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# TIMES COLONIST

Saturday, March 30, 2019

Victoria, British Columbia



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## Boy, 4, mauled by cougar in Lake Cowichan area



Arm 'chewed up, but he's going to be OK,' mayor says

A four-year-old boy was mauled by a cougar in Lake Cowichan on Friday afternoon and was flown to hospital in Vancouver.

"His arm was chewed up, but he's going to be OK," said Lake Cowichan Mayor Rod Peters, who was at the scene.

He said the attack happened about 3:30 p.m.

Peters said conservation officers had shot two cougars in the area by about 6 p.m.

"They're still in the area with their dogs," he said. "They think there might be a third so they're just doing another sweep."

Peters saw one of the cougars being pulled out of the bushes.

"Not a very big cougar," he said. "Just a young one."

The attack was in a swampy area, part of a riparian zone off Point Ideal Drive, Peters said. — Jeff Bell, Times Colonist



**TRAVEL: Hola! Eat, eat >D1**  
**HOMES: The condo life >E1**

# TRAVEL

## CLASSIFIEDS

Real estate, autos, services, jobs >D5

Editor: Paul Smith > Telephone: 250-380-5240 > Email: features@timescolonist.com

■ RICK STEVES, D3



Bucerías's laid-back lifestyle, warm ocean and sandy beaches attract snowbirds from Canada.

### MEXICO

## Into the wonderland

Journey along unspoiled coast with quiet beaches leads to fine-dining experience

Story by ANNE Z. COOKE  
Photos by STEVE HAGGERTY  
Tribune News Service

SAN BLAS, Mexico

Does your favourite celebrity chef spring to mind when you're feeling peckish, chleeking through the channels and looking for a cooking show? No?

The name "Betty Vasquez" didn't ring my bell, either. But when I searched the internet for "Mexico famous chefs," I found her in San Blas, in the state of Nayarit, north of Puerto Vallarta. Later on, when Steve, my husband, suggested that we spend one of our Puerto Vallarta vacation days driving north along the Riviera Nayarit, I agreed, as long as it included dinner at Betty's, in San Blas.

Until then, I hadn't realized that the border between the two states, Jalisco and Nayarit, is just north of the airport, at the Rio (river) Ameco. Beyond the border you're in wonderland, on one of Mexico's last, unspoiled tropical coasts.

Still a bit off the grid, it's a glorious refuge for wildlife with hundreds of empty sand beaches, clear-water streams and mangrove swamps thick with birds, fish, crocodiles, small mammals and even lynx-like cats.

Driving there we'd pass a dozen little villages, from Nuevo Vallarta and Flamingos to Bucerías, Huancaxtle, Punta Mita, Sayulita, San Francisco, Lo de Marcos, Guayabitos and Chocola, before ever reaching San Blas.

But it wasn't that far, according to Sonia, the concierge at our hotel, the Miraval, in Nuevo Vallarta. "San Blas is a three-hour drive, lots of curves, but scenic," she said.

"Take your toothbrush and stay overnight. Then you'll have time to stop along the way in Bucerías, Sayulita and San Pancho. Everybody swims in the ocean and you can get lunch."

We left Puerto Vallarta early the next morning heading north on Highway 200, following the



Betty Vasquez, one of Mexico's famous chefs, is based in San Blas, about 160 kilometres north of Puerto Vallarta.

coastline, passing miles of sandy shores and rolling waves, thrilled to be seeing something new.

Steve, who'd done some research, wondered whether San Blas, now a sleepy farm town, was the same port of call where, from the 16th century on, Spain's treasure ships, returning from the Philippines, first made landfall, stopping to take on fresh water.

Later, in 1767, when Spain decided to push her empire north, as far as Alaska, San Blas became an official naval port. It was here that Father Junipero Serra, the Spanish priest, and a company of soldiers embarked, sailing north to build California's missions.

Our first stop, in Bucerías, was just long enough to explore the expansive arts and crafts street market, on Lazaro Cardenas Avenue, and for a 10-minute swim in the ocean, a block away. As we were leaving, two friendly Canadians in bathing suits, there for the winter season, stopped to

urge us to join them. "It's marvelous," they said. The next stop was the Four Seasons and the W Hotel, for a look at each resort's very special lobby art, including paintings, pottery and Huichol beaded figures and murals.

A few miles on we reached Sayulita, an art colony and one of Mexico's historic "magic towns." With galleries, shops, cafes, coffee shops, cottages and sheds crowded onto every buildable inch, its cobblestone lanes were as boisterous as they were colourful, joining mobs of shoppers, mostly Mexican vacationers, we found a beachside cafe and ordered iced tea.

Eventually we reached San Pancho — San Francisco, officially — a place I'll remember because we sat on the central plaza and watched the iguanas in a tree, then spotted a street artist who sold me a primitive painting. "My father paints all of these," he said, showing me a half-dozen



different scenes. "He makes the paper, too."

Coloured flags strung between the rooftops — a recent trend, it seems — led the way to the ocean and Las Palmas Restaurant on the beach, where we sat under an umbrella, watched the surfers and ordered lunch. Lingering over a platter with six kinds of tacos and a couple of pints, an hour ticked away before we noticed it. By the time we reached San Blas the sun was leaning westward, bathing the ocean in a silvery sheen.

As we circled the plaza, passing mothers pushing babies in strollers, old men playing checkers, and skinny kids chugging around the fountain, I caught a whiff of barbecued pork. A wave of nostalgia made my heart thump, and I felt like a fifth-grader again, traveling with my parents.

San Blas, I could see, wouldn't be on the average traveller's bucket list.

> See DELIGHTFUL, page D2

### TRAVEL NOTES

#### Florida's theme parks have new attractions

ORLANDO, Florida — Some Florida theme parks will be debuting new attractions this week.

SeaWorld Orlando on Wednesday is opening a Sesame Street land, while down the interstate, Legoland Florida in Winter Haven is debuting an area based on *The Lego Movie* and its sequel.

Both additions to central Florida's theme park landscape are aimed at young families. — The Associated Press

#### Dutch farmers plea: Mind the flowers

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Dutch farmers leave a message for tourists: Please don't trample upon our tulips.

Both fields close to the Netherlands' North Sea coast are a major tourist drawcard each spring as tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and other flowers bloom and transform the region into a patchwork of vibrant colours that provide the backdrop for many a holiday snap or Instagram post.

The visitors, however, increasingly are walking into fields, damaging flowers and the bulbs, so new signs are urging tourists to enjoy the view but to stay out of the fields. — The Associated Press

#### Disney parks go smoke-free

ORLANDO, Florida — Disney is eliminating smoking areas at its theme and water parks in California and Florida.

The company said in a statement on Thursday that smoking also won't be allowed at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex or Downtown Disney in California starting May 1. Smoking areas will be available outside the parks and those entertainment areas. Disney Springs in Florida and the company's hotels also will have smoking areas. — The Associated Press

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In recent years, novice surfers have made the Riviera Nayarit's once-empty beaches a popular destination.

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FROM PAGE D1

# Delightful boat tour caps dinner from first-rate chef

But simplicity is its charm. If you've seen Alfonso Cuarón's film *Roma*, a story of ordinary people coping with life in Mexico in the 1970s, you'll know what I mean.

As we pulled into the gas station, the attendant, a tall guy in cowboy boots, ambled over to man the pump.

"If you want to taste real Nayarit cooking," he said, spotting the tourist map on the dashboard, "try the Hotel Garza Canela, that way," he said, pointing toward the ocean. "They have a restaurant there, and a pool."

"Is that Betty Vasquez's restaurant?" He wasn't sure. Heading for the hotel, we booked a room for the night, and asked about the restaurant, the El Delfin.



Marco and his dad make a living selling primitive paintings for \$10 U.S. on the streets of San Francisco.

"It's right there, across the patio," Rosa, behind the desk, said as she pointed the way. Stepping outside, I realized that we were behind a wall in a colonial-style hacienda, with leafy trees shading a spacious patio and garden with several other buildings and a swimming pool.

"My father loved those trees," said the lady at the restaurant door, her brown hair twisted into a bun. "He spent hours out there, weeding and watering. Come in, I'm Betty," she said smiling.

I was so thrilled to meet her that I grinned like an idiot, but she shook hands and looked pleased.

"And you've come all this way, just to eat here?" she said. "I am so glad you're here," she said, showing us to a table.

"What do you think?" I asked Steve, after she'd donned an apron and disappeared into the kitchen. "Worth two stars?"

Twenty minutes later we compared our dinners.

"This is delicious," he said,

the town and ocean view. See the big white rock. The Huichol people call it Tatei Haramara, the sea goddess. Walk through the old church, La Nuestra Señera del Rosario, near the fort. Swim at Las Islitas beach, on Matanchen Bay. Bring bug spray. Don't miss the highlight, the naturalist-guided boat tour on Santiago River estuary in La Tovará National Park.

"You know," she said, pausing to think. "Why don't I show you around? I'm going out of town, but I'm free in the morning. We're filming the next season of *MasterChef Mexico* and I have to be there. I'm one of the show's three judges."

After our tour with Betty, we took the guided boat ride through La Tovará's estuary, with naturalist Francisco Garcia. Gliding from shadowy mangroves to sunlit freshwater pools, seeing rare birds and strange trees, was wonderful and enchanting.

Betty was right. The boat ride was almost as memorable as dinner at the El Delfin. And as always, the best adventure was the one I didn't plan.

sharing a taste of baked pork loin, with a fruit-and-chipotle sauce. "Is yours the curried shrimp?" he asked. "Am I tasting coconut milk?"

We were scanning the dessert menu when she returned with coffee, and since it was early and the restaurant was still empty, she sat down to talk.

"Tell me, will you be here long?" she said. "I loved Paris when I studied at the Cordon Bleu, but this is our family home. My roots are here. Do you have time to tour around? There's a lot to see."

I got out my pad and pen.

"What else should we see?" Scribbling, I made a list. Visit the fort on San Basilio hill. Look out at

**THE NITTY GRITTY**

Touring the Riviera Nayarit: Go to [rivieranayarit.com](http://rivieranayarit.com)

Hotel Garza Canela, [garzacanela.com](http://garzacanela.com): rooms or suites for up to six, \$99-\$275 US.

Entrées at El Delfin restaurant: \$10-\$25 US.

Driving from Puerto Vallarta: National Hwy 200 North to signs to Tepic, then State 16 to Zacoatitan and San Blas, from Puerto Vallarta: 156 km, three hours by car

from Mazatlan: 283 km

from Guadalajara: 261 km, three hours by car



Mexico's many arts and crafts include woven fabrics, for sale here in Bucerías, on Banderas Bay, north of Puerto Vallarta.

# Hawaii's hotels quietest since 2009

HONOLULU — Hawaii's hotel industry has reported February was its worst performance month in about a decade.

The Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported this week that the Hawaii Tourism Authority report used analytical data from the hotels.

One hospitality consultant said

a drop in occupancy is a carry-over from last year's volcanic eruption on Hawaii island and severe weather events.

The report said statewide occupancy fell nearly three percentage points to 83.4 per cent from February 2018 and revenue decreased nearly six per cent from a year ago to \$360 million US.

The report said the average daily room rate dipped more than one per cent to \$290 and revenue per available room declined more than four per cent to \$242.

The newspaper said the last time Hawaii's hotels reported similar performance levels was August 2009.

—The Associated Press

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF THE HAWAIIAN TOURISM AUTHORITY