

On the beach, in a boat, Hollywood is history

► **MANZANILLO**
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tered swimming pool enclosed by graceful white arches. As we bid Rafael goodbye, he slipped us the electronic key card he used to open the room as a souvenir.

Manzanillo can thank Hollywood for creating its aura of palm-fringed bliss. Since the movie's debut, this coastal stretch of the small state of Colima has burgeoned into a commercial patchwork of beachfront hotels, vacation homes, souvenir shops, and surfside restaurants. The main tourist area wraps around two crescent-shaped bays, Manzanillo and Santiago, which are separated by the Santiago Peninsula's steep outcropping of rocks. Volcanic hills to the east create a sweeping backdrop. Golfers are attracted by three world-class golf courses that offer stunning views of cool lagoons or mist-shrouded mountains.

After rekindling "10" memories at Las Hadas, we continued our nostalgic journey by driving down to La Audiencia beach, overlooking Santiago Bay. It was here that George first caught sight of Jenny in her swimsuit. We quickly discovered that both time and tourism have changed the once-pristine setting. High-rise hotels now tower above the swath of golden sand, and a cad-



PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA R. CAPOS/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Decades after "10" was filmed on La Audiencia Beach, Manzanillo has many more tourists and many more accommodations. Yet its beaches, its food, its fun, its surroundings and places like Las Hadas (below), where the "10" trysters met, retain their allure.

re of colorful beach umbrellas march toward the surf. Offshore, freighters and container vessels ply the waters of the shipping channel bound for the sprawling seaport northeast of downtown. At times smog from industrial smokestacks tinges the blue sky.

It's not surprising that Manzanillo developed first as a commercial center and later as a vacation destination. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the area played an important role in exploration, and several expeditions to the Orient were launched from its shores. Today, city life revolves around the municipal mercado at the intersection of Independencia and Cuauhtémoc streets and dozens of small family-run shops in the historic central district. When we arrived in midmorning, the market was in full swing, with music blaring and voices shouting above the din. Stalls overflowed with fruits and vegetables. Men filleted giant red snapper while women chopped chicken. Upstairs, we stopped to buy fresh fruit juice and a CD of mariachi music.

In November avid fishermen descend upon this self-proclaimed sailfish capital of the world when Manzanillo hosts its international sailfish tourna-



ment. A modernistic sculpture of a blue sailfish soars gracefully above the city's harborside park and serves as its signature emblem. Local outfitters offer fishing excursions in pursuit of trophy catch, as well as snorkeling and scuba-diving trips, glass-bottom-boat tours, and off-road ATV motoring.

Last spring, Tracey and Keith Manbeck flew here with five other couples from Albany, Ohio. They lived like "real movie stars" in a luxury villa in the La Punta district. During their weeklong stay they dined on authentic dishes prepared by the in-house chef and sipped cold Mexican beer and tequila sunrises served by the resident bartender. In midweek, the husbands hired a local captain and a deep-sea fishing boat for a day. They returned sunburned with 500 pounds of fish, a portion of which the chef served for dinner. "It was a real thrill," said Keith, who was a first-time fisherman. "The captain knew exactly where to go. Pulling the fish into the boat was fun, and a lot of work. They were real fighters."

Manzanillo's commercialism drops away quickly once you leave the city for the countryside. We drove northwest along coastal Highway 200 past brilliant yellow primavera trees and open-air fruit stands, and made frequent meandering detours to explore some of the secluded beach towns that Hollywood overlooked. Cuastecomates was barely stirring when we stopped early in the morning and walked toward the sea to admire the town's horseshoe bay ringed by purple-gray mountains.

After a winding drive through the mountains, we reached La Manzanilla, where gold flecks sparkled in the hard-packed sand and the beach stretched as far as the eye could see. A local fisherman mending his nets suggested we walk to the far edge of town to glimpse the crocodiles lounging in the mangroves behind a rickety chain-link fence.

Barra de Navidad proved our favorite beach stop. This lively resort town straddles a sandy spit of land dividing the crashing waves of the ocean from the glassy waters of an inland lagoon. We shopped for painted masks, decorative metalwork, and highly polished silver jewelry, and then walked barefoot for a mile through unspoiled sand along the seacoast.

During lunch, we ran into Minneapolis resident Kristy Hagner at the Sea Master restaurant. Over beer and guacamole and chips, she explained why she and her husband, Dave, returned with their family for a second visit. "We like the warm weather and the beaches, and the food is fabulous," she said. "It's great to be outside in the sunshine during the winter when it's cold and snowy up in Minneapolis." The Hagners and friends had rented a large cabin cruiser for the day to take them from Manzanillo up the coast to Barra de Navidad for swimming and fishing.

When stiff ocean breezes ruffled the surf later that afternoon, we switched to the inland waterway and rented a launch to take us on a 40-minute ride around the lagoon. Our boatman ferried us across the channel to the palatial Grand Bay Hotel-Isla Navi-

If you go . . .

What to do
Ecological Center of Cuyutlán
Cuyutlán
www.headformexico.com/tortugario.html

View sea turtles and iguanas and take a boat ride through the mangrove tunnels and tranquil Palo Verde lagoon. Monday-Sunday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Entry fee \$2.50. Boat ride about \$10.

El Chanal archeological zone
Colima

This pre-Hispanic city flourished between 1100 and 1400 AD and covers more than 120 acres. Although the ruins of its pyramids, plazas, central altars, and ballgame courts are not as spectacular as others in Mexico, it's well worth seeing. Tuesday-Sunday 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Antares Nautica Water Sports
La Audiencia Beach

This beachside outfitter offers rentals of small fishing boats and wave runners, and tour boat rides and scuba diving and snorkeling excursions.

Where to stay
Las Hadas

Avenue Vista Hermosa
Manzanillo
888-559-4329
www.brisas.com.mx/
Reminiscent of an exotic sun-bleached Moorish village. Championship golf course, 10 tennis courts, water sports, and a private 70-slip marina for deep-sea fishing excursions. Standard double \$280.

Grand Bay Hotel-Isla Navidad
Circuito de los Marineros

Manzanillo
877-999-3223
www.wyndham.com/hotels/ZLOGB/main.wnt
Lush gardens, quiet canals and pools, scenic views of Barra de Navidad, and a 27-hole golf course. Doubles from \$339.

Where to eat
L'Recif

Cerro del Cenicero
Manzanillo
011-52-314-335-0900
www.lrecif.com
Perched high along the Pacific and renowned for its gourmet international cuisine. November-April for dinner only, \$14-\$34.

Los Delfines
Avenue Vista Hermosa

Manzanillo
888-559-4329
www.brisas.com.mx/
Savor red snapper and several variations of ceviche at this outdoor restaurant. Lunch and buffet-style dinner, \$8.50-\$29.

dad Resort, the centerpiece of a 1,200-acre private island. From the boat dock, we walked to Mary's Restaurant, a popular open-air bistro overlooking the estuary, and savored a dinner of fresh lobster, the house specialty.

Our exploration of Manzanillo and its surroundings revealed more romantic settings well worth considering as film locations, should Hollywood make a sequel to "10." One afternoon we drove about 20 miles south to the Ecological Center of Cuyutlán, known locally as El Tortugario, and climbed aboard a small wooden boat for an enchanting ride through the mangrove tunnels and tranquil waters of the Palo Verde Estuary. Another day, we wound our way through the mountains on back roads past lush mango and papaya groves and family-run salt flat mining operations to the state capital of Colima, a traditional city basking in the shadow of far-off volcanoes. After touring the 16th-century cathedral and nearby Armaments Museum, we settled into an outdoor cafe table at the Hotel Ceballos overlooking Libertad Garden, a delightful park with a lacy white gazebo and dappled walkways.

But the sun and surf drew us repeatedly back to the coast. During dinner on the terrace at L'Recif, a gourmet restaurant perched high on the Juluapan Peninsula, we gazed at the rugged black rocks far below. After a scarlet sunset, a tiny sliver of moon emerged above the cliffs and cast a beam on our table. It was one of those made-for-movies moments that etch Manzanillo in your memory.

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