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VILLA DEL PALMAR: The Number 1 Lovers' Valentine Surprise

Story by Anne Z. Cooke Photography by Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld

A week – or a long weekend, if time is short – at this sunny beach resort south of Loreto, on one of the Gulf of California's most spectacular blue bays, can be almost anything that you want to make it. Why? Because the Villa Del Palmar is the only resort on the bay, a blank slate for you to write on. There are no other resorts, hotels, restaurants or street stalls here; no souvenir shops, delivery trucks, no roads, no blaring music or noisy traffic. Flanked by the rugged Sierra de la Giganta range, the Villa Del Palmar is the first, the only – and one hopes the last resort – to occupy what is surely one of the Gulf of California's last virgin coastlines.

If you're an adventurer, bored when you sit too long, start your day with sunrise hike in the hills above the resort. Work out in the gym, or take yoga and "mindfulness" classes. Jog along the Villa Del Palmar's private quarter-mile of shoreline or work up a sweat digging for edible clams. Paddle board off the beach, sticking by the shore or crossing the bay itself. Or make a kayak expedition part of your daily routine.



Posied at high tide, the Villa Del Palmar bay water is perfect for kayaks and paddleboards, Loreto, Mexico.



Snorklers get ready to head for home, Loreto Bay National Marine Park, Baja California South, Mexico.

If you're a snorkeler or diver, this is heaven. Local outfitters offer daily guided excursions into the adjacent Loreto Bay National Marine Park, famed for its pristine waters, numerous dive sites and spectacular marine life. Years ago, when marine conservationist and scuba diver Jacques Cousteau first explored the region, unexpectedly discovering vast numbers of fish, whales, porpoises, sea birds and other marine species, he realized that he'd found unknown treasure, "the world's aquarium," he said.

Instrumental in the effort to save the Sea of Cortez, the "North American Galapagos," as he called it, Cousteau led the effort to ensure national and global environmental protection for the area. Most dive trips anchor near Isla Coronado, and at one or two of the other nearby islets – Carmen, Danzante, Montserrat and Santa Catalina – all famous for rocky coves, powdery white sand beaches and clear water with visibility between 25 and 50 feet. There's sport fishing, too, in deeper water, for species including dorado, sailfish, marlin, rooster fish and yellow-fin tuna.

However, if you're a chill-out kind of traveler, one who prefers solitude to beach vendors and rugged mountain scenery to tourist-town souvenirs, you can catch up on reading, float in one of several swimming pools, walk on the beach or sun in a lounge chair. The opportunities for sketching, water color painting, bird watching, photography and spa treatments are endless. Even dining is a festive part of the Villa Del Palmar experience. Three restaurant choices run from casual to fine dining menus, and all serve exceptional Mexican and continental cuisine. You can also cook and eat in your unit, all of which have fully equipped kitchens.

With just 181 units, all fully furnished, the resort never feels crowded. Sizes range from studios to three-bedroom villas and suites; some have balconies. The units are in the rental pool, or available for a share-purchase, as part of the resort's timeshare program. Each unit has a fully-equipped kitchen and dining area. And there are several pools, a deluxe spa, and a workout room. The Loreto area is generally warm, ranging from mild in the winter to intensely hot in the summer. Winter nights may be chilly, and depending on local currents, colder water temperatures.

All-inclusive rates include meals and most bar and pool drinks, or you can pay for items individually. The closest other restaurants and shopping are in the historic town of Loreto, about 30-40 minutes away by shuttle bus or taxi. For more mobility or to explore more widely, rent a car. For information visit www.villadelpalmarloreto.com.



Visitor Scott "El Gringo" Koenig never passes up a fresh taco, here at the Carnival in Loreto, Baja California South, Mexico.



C'mon in, the water's fine; another lazy day in paradise, at Villa Del Palmar's pool.