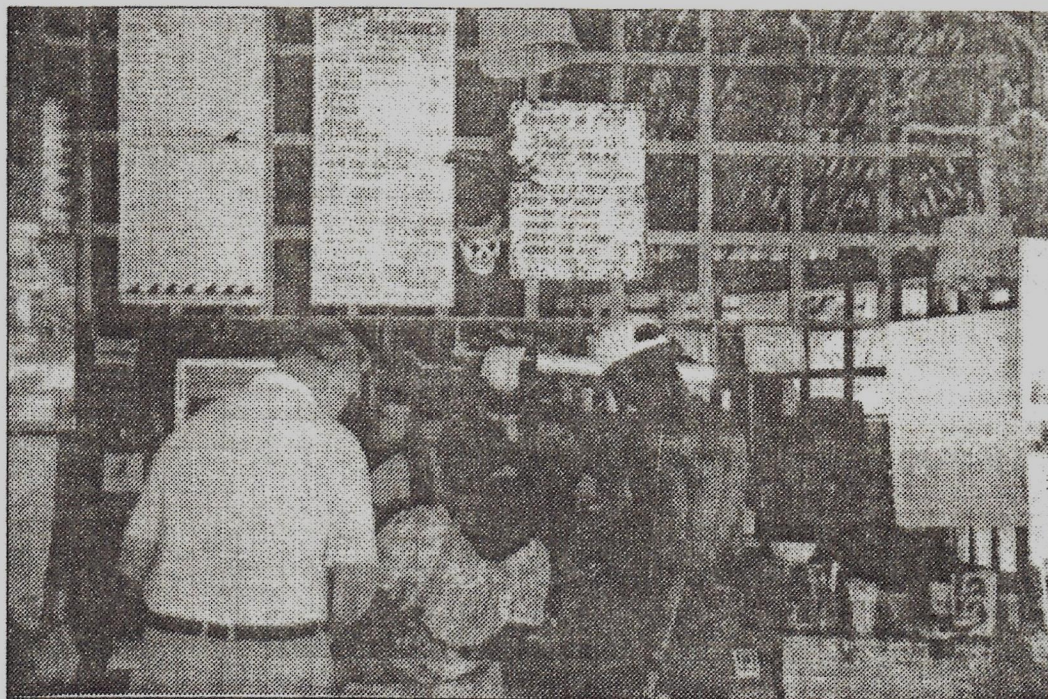
Understand that until that inspired moment that brought us on short notice to Puerto Escondido, I had never in my entire life been on a surfboard. I had seen them, of course...from a safe distance. Also, I had, on TV and in

glamorous places like Kuta Beach in Bali, watched bronzed young people performing daring swoops and swirls over the waves. "Sort of like skiing," I imagined. I figured that when my turn came to try out the board I was planning to rent, I'd rely on the same muscles and body motions (sort of) that I did when I was shussing (slowly and in control) down a relatively tame mountain in Pennsylvania, or more challenging ones in Aspen Colorado or Chamonix, Switzerland.

But, with the moment of truth fast approaching, my heart began a wild dance, simply from the prospect of trying to gauge what size board would be right for this beginner. Who stands a measly, squatty 5'4". I must say my personal configuration was in marked contrast to the stream of tall, lean, lithe surfers I saw strolling away from the beach with their hair glistening wet and boards slung casually at their sides. What was going on here? Why was everyone leaving just as we had arrived? Actually, while I was pondering the phenomenon of our arriving just as everyone else seemed to be leaving, it gave my racing heart a chance to slow down. Well, as it turned out, we were

too late for the optimum morning-time for catching the surf. It seems that peak time came, actually, at about 7 a.m. and, by now, after our flight and check-in amenities, it was after 10:00! There were, of course, still waves where some few people were still noodling around. (These so-called "little" waves actually looked gigantic to me...but, then, as a "virgin" what did I know?) And there was always tomorrow morning (or, perhaps, that afternoon) to experience the excitement of the first "Surf's up!" announcement. (Or, at least, that's the way I fantasized it would happen.)

But, we were, after all, planning a leisurely three day stay in Puerto Escondido to give us time to enjoy all its various charms: the elegant simplicity of our hotel designed to look rather like a hillside Mexican colonial village (that is if colonial villages were built around palm shaded swimming pools), the abundant fresh local fish, the tourist shops with their myriad tee-shirts, tons



Carmen's Cafecito, the surfers' favorite beachside eatery. (Photo by Bob Rosenberg)

time to 1980 to the spring of 1984. District 1 in Wisconsin has some of the best water in the state for school



had stumbled by sheer travel writers' instinct on the international surfer's 'hangout,' Carmen's Cafecita, a casual open-air eatery where the sounds of Mexican Spanish was overwhelmed by a babble of French, Italian, German, "Aussie" English and any other language of the countries of the motley crew who had been drawn from their various homelands to Zicatella Beach

After a stunning breakfast of the requisite (and exquisite) fresh orange juice, great coffee, croissants and, Pan Frances (actually French Toast made with, wonder of wonderful, homemade whole wheat bread, sprinkled with sugar crystals and cinnamon, we unanimously agreed that it was time for a swim. And, what better place to do it than at our hotel with a sunny pool for the sun worshipers and a shady pool for the refugees?

By then, of course, after our leisurely swim it was time for lunch...for a taste of some of that Pacific fish and the great vegetables that were safely sterilized so as not to upset our Yanqui stomachs. We rationalized that there would be enough time enough to go in town later, so we decided to check out the menu at the reportedly excellent, mostly fish and vegetarian-oriented Santa Fe restaurant. That way, along with feeding our perennial hunger for Mexican flavors at least we could be watching the surf from the open-air dining room until we were ready to indulge.

After a bowl of delicious sopa de pescado, (fish soup) a quesadilla, (tortilla with cheese) a bottle of Sol (a favorite brew on the Pacific coast of Mexico), the climate took its toll on our fatigued bodies that had been up and about since early, early that morning.. In perfect accord we concluded that it had to be the appropriate time for a siesta, the time-honored Mexican custom of napping after lunch. Without giving it another thought we found ourselves trailing wearily from the dining room up the bourganvilla-lined stone steps to our deliciously air-conditioned rooms

And, what a wonderful, refreshing siesta it was! We arose in time for a shower and the realization that in less than an hour, at about 6:30, el sol (the sun) would be settling in for the night. By now there was a time for surf board shopping...so the next order of business quickly came to mind...a brilliant idea! A margarita and a few botanas (snacks) while watching the sun set somehow sounded very attractive to all four of us. No one was the least bit recalcitrant, so off we headed to the commodious open-air deck where it seemed that half the hotel's guests had already gathered and were swapping the kind of "chitchat" commonly heard at resorts of this kind all over the world.

The surfers were discussing the recent waves, the travelers were swapping tales of their recent trips...and the rest of us were trying to shed our sleepy ways the better to enjoy the extravaganza of a show put on by the setting sun.

The first margarita helped open our eyes and we found ourselves in kinship with the nearby conversations that were, by then, sounding more and more appealing. The botanas cinched it. We had tortillas in every guise: with cheese, with avocado, with salsa. And, then, of course, all that tasty food called for another margarita to wash it down. And so it went, with the sun, of course, doing its transition below the horizon into the sea...or so it appeared

During the swift change from dusk to dark, it became apparent that it was time to check out the town. But not to be "fitted" for our surfing equipment. That would have to wait for morning when we would have clear vision, clear heads and, perhaps, some wiser folk to assist in making the vital choices.

Puerto Escondido takes on a whole new character in the evening. The main street of the town loses its sleepy daytime persona and comes alive - music blares from some of the restaurants; the vendors hawk their wares from open storefronts. Not aggressively, mind you, since Puerto Escondido is not that kind of town. But, if you choose to buy, there's plenty to select from: the requisite T-shirts, of course...a few silver shops; straw hats; souvenirs in all sizes and shapes. And, let's not forget the perennial Mexican style lace-trimmed blouses, and skirts for young señoritas as well as guayaberas (pleated shirts) for the men. An occasional ceramic treasure pops up and there's lots of that blue or green or brown-trimmed glass to hold every kind and flavor of beverage, alcoholic or not!

At the end of the short street, we had to make a choice - again. Return to the hotel or check out a beachfront restaurant for some grilled local fish. No contest. Fish it was. Red snapper, fresh that day from the Pacific, slathered with chilies and oil and served piping hot from the grill to the table to be consumed accompanied by declarations of universal appreciation! And then, contented, we headed to bed...the surf would be waiting in the morning!

And, so it went...with the second day passing similarly to the first! After all the delicious overindulgence of the first day, naturally, we overslept our first call...repeated our delightful "routine" and somehow the day passed, admiring the antics of the people who had managed to extricate themselves from their beds and were twirling and tossing on the waves. But, even some of the most avid, most dedicated surfers finally exhausted themselves on the vigorous, nearly constant waves and, eventually, left the beach.

In order to check out what life was like for surfers when they weren't involved in first-hand "pipelining" we were invited and happily agreed to join a group who had decided to call some time off and, instead, to enjoy a leisurely tube ride on a nearby river. Our companions' youthful exuberance was still there, but their the pace by then was somewhat diminished. Altogether the tube ride provided a, a great, relaxing experience, lending yet another dimension to the joys of Puerto Escondido.

"Later" we reasoned. We'd try out the surf later - or, even if we don't...so what? We were having a great time...and, after all, what could possibly be more important while we were on vacation?

So, of course, in spite of our good intentions, that time for climbing aboard the (as yet unrented) surfboards never came! Even our friends (those avid surfers) were so seduced by Puerto Escondido, the Santa Fe, the shopping, the eating and the margaritas that somehow, when it was time to climb back onto our reserved flight home, nobody complained. Things were just fine!

And, as for me? Suffice it to say that I'm still a surfer "virgin". Next year....