

December 11, 2014

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Mexico's No. 1 Baja Beach Resort: The Villa del Palmar, South of Loreto

Posted: 12/10/2014 6:32 pm EST | Updated: 12/10/2014 6:59 pm EST

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If you're at your wits end, desperate to find a last-minute gift for your parents, your daughter or your club's long-serving president, treat him, her or them to a vacation at the Villa del Palmar resort, in Mexico, south of Loreto on the west coast of the Sea of Cortes.

Buy a card, sign it "for your Villa del Palmar vacation," and pop it in the mail. A week, or even a long weekend at this palm-shaded resort, alone on a secluded beach looking over a sky-blue bay, is the perfect gift for any occasion, from a significant birthday or anniversary, to Valentine's Day. I went there myself and would recommend it to anyone.

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If your friends, the lucky recipients, are the energetic type, a perfect day could start with a sunrise hike in the hills above the resort, a workout in the fitness center, or a wake-up yoga class. After breakfast -- omelets, French toast, fresh fruit and chilaquiles lead the menu -- they can jog along Villa del Palmar's private quarter-mile of shoreline or work up a sweat digging for edible clams.



By mid-morning it's time to try paddle boarding or kayaking off the beach, an ideal place to practice since the bay is protected from wind and waves. Though tidal changes raise and lower water levels in the Sea of Cortes, most waves are little more than ripples.



A dazzler for snorkelers and divers are the daily excursions beyond the bay, to other islands in the heart of the [Loreto Bay National Marine Park](#). When marine conservationist and scuba diver Jacques Cousteau first explored these waters, years ago, he discovered a little-known but pristine ecosystem, "the world's aquarium" he called it. Praising the Sea of Cortes as the "North American Galapagos," Cousteau's campaign to preserve the region was critical in securing national and world protection for this unique marine environment.

I signed up for an amazing boat trip cruising among the nearest outlying islands, followed by two hours snorkeling off [Isla Coronado](#), one of five of the closest islets -- others are Carmen, Danzante, Monserrat and Santa Catalina -- famous for rocky coves, powdery

white sand beaches and water visibility between 25 and 50 feet. Sport fishing is also available for some regulated species, including dorado, sailfish, marlin, rooster fish and yellow-fin tuna.

If your friends are chill-out beach people -- and who isn't, at least some of the time -- they'll find plenty of like-minded visitors who also prefer sunning, birding or sketching, and who choose solitude to beach vendors and rough mountain peaks to tourist-town souvenir shops. Flanked by the rugged Sierra de la Giganta range, the Villa del



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Palmar is the first and the only resort (and one hopes, the last) to occupy what is surely one of the Gulf of California's last virgin coastlines.

The property's deluxe lodging includes 181 furnished studios, one, two, and three-bedroom villas and suites, all with air conditioning and fully equipped kitchens. Some have covered balconies with spectacular bay and island views. (See the photo at the top of this article.) Units can be reserved by the day or week, as in a hotel, or purchased as part of the resort's timeshare program. The 4,447-acre property has three restaurants, four pools, a deluxe spa, a fully-equipped fitness center and a cozy private disco nearby.

Like most of Baja California Sur, the Loreto area is an arid environment, warm year around and with low vegetation. Summer days (low season) can be very hot, especially in mid-day, when a hat and sunscreen are



mandatory. Winter days are more temperate, with cooler nights. Water temperatures are generally mild, but can vary depending on the month and the currents.

All-inclusive rates include meals and most bar and pool drinks, or you can pay for items individually. The only other dining or shopping options are in the historic town of Loreto, Baja's oldest settled town, about 30-40 minutes away by shuttle bus or taxi. For more mobility, rent a car; the area is uniquely safe and secure. For more information, visit www.villadelpalmarloreto.com.



Photography provided courtesy of Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld

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