

Acapulco's lazy lagoons

What better way to spend a sunny afternoon that floating up a lazy lagoon – with an unexpected facial to boot

By Habeeb Salloum

A few kilometres past Acapulco Airport, the beach at Barra Vieja looked deserted as our group of seven stepped out of our van at the mouth of Tres Palos Lagoon. Soon we were climbing into a boat moored on the sands just waiting for tourists. Wading through a few feet of water we climbed aboard to begin our sail up the lagoon.

Steering the boat was girl who looked like a 15-yearold.

“Would she be able to save us if we had a mishap and I can’t swim?” I thought to myself as we moved through the murky waters.

The spot where the first Tarzan movies were shot, the large lagoon – 14.5 km (9 mi) long and 5.8 km (3.6 mi) wide – is home to several species of fish and waterfowl.

I surveyed my surroundings. The lagoon was edged on both sides by dense greenery dominated by majestic palms. Storks, herons and other exotic birds were resting on the branches of mangroves and shrubs. Pelicans were swimming in the calm waters around our boat. Everyone seemed happy enjoying the totally ecological ambiance. It was a rustic scene waiting for an artist’s brush.

As we admired the lush vegetation and the diversity of birds, especially the storks flying then resting on the branches, the voice of our guide rang out. “These birds you see are storks. You know! I mean birds that bring babies!” Everyone snickered. Flamingos also sunned themselves at the water’s edge and we leisurely sailed past fishermen trying their luck.

Leaving the lagoon we slowly made our way through a swamp on one of the many rivulets that flow into it. We did this under the shade of mangrove trees whose roots, I thought, would at any moment scrape the bottom of our boat. The operator was skillful in her navigation and never once hit the mangrove roots.

Back in the shallow part of the Lagoon she shut off the motor, jumped into the murky waters and slowly began to gently push the boat as we enjoyed the cool breeze. After about 10 minutes she stopped and from the bottom of the lagoon scooped a large lump of black mud and rolled it into a ball. Smiling she called out, “Who wants a mud mask? It’s much better for beauty treatments than you will get in any spa!”

A brave young woman from our group jumped in the few feet of water saying: “I’ll try it!” Soon her face was mudcovered and she was back in the boat drying her mud mask in the sun. Like bees taking to honey, the other women, and even one man, began to put on mud masks. A short time later, after they washed off their dried masks, most of the women remarked their skin felt tighter and softer.

Actors, beauty queens and models have visited the lagoon to try the natural nutrient-filled mud that seems to tighten the skin. My fellow travellers were no different. After washing off the mud, the youngest woman in our group stood up and turning around she smiled at us saying: “Don’t I look like a model? After this mud-mask, I am sure I can compete with any woman in a beauty contest even though I’m just doing it for fun.”

“Even without the mud-mask she’s beautiful!” I mumbled to myself.

“I wish I had a plastic bag to take some of this mud back to Canada,” another women remarked as she waited for her mask to dry. Smiling, I handed her a plastic bag that I had brought with me to carry my bathing suit if I waded in the water. She filled it with the black mud. But how she would get it through customs, I had no idea.

We sailed back through the lagoon and three hours after beginning our journey were sitting in an open-air restaurant on the beach in Barra Vieja. Here, where the rushing salt water of the ocean and the fresh still waters of the lagoon meet, we were comfortable in a thatched-roofed, sand floored area with hammocks, chairs and tables.

It was secluded and it seemed we were the only people on the beach – a million miles away from the crowds and traffic of Acapulco. Soon we were dining on Empanadas, Sopas and, best of all, Pescado a la Talla, Acapulco's special fish dish – a spicy roasted fish, a freshly caught right from the Tres Palos Lagoon. I have prepared this dish several times at home and eaten it many times in Acapulco restaurants, but this was the most succulent version that I've ever tasted. And to top it off, the price was quite reasonable.

It was an excellent cap to our journey through the Tres Palos Lagoon.

In the words of one of my colleagues: “It was a relaxed and fulfilling day spent amid the best of what nature has to offer. I hope that this lagoon will not be caught in the boom of the 21st century. But I fear the real estate vultures are waiting.”

If you go:

Acapulco has an international airport and the new superhighway No 95, connects the resort to Mexico City, but the toll is sky high and it takes less than four hours driving.

The lagoon tour costs about US\$10 per person for about 90 minutes – depends on bargaining, or join the excursions offered by tour companies.

Getting around town is easy by taxi, bus – about 40 cents – horse-drawn carriage or rented autos. Small cars, fully insured with unlimited mileage, rent for about \$65 per day. It's easy to drive in Acapulco – drivers seem to obey the law.

Acapulco, called by some the “playground of the world.” offers breathtaking scenery, pristine beaches, deluxe accommodation and all types of sports, including four manicured 18-hole golf courses and one 9-hole course.

Acapulco offers a world of culinary delights. Besides the peoples' restaurants near the Zocalo offering fine dinners for around \$10, there are some 160 classy eating places like the Zibu serving the best in Mexican and international dishes.

For those historically inclined, a visit to the nearby Tehuacalco Archaeological Zone is fulfilling journey.

When you leave Mexico there is a 'Departure Tax' of about \$18.

Where to stay:

Acapulco has hotels to satisfy all tastes. In the old city, there are abodes that offer rooms at less than \$10 per night. At the upper level, there are luxury hotels like Las Brisas; the Fairmont Acapulco Princess Hotel (towering upward like a grand Aztec pyramid). For those who love history, Los Flamingos Hotel, made famous by Hollywood movie stars in the first half of the 20th century, is the place to stay; situated high on a cliff, it is cooled by the sea breeze and offers a view of spectacular sunsets.

Note: All prices quoted are in US dollars – about 15 pesos to a US dollar.

For further information:

In Canada contact the Mexican Tourism Board, 2 Bloor St. W., Ste 1502, Toronto, Ont. M4W 3E2, 416-925 0704 or 800-44 MEXICO, email: toronto@visitmexico.com and . In the U.S., 375 Park Ave., Floor 19, Ste 1905, New York, NY 10152, 212-308-2110, email: newyork@visitmexico.com.

Also, see www.acapulco.com for information and reservations. Telephone from the U.S. and Canada: 888-514- 2137; from México: 01-800-674-9434.

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