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To: [Vacation List Family](#) ; [Vacation List International](#) ; [Vacation List Friends](#)

Sent: Tuesday, June 07, 2005 10:50 AM

Subject: Recollections of Mexico

(As we travel, we take every opportunity to connect by e-mail with family and friends back home. On this recent odyssey, Internet cafes were lacking and those we found were useless. So ... we are sending a postscript to our travel by recollecting our experiences and sharing them with you.)

Still weary from our Netherlands trip we were anxious to rest our feet and stay close to home for a while. But, as things go, an offer happened our way that we could not refuse. Our Las Cruces friends (Jim and Patty) invited us to join them on a drive to Barrancas del Cobre (Copper Canyon), Chihuahua, Mexico. This would be a two-car caravan with no timetable or agenda ... just a leisurely drive to the canyon area and perhaps a visit to the Sea of Cortez on the west coast of Mexico.

We are always itching to travel. Weary feet or not we happily agreed to this adventure. We've heard many horror tales and negative opinions on any travel to Mexico but being the adventurous type (of sorts) we wanted to find out for ourselves ... "Is Mexico the Land of the Stupid" and a perennial "Third World Country". Hopefully our recollections will answer those two burning questions. Along the way we hoped to learn something of the Tarahumara (pronounced 'Tara-mara') Indians, see the canyons, swim in the ocean and simply relax in some of the quaint Mexican towns.

To begin ...

We left Las Cruces on a Wednesday ... day was promising and sunny. The border crossing was simple as there were no other US visitors at the check point in Santa Teresa. Got our visas (assumed it was free but later found out it cost \$20 USD each) and paid for the import fee (\$32 USD) to take our car into Mexico. Process was uncomplicated thanks to Patty who, like a real trooper, was able to handle the Mexican language with ease. Patty was born in Guatemala and is skilled in handling these bureaucrats. Fifteen minutes is all it took. With papers in hand we took off into the interior. Five miles later we had to pay a toll to enter the Pan America highway (one of many we encountered and frankly not worth the cost but the alternative "free" roads were murderous on the car). A short distance later we stopped to have an early lunch that Dee and Patty prepared ahead. While eating my 'tortilla roll' I

wandered about and happened to notice that my rear bumper was oddly distorted. Hello 10 minutes into Mexico and already a bad sign. While we were in the border crossing office, a Mexican 'rear-ended' my Explorer; broke my taillight and dented my bumper. First example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid" (PS: to repair the damage it would cost \$410 USD. This trip is already becoming expensive. Yes, I had Mexican insurance but the comprehensive deductible was \$1,000 USD.) Bummer

This trip was starting on an ominous note but what option did we have? We shook our head in disbelief and trudged on. We had to stop at a checkpoint where our car import papers were verified and our destination revealed to the Mexican 'federales'. No problem and we were waved on. Our first destination was Ciudad Chihuahua (Chihuahua City). The weather was perfect, the countryside similar to New Mexico but the road was truly poor ... and this was a toll road. Four-lane, no shoulders, no rest stops, no pull-outs, the road was bumpy and often pot-hole riddled. By 2PM we arrived in Chihuahua and made an effort to locate a suitable hotel/motel. Oh yes ... Jim and I communicated by means of walkie-talkies that I brought along. With a two-mile range these radios were a real convenience as we talked all the time of where to turn, where we are heading, and any wrong turns that need to be avoided. Anyway ... without a map of the city we are looking for a hotel not knowing where we are heading or which part of town we're in. We drive straight through the city hoping to find a hotel near the city center or plaza. The city is huge but dirty. Garbage everywhere. "Tiendas" or little shopping stores line every inch of every street. Loud music permeates the air ... the smell of unidentifiable cooked food fills our noses ... peddlers approach us at every opportunity ... we are barraged with sounds and sights that literally spin our heads. Still no dice ... no hotels to be seen. We head back to our starting point by taking the 'ring road'. We stop by a few hotels but Jim and Patty say ... "No way ... these motels all have curtains". This needs an explanation ... a hotel with curtains means that the courtyard parking spaces are all hidden by curtains. A customer pulls into the parking space and draws a curtain to conceal the car. The customer then enters the room ... closes the door ... places their money into a rotating slot in the door ... the hotel attendant removes the money and the customer has privacy without being identified. These hotels/motels rooms are rented by the hour (typically \$10-\$15 USD/hour). Yes ... these establishments are used by (typically) Mexicans to hold their illicit dalliances. These types of hotels are everywhere, and I mean everywhere. Finding a legitimate tourist hotel was a struggle. Another example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid". Well finally, we located one that was clean and reasonably priced (reasonable - a misnomer). We checked in ... had a few cold 'cervezas' (beers) and wine and started to unwind from the 270 mile drive. We explored the nearby 'tiendas' but were unimpressed. Stopped for more cervezas and finally elected to call it a day. No sense driving through town to see any attractions. Chihuahua is not a nice city. With no English TV channels it was a quick 'lights out'.



Curtained motel (typical)

The next morning we had breakfast in our room. The ladies brought coffee, "mush" (oatmeal), fruits and other items because in Mexico breakfast is not included in your room rate (thankfully), eating places open later and frankly are not a safe place to eat. So for the duration of our trip we prepared our own breakfasts and controlled our own health. We left at 8AM, drove to the Chepe Pacifico train depot to inquire about taking a 'car train' through Copper Canyon (none available - only charter trains) and headed out of town. Stopped by Ciudad Cuauhtemoc to convert some currency. Would you believe that in the bank we were approached by a beggar asking for money. This they allow in Mexico. Another example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid". Could not find a way to leave the town, drove in circles for a short while until we finally managed to find the road. This part of Mexico is renowned for apples and apple orchards lined both sides of the highway leading into the mountains and into Village of Creel ... our destination. Chihuahua is at 4,600 feet and Creel is at 7,800 feet so we were definitely heading into the heart of canyon country. Creel is the gateway town into Copper Canyon. We drive through high desert terrain and slowly made our way into alpine with dense forests. Started to rain and the forecast was more rain. Dark clouds filled the horizon with lightning in the distance. By 2PM we made it into Creel and the town was depressing. Other than the main shopping/store district the town was like any Mexican town ... poor, unkempt, decaying and filled with people who had little to do. We parked on the main drag and started to look for lodging. The ladies did all the negotiations. Most hotels were overpriced and of poor quality. Finally found one "los Valles" for \$25 a night ... clean but a 'so-so'. Again, no English TV channels and a bathroom of dubious cleanliness. After checking in we strolled the main street looking for something to do. We discovered that we were in the "off season" and most places were either closed or with limited hours. We did not see many tourists in town. Located an adventure referral place called "The 3 Amigos" and asked for

advice on what to do, where to go, and how to go about exploring the Copper Canyon. Bought some literature from the owner who recommended a drive to the bottom of the canyon and to a place called Batopilas. We decided that we would take this adventurous advice ... leave the Explorer in Creel and take Jim's SUV into the canyon. The inn owner allowed us to leave the Explorer in her courtyard. We ate a light supper in her restaurant (it was good, tasty and CHEAP). Back in the room we finished the rum and cokes, followed by more cervezas, chatted about the next day's plans and crashed. Bad sign ... it rained all night.



Creel - approaching rain

Next morning we woke up to a heavy fog ... could not see beyond 200 feet. Still, we knew that the fog would burn off and the day would be promising. Finishing our breakfast we took off at 8:30AM. Still slightly foggy, we missed Lake Arareco which was our first destination. Oh well, we'll get it on the way back. Next stop was The Mission at Cusarare. A dirt-poor village that is known for its old mission church and a new museum housing 1700s art. We managed to find the village but the mission did not open til 10AM. One good thing here ... no one approached us to peddle their goods or ask for money. This is an Indian village. Not even stopping the car we turned around and left the village to head to our next destination --- Cusarare Falls. Only a few miles down the main road we find the dirt road leading into the parking area. We park, ask around for directions and head into the mountains. We were advised which way to go but instead found our way to a 'toll house' where we had to pay to walk to the falls. (Later we found out we could have saved 60 pesos by walking on the other side of the river. Also, we could have driven to the falls if we could have found the access road.) All four of us started our walk through a dense forest abutting a river. The distance was 3km (1.8 miles) ... weather was improving; it was getting hot and humidity was high. We started to sweat profusely. Jim felt uncomfortable about leaving his SUV parked in the open and elected to head back to

watch the car while the rest of us trudged on. It took all of an hour to get to the falls which was anti-climatic. The falls were nice and OK ... they were not very tall and the water cascade was at a low level. Still, the overlook was delightful, the air cool and Patty was in her adventuresome glory ... exploring all the nuances of the top of the falls, including getting within 3 feet of the edge. We spent a total of 10 minutes here and started back ... encountering a host of Tarahumara Indian ladies walking to the falls area to wait for tourist to arrive. Dee purchased an Indian craft item for \$2 USD. The walk back was getting wearisome as the temperature was inching upward and the humidity was high. We found a shortcut and managed to get back in 30 minutes. Jim was waiting for us with tales of dogs fighting. Patty distributed some candy to the Indian girls. We called this place 'quits' and left to explore the canyon.



Cusarare Falls (low water level)



Tarahumara Indian woman (18 years old)



Tarahumara Indian woman and child

The road we were on was paved and in reasonably good condition. The pace was fast and the scenery was getting more interesting. We passed little villages of Basihura and Humira ... again, dirt poor with nothing to make them indistinguishable from other poor towns. We were climbing higher into the mountains and the weather was turning ideal ... sunny and cool. Air was fresh with pine scent and the mountain peaks were bathed in sunshine, showing their full glory. Eventually we had to descend into the canyon (again, on a good paved road) and wound up at Humira Bridge – the

lowest point in Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon). This is important to remember – there are many canyons in Barranca del Cobre and Copper Canyon (as a named canyon) is but one of them. There are others canyons lower than Copper Canyon but this one is the namesake of the area because it's the longest (as told to me). We stop at Humira Bridge and take advantage of this photographic opportunity. Dee and Patty engage a conversation with a Tarahumara Indian who is selling a few trinkets. Next thing we know this Indian woman takes off her skirt to allow Dee and Patty to try it on. But not to worry --- this woman has 10 or 11 skirts underneath; just in case she sells one she will not go home undressed. Her husband was nearby. Not a soul was anywhere near this place and here were these two poor Indians hoping for a sale in the middle of nowhere. That's another thing ... you may be driving down any road, anywhere in this place and you could encounter an Indian or an Indian family sitting waiting for a bus or just simply sitting looking for something to do. Where they came from or where they live is a mystery, perhaps nearby or deep in the mountains. One may encounter an Indian anyplace, anytime and in the most inopportune situation. Most are selling, some are begging, some lost in their own space with a blank look about them. Wow!!!!



At the bridge - Patty trying a skirt

We leave Humira Bridge and climb higher into the mountains. At Napuchi fork we leave the paved road and take an OK dirt road into the forests. We are about to embark on a journey that will leave a permanent mark in our collective minds. For 10 or 20 miles we traipse up and down valleys and encounter many small villages. The road is getting rougher and narrower. We finally wind up at 8,000 feet and at the highest elevation in the park. We pass a small hamlet of Quirare and immediately enter a "road to hell" on the way to La Bufa and Batopilas, our destination. At mile marker 27km we stop at a vantage point overlooking Batopilas Canyon ... the view blew our minds. Not only could we see forever into the horizon but the view towards

the bottom of the canyon was awesome ... simply awesome. The drop in elevation must have been over 6,000 feet from where we were standing to the road entering La Bufa below. The edge was nearly a sheer vertical drop. We could see the road leading down and it was a series of switchbacks that would traumatize even a seasoned logging truck driver. But as all good things happen they must end ... Patty heard a sound that sounded like " hhhiiiiisssssss" and it turned out that Jim's SUV had a leak in the rear tire --- a flat. Here we were at 8,000 feet, near the edge of a vertical drop and we had to do the unthinkable ... change a flat on a single lane dirt road. Not to worry ... Jim advised me to turn off my camera and assist in the dirty task. 15 minutes later we had the problem solved and proceeded on our way down.



Batopilas Overlook (6,000 feet to bottom)

Hands slightly dirty, full of sweat and wishing for a cold beer we discussed of why and where this happened. It was not a rock tear but a nail. And where in the hell could a tire pick up a nail in the mountains. I don't even think these Indians ever saw a nail but that's exactly what it was. On the way down no other cars passed us in either direction. We proceeded down with care, caution and white knuckles. Patty was fascinated but Dee was mortified. I was too busy taking pictures in case I never make my way up again. This road was worse than Skippers Canyon we explored in New Zealand last October. We drove slowly but surely ... switchback after switchback. We encountered cattle, goats, burros, and mules along the road down. Maybe one car passed us going up ... don't remember. We also encountered a burned sedan on the side. Brakes must have gotten real hot and the car caught fire. Oh well ... nothing you can do so it was pushed over the edge. Slowly ever slowly we managed to get to the bottom ... took nearly 90 minutes. At La Bufa Bridge we said a couple of 'biddy-biddy' (prayers) and proceeded down still further to La Bufa itself. The road was OK but winding at the edge of cliffs. At La Bufa we discovered it was only a single residence with a repair shop. Used to be a mining town but has since

been wiped off the map. Population – maybe 8. Talked to the mechanic who fixed the flat. Jim stayed with the fellow and it turned out to be a pleasant conversation because the mechanic knew his stuff and Jim loves to talk with a local. 30 minutes later we are on our way again ... its getting darker and the sky is threatening. The road to Batopilas is getting uglier and uglier and we still have a 1,500 foot descent. Twists and turns ... narrow hugging the edges of cliffs. Bumpy, rutted and slick. Maybe a car or two going up with a 5-ton truck going down. Finally, by 5PM we arrive at Batopilas and proceed over a creaky bridge over a river into the town itself. We are looking for a hotel recommended by "The 3 Amigos". Guess what ... the main road to the hotel is closed for repairs and we have to take the alternative road. How? Drive to the river edge and cross the river on the way to the other end of town. This we start to do ... except we have to cross the river 4 times. Jim crossed the river 3 times before we realized that the pick-up in front of us, being higher and heavier, was being slightly moved sideways by the river depth, flow, and force. We elected to bypass the 4th crossing and head back to the main road. Even if we successfully crossed it the 4th time we would still have to make the 4 crossings on the way back and if it rained during the night you could imagine our dilemma. We got back to the main road and started to look for available lodgings. Guess what again ... only one motel is on this side of town and it sucked big time. This motel did not have a 'star' – in fact, it was ready for demolition if not condemnation. Room rate was \$15 USD a night. No TV, no Air-conditioning, not even a key to the room. Plumbing was 'golden' (rusty), bedding was suspicious (we used our own pillows that we brought just in case) and the room odor was rather "odd". But .. it did have a floor fan for cooling. With no choice we took two rooms and hoped for the best. Met a Texan who, like us, refused to cross the river 4 times. Nice fellow, a Mexican-American from Pecos, Texas. Born not far away from Batopilas. So ... we got a room, checked in, and all four of us decided to walk to the city center to see what we missed. The town is one street wide, hugging a hillside. Not bad for a Mexican town, still poor and dirty with many, many Indians about. The construction we encountered was nothing more than repaving the street so a small detour was possible without having to cross the river. Another example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid". City Center was neat and interesting, possible for us to even stay a few days if we had access to the hotel. Tiendas were unimpressive; the famous 'swinging bridge' was unimpressive and frankly the entire town was unimpressive. Worst of all ... no restaurants open; only street food. Major bummer ... what do we eat? Making a circuit of the plaza we head back to our so-called hotel. The hotel manager sees our dilemma and offers to make us a traditional supper for \$3.50 USD each in her own kitchen. With no other choice, we accept. 30 minutes later all 4 of us are sitting in this old and dank and dark kitchen where we are served refried beans, scrambled eggs with what looked like salsa and tortillas. Trust us ... this meal was filling but tasteless. Mexican food is as bland as sawdust and has "0" nutritional value. Another example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid". Thank God we had wine and beer that served as a food group for us. It was getting dark by now and we chatted with our Texas neighbor. He brought an entourage with him, all of their food, including 20 pounds of meat (smart men) and plenty of beer and chips. They started their BBQ at 9PM, invited some young men with guitars to serenade them and partied. We sat nearby and participated in the merriment but declined their offer of the BBQ. Another example ... "Las Crucens are Stupid" (just joking). All of this lasted until about 11PM when we crashed. Music stopped soon afterwards.

Since we had no A/C, we all slept in the buff (boy was it humid). The door to our room could not lock so we shoved our filled cooler against the door hoping no one could get in. At 2AM, we were awakened by a dogfight for the BBQ scraps and at 3AM I woke up to the floor fan falling apart and crashing to the floor. What a dismal night. Incidentally, talk about the Tarahumara Indians, Patty offered a dinner plate to a 16-year old Indian that just hung around the hotel. Arrogantly, he refused to take anything from a woman and rather go hungry. Another example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid".
Sidebar: Batopilas is at 500 feet above sea level; mangos and papayas grow here.

Next morning arrived none the sooner. Tried to take a shower – no hot water. Just as well, there was no shower head. Even at \$15 USD for this room, it was over priced. Ate our breakfast and left town as fast as our tires could rotate. This time we are headed to Guachochi, back out of the canyon and 80 miles further south. The morning was great, sun was shining, air was cool and no one on the road. We backtracked our way out of Batopilas Canyon and this time we knew what to expect. Going down took us 4 hours; going up took us 90 minutes. Of course, we were in 4-wheel drive going up. The early morning views were magnificent with the mountain peaks just catching the morning sun. La Bufa was still sleeping and the small villages on the way were just waking up. When we arrived at Napuchi junction we broke for an early snack and took the paved road to Guachochi. The drive was easy, relaxing and somewhat scenic as we were descending out of the canyon area and into alpine country. We got to Guachochi early in the afternoon and, yes, it was another poor and dirty little town. We drove around a little getting our bearings. Stopped to shop for lunch meat and other staples at the largest store in town. Eventually we found a hotel on the main road with secure parking. Rate was \$41 USD per night and, again, not worth it. Had to swap rooms a couple of times; TV did not work, no sofa as promised, etc. Had to call repair to fix a sink, a toilet and eliminate sewer smell. Another example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid". With virtually nothing to do, we had an early supper at "Los Adobe". Place recommended by "The 3 Amigos" – served great trout dinners. We must admit, meal was very good, reasonably priced and guess what ---- our Texas friends from Batopilas also stopped by for dinner. A most unexpected but enjoyable "reunion". That evening was rather quiet as we consumed our share of rum and cokes, cervezas and just-bought desserts. Sleep was hard coming as road noise and trucks kept this traveler awake most of the night. Others fared better.

Next morning we left for Creel. Decided to stop by "Agua Caliente" a hot springs area not far from Napuchi. It was recommended as a nice place to soak in the thermal waters. We found the turnoff and headed into the forest. The road turned out to be a real 4-wheel road and after traversing it for 5km we elected to turn back. A good decision for as we were leaving truckloads of Mexican with coolers and bad intentions were coming in. Gringos and Mexicans don't mix well in out-of-the-way places. With time to spare we stopped by the Village of Cusarare to visit the mission and museum that was closed the first time we stopped a few days ago. True ... the mission was open as well as the museum. Entry fees were a little bit high for what we saw but the short diversion was of interest to us and we got to see a lot of 1700 century art and the interior of a 1741 mission church (under renovation). We did not

spend much time here as Indians were coming around ready for the 1 o'clock service.



Mission at Cusarare

Stopped by Lake Ararero for lunch. Harrassed by kids selling their wares. Had to leave.

Time to head back to Creel. We got back about 2PM, secured the same rooms we had a few days back and went shopping. Stores were closed so we just ambled about the town looking for things to do. It was a relaxing evening for us.

Next day we opted to drive to Davisadero to view the confluence of three canyons from an overlook. Day again was great; sunny and cool. When we got to this 'town' it was nothing more than a hotel and Tiendas that served the Copper Canyon train stop. Four trains stop here every day. We mingled about for 15 minutes and elected to leave for one can only look at a canyon so long.



Confluence of 3 canyons (Davisadero)

We drove on further to San Rafael which was the end of the paved road. Nothing much to do here ... just a frontier town with no attractions. On the way out of town we chanced upon a side road that led to a "castle hotel" that we thought might be interesting. Losing our way we lucked upon a sign that said "Posada Mirador". Now this is a hotel that is world famous, for it "hangs" over the side of a canyon wall overlooking the majestic canyons. As luck would have it we located the Mirador and explored its interior and the famous overlook. It is truly a magnificent view from the deck, with dozens of hummingbirds dancing around the deck. We spent about an hour here enjoying the vistas before deciding that enough is enough.



At Posada Mirador (4 Amigos)

We left and returned to Creel. Being early in the afternoon and with nothing else to do, we jumped into my SUV and drove to an out-of-town attractions called "Valley of the Mushrooms and Frogs". Nothing more than interesting rock formations but they still charged you to enter the area. We returned to Creel by way of Lake Ararero. By 6PM all stores opened, we purchased some tourist items and just parked our butts at the main intersection and watched for a little action. Interesting ... on some evenings, people just 'cruise' the main drag. Ignoring the stop signs they just cruise back and forth. We were waiting for an accident to happen, the place was just that crazy. Music was loud and obnoxious. Drunks and families mingled about. By 7PM we got bored, ate our supper at a local eatery and called it quits for the stay in Creel.

Next day we left Creel early for the drive to Ciudad Obregon on our way to San Carlos. The road was mountainous, twisting with many switchbacks. It was paved but rutted. The distance was 160 miles but it took nearly all day to get there. Had to pass through 2 'federales' checkpoints. Not speaking Spanish I had to be bailed out by Jim when I could not converse with the 'federales'. The passing scenery was pure dynamite. We traversed from the State of Chihuahua to the State of Sonora. The mountains were high, the roads were challenging and the traffic was virtually nil. On a deserted road half way to Obregon Jim developed car trouble (lost all of his coolant). In the middle of somewhere ... few cars in either direction and no means of solving the problem, we pulled Jim 10 miles (with a towing strap I brought just in case) to a Pemex station. Found a nearby mechanic (all stations have a nearby mechanic who relies on road problems) who repaired the radiator. I was sweating bullets as to what I would do in case like this but Jim took it all with ease as if this was a normal occurrence. After fixing the problem we rewarded ourselves with some \$1 beers from a street vendor. We smiled again and proceeded to drive on to Obregon. Got to the city by 7PM ... found a suitable hotel. Grimy and

sweaty from the problem, a shower was in order before we headed out to find a decent restaurant. Obregon did not do much for us ... another big city with many problems. Hotel was OK but the loud A/C kept me up for most of the night. A gringo car alarm went off twice that night. No rest was possible. At least they had English TV channels where we could catch up on the news.

Next day we stopped by a local Wal-Mart Supercenter to do a little stocking up. Prices here were not that low but we managed to fill our coolers with needed provisions. A few t-shirts were purchased ... sleeves had to be cut off because the humidity was high (Dee was upset at this). Jim worked on his SUV to tweak the cooling system and off we went to San Carlos on the Mexican coast and the Sea of Cortez. Drive was uneventful but not scenic. Another toll road. We arrived in Guaymas (close to San Carlos) at noon. Did a little currency conversion; had lunch by the harbor and took off for San Carlos, a few miles down the road. The access road to San Carlos lets people know they are entering a 'gringo city' ... well manicured, somewhat clean and full of palm trees and blooming shrubs. Not knowing how to locate our friends who intend to live here we stop by two marinas to ask for assistance. Called their friend who finally made contact with the Cooper's who told us to stay put for they will meet us at the San Carlos marina shortly. This they did. We had a few cold drinks, discussed our trip and its many adventures. The Cooper's live in Las Cruces presently. We were invited to inspect their power boat in an adjacent marina 6km away. The Cooper's are avid boaters and fish the open sea for fish that are in season. Right now it's the dorado. We drive the 6km and are invited on board. Likewise we are invited to join them the next day for some open sea boating and fishing for the elusive dorado. We conclude the day by joining the Coopers and their friends for dinner at a local eatery. The dinner was great, the conversation interesting and educational and the entire evening spent in jovial company. Oh yes ... before dinner we spend time in the hotel pool sucking up on rum and cokes. Nothing beats the temperature and humidity as a dip in a pool ... which we have not done in years. It was a pleasant and gratifying day in San Carlos. That evening we hoped to get a good night sleep but the loud hum of the A/C kept us up most of the night. Bummer ... on vacation and sleep is lacking.

The next morning, after breakfast, we meet up with Ron Cooper (sans wife Linda) and head out to the marina. Preparations are made for a hard day's fishing but the weather is uncooperative. High winds are making the sea choppy and fishing will be at best iffy. We do all the prep work, are given instructions by Captain Ron and shove off into the wild. Ron's boat is seaworthy and a true fishing boat. We enter the open waters, prepare and set the 5 fishing rods and hope for the best. The boat ride is hard and rolling. For 3 ½ hours we troll and wait. We encounter a whale (not sure what species) and many pelicans. We also see "fish balls" that indicate predator fish underneath ... but no strikes on our lines. The wind changes and we are rolling and pitching in all directions. The decision is made to head back to the marina for fishing will be at its worst today. Along the way we encounter sea lions and many more pelicans. We tried but did not succeed. A nice boat ride but no fish. Bummer.



San Carlos deep-sea fishing

Lunch was at the marina ... more good conversation. We were invited to see the Cooper's lot in the foothills of San Carlos where they will be building their permanent home after leaving Las Cruces. Yes ... their lot has a magnificent view of San Carlos bay and surrounds. We wish them luck in their future home. That evening we did virtually nothing ... drive around to see other parts of San Carlos, drink more rum and cokes, swim in the pool and have dinner (forgot where, maybe in the room).

Time to leave San Carlos ... we drive north to Hermosillo on our way to Bahia Kino. Road is adequate and bumpy. Hermosillo is a large town (500,000 population). We shop at Wal-Mart, gas up and head west to the Sea of Cortez. The road to Kino is flat, rolling and need of major repaving. Garbage on both sides of the road is common and shade is hard to come across when its time to stop for lunch. This is orange and grape country. By 2PM we're in Bahia Kino and are looking for lodging. What we find is either depressing or expensive. Nuevo Kino is a long (6 mile) road with gringo homes lining both sides of the highway. Hotels are few (off season) and dingy as well as unsafe. Hotels in Old Kino are the worst and not worth the time or money. We settle for a hotel in Nuevo Kino that looks good on the outside but sad on the inside. Across the road from the beach. We check in and immediately head for the pool with our rum and cokes. Pool is old and grimy but adequate. Water is super chlorinated. We decide to head for the ocean to say we at least swam in salt water. Beach was OK, water was cool and salty and 30 minutes there was enough. Cleaning up in our room was testy. No hot water. By 7PM we left for Old Kino to find a place top eat. Located one on the beach that served freshly (we think) caught shrimp. Meal was adequate but pricey (by Mexican standards). They did not serve beer so Patty had to walk a block to a Tienda to buy some. Another example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid". Meal was tasty and filling but the ambiance was lacking. We were the only customers and probably made

their day. Drive through Old Kino back to the hotel revealed that this village was as poor as it can get. Mostly dirt roads, dirty dilapidated houses with garbage all over. Sad, but that's the reality. With no TV in the rooms, we spent the evening critiquing Mexican culture and quality of life. The more we talked the more we needed to drink more. We were awakened at 2AM by guests with kids making all manner of a racket. Another example ... "Mexico is a Land of the Stupid". Sleep was hard to come by.



Dee and Patty in Bahia Kino

Next morning ... last day ... we drive back up the road to buy some ironwood carvings. Nice Mexican ... some English ... good negotiator ... one price for gringos and locals. We stock up and head back to Hermosillo and turn left to go back to the USA.

Drive back to the border was uneventful ... road was very good and speed was excellent. At the border we turned in our papers, passed immigration and prayed for a fast rush through the US checkpoint. Were we in for a surprise. Approaching the US border we were confronted with a line of trucks entering customs that we could not see the booths. I do not know how or why but our two SUVs were heading north in the southbound lanes bucking approaching trucks trying to find our way into the auto lanes. We managed to enter back to the northbound lanes with virtually no room to spare. Cardiac city was on my mind. Stressful it was and not what we wanted to experience. The slow crawl to pass customs took 30 minutes (not bad) before we entered the US side and thanked the gods for our safe arrival. At this point the two SUVs went their separate ways ... Jim and Patty to the east and perhaps Tombstone and Bisbee while Dee and I went north to Tucson to visit the McCulloughs. Dinner with Neel and Priscilla was most delightful as it was great to talk English, eat American and see friendly faces. Our night at La Quinta Hotel made up for some of the inconveniences of Mexican hotels.

Among the many things we experienced in Mexico that made us call this country "The Land of the Stupid" is:

- ... Garbage is everywhere, even in big cities; people just trash their country
- ... Hotels (in the interior) are for the most part dirty, decaying and un-maintained
- ... Many hotels have a stench that can gag you, especially in the shower
- ... Hotel towels are like sandpaper
- ... Virtually all hotel plumbing is "golden" (rusty)
- ... Do not stay at a hotel unless it has 'secure parking'
- ... Mexican guests typically steal lights, fixtures, bedding, and towels from their rooms
- ... Most hotel locks do not work that well; chains are missing
- ... Most hotel lights do not work at all (no bulbs)
- ... Hot water is a rare commodity
- ... Expect sofa cushions for pillows in many hotels
- ... Topes (speed bumps) are a surprise that can destroy your car. They're everywhere.
- ... Tiendas (little shopping stores) are virtually no place to shop for staples
- ... Mexico has a two-tiered pricing structure – for gringos (tourists) and for locals
- ... Everything in Mexico is 'circa' (meaning – that's close enough)
- ... Mexican men are basically 'macho' oriented – arrogant and selfish
- ... Morality among most Mexican men is abysmal – mistresses and affairs are common (true - as viewed by the number of motels with 'curtained' parking spaces)
- ... My opinion – Mexican men will go to church in the morning, spend the afternoon with their mistress, beat their wife in the evening and steal your tires at night.
- ... Mexican boys are spoiled rotten. It is against 'machismo' to discipline a boy. No wonder they grow up to be self-indulging and self-centered.

- ... Theft is rampant in Mexico. Leave your car on the side of the road overnight and you will return the next morning to find your tires missing, even your door and seats.
- ... Majority of Mexicans do not believe in license plates for their cars. Mexican drivers are lunatics on the road and believe the road belongs to them exclusively.
- ... An unlocked car is an invitation to "help yourself"
- ... Ask a Mexican why things are as they are and they will most assuredly answer ...
"This is our country and we make our own rules."
- ... When building a house they will pour the concrete or build the wall first then chisel away for the plumbing or electrical. They cannot think one step ahead.
- ... Begging by young kids is pervasive. They are taught early to beg or steal. True!!!!
- ... Mexican Indians appear emotionless and submissive. They are the darkest skinned people I have encountered. Their physical and facial features are not at all pleasant. The women may wear colorful dress, but the men wear nothing but a folded napkin as a 'skirt. They are skinny to the bone and extremely short. Every Indian owns a dog but the dog is malnourished and one breath away from death. Every Indian owns a horse – equally malnourished and nothing but bones and hide. Not at all what we hear on TV ads that describe these people as "sensitive, quaint, proud and shy". We were immensely disappointed in what we encountered.
- ... Wildlife (such as deer) in Mexico is missing. The population has been decimated by the Indians over the centuries who kill anything that moves. Road kill, common elsewhere in the world, is unheard of here.
- ... Large, or even midsize, fish are rare in the lakes and streams. We saw Mexicans fish for, and keep, fish as small as 1.5 inches long. Elsewhere this would be considered bait ... in Mexico its lunch.
- ... Mexico is expensive to the tourist. The message at the border, upon entering Mexico, should read ... "Welcome to Mexico. Empty your pockets or we will do it for you."
- ... Mexican infrastructure is broken ... it is beyond repair due to graft and thievery
- ... Labor is so cheap in Mexico that in all the Wal-Mart stores we counted 5 employees for every customer.
- ... Mexico is a 3rd world country that can never catch up with the rest of the world.

If you ever decide to travel to Mexico stay in places that cater to foreign visitors ... like Acapulco, Mazatlan, Puerto Vallarta, etc. Keep you hand on your wallet - always. Park in

secure places only. Buy Mexican insurance if traveling by car. Do not leave your car open or unlocked. Do not ever pay the asked for price ... it is a 'gringo price'. True – do not drink the water (even good hotels tell you that).

Having said all that ... Dee and I enjoyed our travel to Copper Canyon and the other places because we are adventuresome and wanted to visit the Copper Canyon area. We heard many bad stories about Mexico but wanted to find out for ourselves. Many of these tales are true ... some more true than others. Mexico is not a safe place. Still, we would not have missed this opportunity. In spite of the many obstacles and shortcomings we were adaptable enough to make the best of this trip. Would we return – most likely not?

Best of all we traveled with Jim and Patty who were truly good troopers. They invited us along to share this adventure for which we are very thankful. We also found out that we were compatible in many ways. I believe we worked off each other, learned from each other and shared many similar traits on this trip. Good friends mean good travel.

Ed and Dee – survivors of a Mexican odyssey

Footnote:

Some of the readers may take the position that we are bigoted and anti-Mexicans. We are not – we're just very good observers. Jim lived in Central America (Guatemala) for 15 years. He met and married Patty there. He knows this class of people intimately. Jim guided and advised us but did not attempt to sway our thinking as to what we saw. The opinions in this e-mail are totally ours based on our personal experiences.

As a final confirmation of our views, listen to this ...

After we crossed the border back to the US and parted in Nogales, Jim and Patty decided not to travel to Tombstone but instead stayed in Willcox, Arizona on their return to Las Cruces. When Jim checked into Motel 6 in Willcox he casually mentioned that it was nice to stay in a hotel that had showerheads. The staff person at Motel 6 then related the hotel's experiences with many Mexican travelers who steal showerheads, light bulbs, lamp shades, and anything that is not glued or nailed down. It is not uncommon to have some Mexican leave the hotel with the bed cover in place only to have the maid learn later that all the bedding, including blankets, sheets and pillows, has been stolen.

End of story !!!!

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