

## In Defence of Indolence

*Dolce far niente* – Italian for 'The sweetness of doing nothing.'

We drove up and over the rise to the saddle just below the crest of the hill. Our driver, Alejandro, stopped the car. He said nothing as he knew that we knew we were there. We climbed out of the old taxi and stood by the side of the road to admire the perfect view.

Below us lay the crescent bay. The calmed waters broke gently upon white sand. The boulder-walled mouth of a small river split the shore of the bay. In the middle of the *bahia*, a green-rounded island rookery dwarfed a smaller one into counterpoint, smaller but otherwise identical to its parent. Protected in the bight of the adjacent point, in the placid waters, a natural harbor protected the open *panga* boats with their bows pointed in unison to the open sea, their outboards randomly cocked off the transoms towards shore.

A green hill surround defended the cove. Larger hills behind morphed into an ever more distant blue by ridges ascended by mountains upon jungle-covered mountains trailing into mist. Of course, the sea was immense and promised adventure for the intrepid, for one could sail upon these waters to Tahiti or Scotland, changing course with only the pull on a sheet or tug of a tiller.

All we said was, "Where do we stay?"

The drive had taken us some two hours and 40 miles north of the hotel in Puerto Vallarta. In the year 1986 one still sought the services of a travel agent. Our agent booked us on a flight to Puerto Vallarta, not yet the megaresort it is today. There is a saying, "The only difference between Puerto Vallarta and Miami is in Miami, they speak Spanish." We had three weeks. The package deal came with five nights at the just-opened John Newcombe Tennis Center. We asked for a discount because we did not want to stay in Miami. But it was 'take it or leave it.' We despised those days. Every morning, we woke to 500 deck chairs reserved for the day by dog-eared novels.

After we checked out of the hotel, my wife, two young daughters, and I stood on the curb with our packed bags, waiting for a taxi. The driver loaded our gear into the trunk and we clambered in. The driver asked, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "We want to go where you go when you are on vacation."

- Do you want tranquility or action?
- Tranquility.
- I know just the place but it is far.
- The farther, the better.

The narrow two-lane road led north, away from the largest bay in the world, *Banderas*. The route crossed the bridge from Jalisco state to Nayarit. Because of a time change, the span is known locally as the 'longest bridge in the world.' The shoulderless macadam skirted inland from the military base at *Punta de Mita* (corner or tip of forced labor,) then rejoined the coast at *Sayulita* (from the Amerindian Huichol words 'saharika' or 'sayari,' which are thought to mean 'place of sun' or 'the place where the sun is born.') After the valley, the journey was over several hilly, road-twisting headlands down to

small villages and hamlets by the sea: *San Pancho*, *Punta Monterrey*, *Lo de Marcos*, *Montéon*, and the penultimate *Los Ayala*. The state marketing committee has renamed the entire coast Riviera Nayarit.

The bay we discovered when we reached the saddle of the hill above Los Ayala was *Bahía de Jaltemba*. The authentic Mexican village past the river's outlet was *La Peñita de Jaltemba*. La Peñita means 'the little rock' and refers to the island. Jaltemba in Nahuatl means 'place on the sand.' Before the outlet was the nascent *Rincón de Guayabitos*, a development drafted by U.S. urban planners and civil engineers as one of the few places foreigners could purchase land fronting on the ocean. Rincón de Guayabitos means 'nook or corner of the guayaba tree.' The yellow-green fruit guayaba is two to four inches in diameter and tastes like a strawberry. The people of the village had cultivated the fertile land in the small valley into guayaba plantations.

The deep ocean waters were off the shelf some twenty miles west. The ocean swells dissipated miles outside the bay. The big water held the large game fish – sail and other billfish. But the nearby sea nurtured *dorado* (mahi-mahi) served in fillet, *huachinango* (red snapper) sauteed whole in *mojo de aho* (garlic sauce,) and shrimp cooked in every imaginable way, and other seafood delicacies – even small *tiburón* (shark) cut into steaks.

The fish in the bay were so abundant two fishermen netted from the beach. One held an end on shore while the other paid out the rest of the reticule in a panga, in a grand arc, returning to the sand. Then began the half-hour haul of the net to retrieve the catch. No one could resist the thrill of the anticipation of the take. Even the few tourists in Guayabitos joined in the heave-ho. Conspicuous were the chefs and family cooks eager to be the first to choose their trophy for the dish of the day.

Sea and shorebirds feasted on the bounty. Gulls, terns, egrets, and herons plucked mollusks and small crabs from the sand. The brown pelicans were particularly numerous, steeply plunging into the bay. Lording over them all, the magnificent frigate birds soared and dived to dip their beaks for small prey. But mostly, they pestered other birds in flight until the victims regurgitated a part of their meal. These men-of-war seized the prize mid-air, tossed it high, and performed a barrel roll before recapturing the meal. Because they could.

We stayed at *Bungalows San Carlos*, and we rested there every year, sometimes twice a winter season. The two-story horseshoe-shaped hotel featured apartment accommodations open to the beach. A small kiddie pool and a larger one for adult swimming centered in the courtyard. It was a great place to be lazy.

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It was because of *El Pacífico*. The peaceful one. Balboa knew it when he named the great ocean. The calm waters whisper, "Why bother?" The bays and coves with their tranquil waters soothe and relax one to a pleasant torpor, a listlessness, indifference. The tranquility is infectious. We yielded to the serenity.

We did nothing. Well, I cannot say that we did absolutely nothing. We ate, we slept, we bathed. We walked the beach. We watched the birds. Sometimes, we even swam, the kids all day. We also read, a lot. But we mostly gazed upon the sea.

Occasionally, one of us would say, "Why don't we..."

We lived the life of the sun. We rose early with the sun and ate. Then, we did not do much of anything all day until we made a drink in the evening to calm us from our strenuous efforts at doing nothing. We were lazy and we were gloriously indolent all day.

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