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WEEKEND ESCAPE: BAJA CALIFORNIA

The Casita Life in Todos Santos

Picture this: thatched roofs, mango smoothies and the sea

March 07, 1999 | HILLARY HAUSER | Hillary Hauser is a freelance writer based in Summerland

TODOS SANTOS, Mexico — It was sunset, and my friend Pam Alani and I had organized our drinks and some guacamole and chips, and moved to the outdoor palapa bar by the pool at Las Bougainvilleas. For four days we had this guest house enclave to ourselves. With the ocean booming in the distance, we sat under the shade of the thatched palapa and discussed the big day we'd had in town.

Only a few days earlier, Pam had called me from her home in Costa Mesa to say she was going to Todos Santos, the "Bohemian Baja" town 40 miles north of Cabo San Lucas. She wanted to take care of some details on the vacation home that she and her husband were building on property they bought there. Did I want to go?

Blink! I was there. Driving from the San Jose del Cabo airport 40 miles north to Todos Santos on Mexico 1, we had rolled into town with no idea where we were going to stay. Pam was well acquainted with the numerous little inns and hostleries of Todos Santos—the bed-and-breakfast places, the well-known Hotel California. This time, however, she aimed her car straight for her builder's house. Larry Walgren, an American surfer who visited Todos Santos in 1983 and never left, was home. He immediately called over to Las Bougainvilleas for us. So easily, so fortuitously . . . we stumbled into a Mexican home away from home.

Pam and I had taken a Friday morning Mexicana flight out of LAX to San Jose del Cabo for a round-trip price of \$240 each, a very nice deal, we thought, considering that we bought our tickets less than a week before we left. From the airport, a \$10 cab ride took us to the storage place where Pam keeps the family's dusty and trusty four-wheel-drive Suburban. Car rentals at the airport can be expensive (about \$70 per day), so I felt fortunate to be along on Pam's ride.

Located on the Otro Lado (other side) of Todos Santos in the upscale La Cachora district, Las Bougainvilleas is the brainchild of Pat Gerhardt and Dennis Glass, a friendly, outgoing couple who are transplants to Baja from Southern California. The property consists of a spacious main house where Pat and Dennis live and, at the opposite end of an azure swimming pool, a two-story casita. Behind this house, down the path behind tropical plantings, is a second honeymoon house—a spacious, thatch-roofed round casita with a platform bedroom, full kitchen, living room area and a bathroom in which the shower is an open slate-rock affair with floor-to-ceiling windows facing a private garden.

Each house is private. While we were there, a honeymooning couple from Boston arrived late one afternoon. After a brief introduction and a celebratory margarita toast to their new life together, we never saw them again. Any guest with a car can shop at the nearby markets and do all the cooking at home.

Pam and I had taken the two-story house, hidden behind pink stucco walls, within walking distance of the beach. It has a large, attractively furnished, tile-floored living room full kitchen, spacious bath and, upstairs, a loft-style bedroom with two beds. Glass doors lead out from the living room to a private, enclosed side patio furnished with dining table, benches and chairs.

Pam and I began our days with coffee made in our kitchen, and took a little time each morning by the pool for reading and writing. Then we walked the short pathway to La Cachora Beach, where the shoreline is wild, raw and pristine. In the distance, Punta Lobos juts out dramatically, forming a cove in which local fishermen launch their pangas each day through treacherous surf. Every afternoon we broke up our chores with a late lunch at Caffe Todos Santos, where we always ordered mango smoothies followed by a shared order of fish tacos (about \$8, including the smoothies), or curried chicken flautas (\$5) or a tostada (\$4).

For me, the best part of this short trip was getting to know Todos Santos, which has a town square, an ornate theater, a prominent church and streets alternatively paved and cobbled, and sometimes lighted. The streets leading out of town—to the residential districts where we were staying and where Pam is building her family home—are dirt and dust.

Everywhere you look it seems there's a new home being built of stucco, adobe or straw bales, all with thatched roofs. We visited the furniture/crafts store of Franco Gardella, an Italian from Zacatecas. He had just returned from San Miguel de Allende, where he bought pottery from local artists to sell in his store, Casa de Franco. Next door, Laguna Beach artist Jill Logan was setting up her gallery, where she now lives and paints full time.

One evening Pam and I made dinner reservations at the Santa Fe restaurant, which lures visitors all the way from Cabo because of its celebrated menu of Northern Italian dishes. We ordered skewered shrimp served with side plates of fresh, exotically prepared and perfectly undercooked vegetables. With margaritas and a shared salad, the bill came to about \$20 each, expensive by Todos Santos standards, but a fraction of what one pays for gourmet dining back home.

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Budget for Two

Air fares LAX-San

8/26/2014

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Jose del Cabo: \$480.00

Las Bougainvilleas, 3 nights: 375.00

Gas: 40.00

Dinner, Santa Fe: 40.00

Lunches, Caffe Todos Santos: 30.00

Groceries: 30.00

Taxi: 20.00

FINAL TAB: \$1,015.00

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