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Stroll Along the Malecon for a Taste of Mazatlan

Blog: [Hole In The Donut](#) - 4 March 2010

By: [Barbara Welbel](#)

Hundreds of years ago, Mazatlan was founded as a fishing village on the north bank of a natural inlet from the Sea of Cortez. Over time, Mazatlan grew northward from the inlet as the protected deep-water lagoon beyond the inlet attracted a commercial fishing fleet that now numbers in excess of 800 boats and provides much of the fresh shrimp and tuna consumed in Mexico each day. Although the port, one of the largest on the Pacific coast of Mexico, is today also utilized by cargo and cruise ships, the strength of its fishing industry allowed Mazatlan to escape the descent into a tourist based culture that has befallen so many of Mexico's other coastal cities.

After investigating [El Centro – the old town of Mazatlan](#) – the second best way to experience the everyday life of Mazatlencos is to stroll along the Malecon, a 6.7 kilometer long (about four miles) beach front promenade. I began my walking tour at Pescadero Beach (Fisherman's Beach), where scores of gaily painted wooden fishing boats rested on the beach. Every morning, fishermen gather on the beach just before dawn. They form crews

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of six or eight and help one another drag their simple boats across the sand and into the sea. By midday the boats are back with their fresh catch and the process is repeated in reverse; returning boats are dragged back onto land, the larger of them using a simple metal axle with two wheels, which is pushed into the water and gradually shoved under the boat, allowing the crew to leverage the weight of the vessel and shove it back into its allotted slot. I strolled along Pescadero Beach at midday, chatting up gnarled old fishermen with dark tans and faces deeply creased from too many years in the sun. What type of fish had they caught? “Dorado,” was the most common answer, although some showed me yellow-tail tuna and what appeared to be Red Snapper. The men nodded and smiled, demonstrating their talents at repairing nets and untangling fishing line. I shot a video of the final boat being dragged from the sea and asked one of the younger crew members what they had caught. “*Ah, mucho Dorado,*” he claimed. Lots of Dorado. The others laughed and shook their heads. “*Pero manana,*” he added. But tomorrow.

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Further south along the Malecon is a park, officially named Parque Glorieta Rodolfo Sanchez Taboada, but which the locals call “*El Clavadista,*” named for the cliff divers that perform here. Jumping from a high rocky promontory into a narrow channel of thrashing water that is no more than six feet deep, these divers must time their jump perfectly with the incoming waves. There are no signs at the park describing the dive performances and I never found it written up in any of the local tourist literature; I happened upon it quite by accident and initially stepped right over one of the young divers who was sprawled across the entryway to the tower, awaiting the next tour bus.

Eventually, from asking around I learned about the *clavadistas* and identified their ringleader, who offered to have one of his divers jump for the small sum of \$25. I cried poor mouth – not a lie – and instead spent an hour chatting with him about the art of cliff diving. These young men receive no pay for their performance and exist on tips alone, mostly from the tour

buses that arrive throughout the day, carrying cruise ship passengers on a three-hour tour of Mazatlan. When one of the buses pulled in, my new best friend motioned for me to stand at the edge of the cliff and ready my camcorder. At a nod from the *jefe* – the boss – one of the slouching young men stripped down to board shorts and climbed the tower. He stood for several moments at the top, shivering, stretching, and watching the waves roll in before stepping up onto the narrow rail and performing a perfect swan dive. I gave him \$20 pesos (slightly less than \$2 U.S.) and was on my way with effusive thanks to the *jefe*.

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A long curve brought me into Olas Altas, a lovely neighborhood of oceanfront hotels, restaurants, and shops, beyond which lies Mazatlan's historic old town, Art Museum, Archeological Museum, and Angela Peralta Theater. Although Mazatlan's best beaches are found farther north, in the touristy "Golden Zone," Olas Altas Beach is an enchanting crescent that glows pink in the rising and setting sun.



Olas Altas neighborhood along Mazatlan's Malecon



Olas Altas Beach and the Malecon



Paseo Centenario along the southern portion of Mazatlan's Malecon

Following a late lunch at El Cueva de Leon, where nothing is more than \$50 pesos (\$4 U.S.) and the fresh-caught seafood is delicious, I continued my stroll along the Malecon. The final stretch climbs through Paseo Centenario, with its stunning clifftop views, to the southernmost point where *El Faro* – Mazatlan's lighthouse – hunkers atop the conical hill that guards the harbor entrance. The dirt and rock path up the hill is well trod but steep; just when I thought I was nearing the top I came to 300 concrete steps that negotiated the steepest part of the trail. At a height of 157 meters above sea level, El Faro is considered to be the highest natural lighthouse in the world. Its light reaches 48 nautical miles and the views from the top are spectacular.

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The Malecon is best experienced on foot, however those who cannot or do not wish to walk can see its sights aboard a Pulmonia. Built on old Volkswagen chassis, these open-air carts are unique to Mazatlan, having

Volkswagen chassis, these open-air carts are unique to Mazatlan, having carried locals and visitors around the city since they first appeared in 1965.

Tags: central pacific coast , clavadistas , cliff divers , el centro , el faro , fishermen , lighthouse , malecon , Mazatlan , Mexico , Mexico travel , pescaderos , promenade , Travel

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