

May 11, 2003

After spending a most delightful two weeks at Paradise Village Marina in Nuevo Vallarta, just north of Puerto Vallarta in Banderas Bay, we set sail around 8 p.m. on Wednesday, April 16, for Chamela Bay – about 100 miles south – one of many stops along the Mexican Riviera. The Mexican Riviera (also referred to as the Gold Coast) stretches from Banderas Bay down to Acapulco where mile after mile lay stretches of long, beautiful, sandy beaches – often one after another. We had a lovely full moon sail down to Chamela, but unfortunately the seas were very sloppy, especially around Cabo Corrientes. We were able to sail most of the way, putting down the anchor around 2 p.m. on Thursday, April 17, off the village of Punta Perula in the northern section of Chamela Bay.

The week before and after Easter is a big holiday period in Mexico, and so many of the anchorages and beaches that we visited during this time were full of Mexicans enjoying their vacation. This ended up being an added bonus for us as we were able to experience their fun and enjoyment first hand. When we arrived in Chamela, there was definitely a festive atmosphere on the beach with a mariachi band playing and loads of families enjoying the beach and eating at the many small palapa restaurants lining the waterfront.

Unfortunately, this anchorage – and most of the anchorages along this coast – are exposed to the Pacific Ocean and thus experience lots of surge at times. The majority of these anchorages, therefore, do not rate high on our list of “peaceful” anchorages. In Chamela Bay, we were unable to go ashore until Saturday, two days after we arrived, due to too much surf. Plus, on Friday, strong winds came straight into the bay from the southwest (never even mentioned on our daily weather report). All we could do was ride the waves until the seas and winds subsided that evening. We felt like we were on a continual rocking horse. There was no other anchorage in the bay to which we could easily escape.

Finally on Saturday, April 19, we did make it to shore and what a most fun and enjoyable afternoon we had. We have many fond memories from our time ashore. Most of the people on vacation in Punta Perula were middle class. Many were camping. We enjoyed eating at a couple of the palapa restaurants. Ceviche, either fish or shrimp, was the most popular dish served. Often, families lingered a long time at the palapas. Some brought their own food and mixed with what they bought at the restaurant. A few people played cards at the palapas while others in their party enjoyed the beach. This tying up of tables would be unheard of in the United States as restaurant owners would want to free up spaces for paying customers. But, this didn't seem to matter here. All was very laid-back with the local restaurant owners.

While we were ashore, small mariachi bands, mostly consisting of three in the band, would go up and down the beach playing at the different palapas. An ice cream bike, with the same sound as our ice cream truck, would play its tune as it moved through the sand looking for customers. Local pangas (small open boats, 18 to 24 feet long, powered by an outboard) would take customers for banana boat rides. Popular with the Mexican female vacationers was to have their hair braided in lots of small braids. Local vendors would bring their many hair style pictures along with them so that the customer could choose the right style. Also popular with the women were the necklaces and bracelets that the vendors were selling.

On Easter Sunday, April 20, we left Chamela at 9:15 a.m. planning to head south to Careyes, about 10 miles down the road. Unfortunately conditions weren't right in Careyes as the winds decided to come directly from the southeast at 20 knots (once again never mentioned on our weather report that morning), and thus this anchorage was untenable in those winds. So, we continued on down the coast, motoring into the wind, to the next anchorage at Tenacatita Bay, 18 miles further down the road. We finally anchored at 3:15 p.m.

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*Palapa Beach Restaurants*

At Tenacatita, a popular trip – known as the “jungle cruise” – is to take one’s dinghy up the stream, whose outlet is right off the anchorage, and wind through 3 to 4 miles of mangroves, sometimes so dense as to form an overhead canopy. The trip ends at the lagoon, just off the small village of Revelcito and the nearby beach. The surf was too big for us to take the trip on Monday. We watched from our anchorage as a few dinghies tried, but all turned back. No one succeeded that day. On Tuesday afternoon, watching the surf ever so closely and timing the wave periods just perfectly, we managed to get our dinghy into the stream – the first dinghy to do so in almost two days. It took us about 45 minutes of motoring to make the trip up to the lagoon. Once at the beach, we experienced the same festive Mexican vacationing atmosphere and palapa restaurants as at Chamela, minus the mariachi bands.

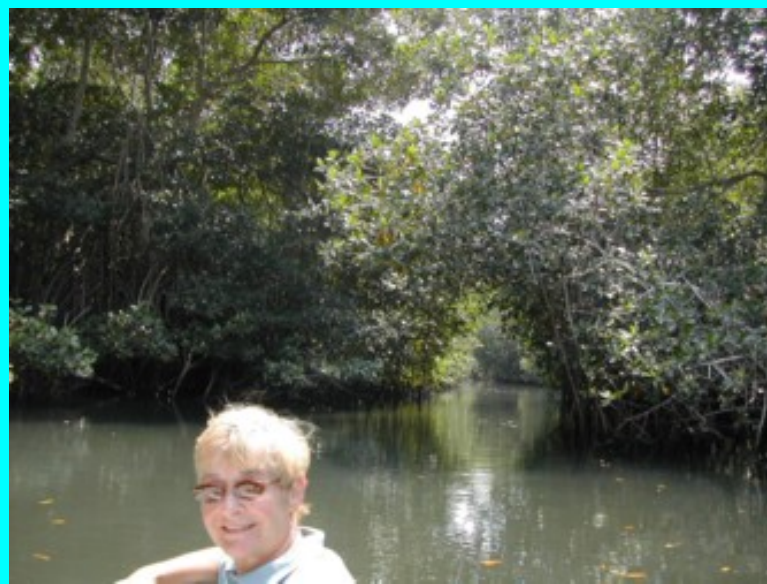
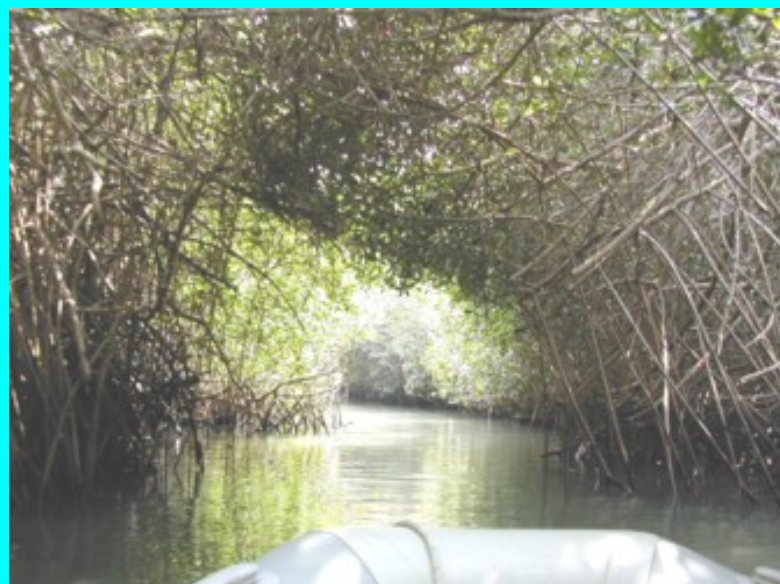
While at Tenacatita, it was also fun to watch the brown pelicans, the most populous bird at this anchorage, as they would catch their fish. The pelicans would come down with a big splash, often just a few feet from our boat, but they never missed their catch. 100% accuracy every time!

We departed Tenacatita at 10 a.m. on Thursday, April 24, heading next to Bahia de Navidad, about 20 miles further south, and arrived there about 2 ½ hours later. We anchored out in the bay for a couple of hours waiting to go into the lagoon at Navidad on the rising high tide. While waiting we saw our first marine turtle. Quite exciting! How thrilling it was, too, to be finally anchored in a lagoon and not exposed to the open surge.

The small tourist towns bordering the bay, Barra de Navidad and Melaque, were quite charming with their cobblestone streets, and when we arrived both were full of vacationers enjoying the Easter holidays. It was quite windy every day that we were there – except for the day we left – with winds from 20 to 30 knots and gusts to 35 lasting almost eight to ten hours each day. Our boat in the lagoon was about a mile from Barra. Luckily, we were able to take the water taxi into town for \$1.50 round trip per person. Otherwise, we would never have been able to make it to town due to the strong winds. By Saturday afternoon, it was quite noticeable that many vacationers were already heading home as the normally crowded and lively beaches were looking less and less busy. The Easter holidays were definitely coming to an end.

On Monday, April 28, after taking on fuel and water at the Grand Bay Marina, we departed Barra de Navidad around 11:30 a.m. and headed for Manzanillo, about 27 miles down the road. As there was no wind we motored all the way, arriving in Manzanillo about 4 hours later. We anchored in front of Las Hadas resort with its white, Moorish arches, domes, and spires – quite impressive from the water with its Mediterranean architecture – and very picturesque at night with all its lights on. Las Hadas was the film set for the movie “10” with Bo Derek. This anchorage would have been one of the most pleasant anchorages we experienced in Mexico, as there was almost no surge. But, with both Thursday, May 1, and Monday, May 5, being holidays in Mexico, there were quite a few vacationers at the many resorts in Manzanillo. Thus, when we were on the boat during the day, we would feel at times like we were in a “washing machine” as, being the only boat there, we would have quite a few jet skiers and water skiers circling the boat turning up the water. In the evening we had it all to ourselves and it was calm and beautiful.

As Las Hadas is on the far side of the bay from the main port, we didn’t realize how big the port was until seeing it up close from the bus. We were amazed at the size of the container dock. Truck drivers in their cabs were waiting in line to pick up the many containers being unloaded from the ships. It reminded me of the scene at Long Beach Harbor in California, although on a much smaller scale.



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*Up a Jungle River*



On a sad note, our outboard motor broke down while motoring into the marina at Las Hadas on Wednesday, and so it is now back to rowing everywhere. Thank goodness this didn't happen on our "jungle cruise" in Tenacatita. It would have been a long, long row back to the boat.



*Kuhela Anchored at La Hadas*



On Friday, May 2, we departed Manzanillo at 7:30 p.m. heading next to Zihuatanejo, about 190 miles further south. During this leg, we sailed only about three hours and motored the rest, arriving in Bahia de Zihuatanejo around 9 a.m. on Sunday, May 4. We anchored right in front of the town and behind the local boats as we didn't want to have to row too far.

Zihuatanejo is by far most cruisers' favorite spot in Mexico, and we can definitely see why. It is quite picturesque and charming while still maintaining its local Mexican village atmosphere. There are many conveniently located services, and the town has a wonderful market. Every Sunday evening there is free entertainment at the Town Square. Many families come in for the evening and lots of little food booths are set up for the event. Fishing is still one of the town's industries and many fishing pangas line the beach. During the week many will go out at night and return in the morning with their catch and sell to the fishing vendors located on the beach. While we were there, the fishing pangas became our local alarm clock as they would pass right by our boat about 6:30 a.m. each morning on their way to shore.

Unfortunately, Zihuatanejo was an open anchorage, and the swells in the bay at times were very noticeable. After five days in Zihuatanejo we had two days of 8 to 10 foot swells and larger than normal surf. It made for a very uncomfortable anchorage plus also very tricky landings on the beach. On Saturday we swamped the dinghy. The wave came straight into the dinghy just as we were arriving at shore. Naturally we got wet, but luckily all items of value were doubly wrapped and so nothing was lost. This was definitely a first for us!

We had planned to linger in Zihuatanejo for two to three weeks, but we realized soon after our arrival that the hurricane season was arriving faster than originally predicted. Thus, we have decided to cut short our stay in Zihuatanejo and plan to depart tomorrow, Monday, May 12, for Acapulco. The present plan is to be south of the Gulf of Tehuantepec before the last week in May. It is in the Gulf of Tehuantepec that the hurricanes spawn, and we are concerned about pushing the time limit. If an early depression occurs and we are north of the Gulf of Tehuantepec, there is really no good place to weather out the storm.



*Kuhela at Zihuatanejo*



*Local Fishing Fleet*



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