

Club Med Guaymas

GUAYMAS (Sonora State, Mexico) — August 28, 1984

The temperature was 116°F, the startlingly blue water of the Sea of Cortez was warm and inviting, and I was beginning my third day at the new Club Med complex near Guaymas.

Sitting by the Olympic size pool with a cold drink in hand (never mind what was in it), I thought back to the Las Vegas style show put on by the G.O.s (Gentil Organizers-staff) last night, which was followed by dancing by the pool, then a choice of a movie (Best Little Whorehouse in Texas) or a dusk to dawn disco at the annex beach restaurant.

A small grin appeared on my face as I tried to decide whether to try my hand at windsurfing, waterskiing or snorkeling. I had already ruled out tennis on one of the Club's 29 courts because of the temperature. Perhaps later this evening. I might also try aerobics, yoga, silk screen painting, water polo, volleyball, softball, horseback riding or sailing. Then again, I'll probably just sit here and soak up a few rays.

That's one of the many great things about Club Med — there is no pressure to participate in any of the varied and free activities.

As a travel agent, I thought I knew a lot about Club Med although I had never been to one. Well, as they say, there is no substitute for experience. I found out first hand that a Club Med vacation has something to offer everyone. My five days at the Club was one of the most enjoyable trips I have ever had. The friendliness of the G.O.s, the free and available facilities of the Club and the laid back atmosphere can't be adequately described in a brochure or afternoon training seminar.

We left Edmonton at 7:30 Saturday morning on Western Airlines bound for Salt Lake City, Phoenix and Tuscon where we changed to Aeromexico non-stop for Guaymas. Guaymas has a pretty red brick terminal that is just a trifle on the small side (we had to line up on the tarmac to get in). However, Customs and Immigration was friendly and efficient and we were soon boarding the chartered bus for the forty minute ride to the Club. Just a word about the bus; it was rather old and delapidated, and possible built before shock absorbers were invented, but it got us to the Club without breaking down. Besides, what's travel without a little adventure?

Nevertheless, we rounded a curve on the road and there in the distance was a sprawling, rust red complex of Navajo style buildings. Totally secluded on a lagoon by the Sea of Cortez sits Club Med. As we pulled up to the entranceway, a Mexican mariachi band was playing and what seemed to be the entire staff of the Club came out singing and clapping hands to welcome us.

We were whisked off to the auditorium, given a cold drink (greatly appreciated), and introduced to the G.O.s. A brief explanation of the Club Med philosophy (rest and relax — An Antidote to Civilization) was followed by an announcement of upcoming events. Then we were exposed to the Club's first step in helping break down your inhibitions — the Silly Sign Dance.

If you think I am going to try to describe this bit of insanity, well, forget it; you will just have to go to Club Med yourself and find out. It speaks well for the Club technique of getting people to unwind when I admit that by the third day even I was jumping up with the rest of the people, waving my arms and gesturing like an idiot when the music came on.

Our rooms were clean, comfortable, spacious and most importantly, air conditioned. Each unit had twin beds, a desk, toilet, sink, shower and lots of closet space. The rooms either overlooked the beautiful man-made lagoon or the Sea of Cortez.

After hurriedly unpacking, I changed into my swim suit (which is *de rigueur* attire at the Club) and headed straight for the beach. You can always pick out Albertans on vacation: we're the pasty white folk who run laughing and shrieking into the ocean in a hurry to swallow our share of salt water.

After a refreshing swim in the warm waters of the ocean, it was time to change for dinner (shorts, T-shirt and runners — that's about as formal as it gets). The dining room was separated into five or six sections; each section had six tables. There were jugs of white and red wine at each table. You served yourself at the enormous salad bar and fresh fruit stand but the entrees and desserts were brought to your table.

This was standard at dinner except for Italian Night which was buffet style (when I die, I want to come back as an Italian). Breakfast and lunch were buffet style dining. The selection was incredible and the quality of the food extremely good.

After dinner there was time for a few relaxing drinks at the bar before the show. A word about drinks at Club Med: you pay for them with plastic bar beads. There is no cash system at the Club. Upon arrival, you turn over your cash, credit cards, passport and airline tickets at the Bank. Then, until your second last day at the Club, you sign for bar beads, purchases at the boutique or the extra charges for horseback riding, shopping excursions, etc.

Your bill at the end of your stay must be settled by credit card or local currency only. Drinks are reasonable in price (a beer costs about \$1.75) but when you're not forking out cash each time, it can get out of hand. We heard about two fellows from Toronto who ran up a tab of \$600.00 after a week only to discover they had not brought enough money with them. The matter was finally resolved when they sheepishly phoned home (collect) and had Mom wire the money down.

Around 10:00 pm the show started in the auditorium. One night it was a musical review performed by the G.O.s. It was very good and a couple of the entertainers could qualify for any musical dance troupe in New York or London (in my humble opinion). The show lasted about an hour and then the evening really began. Dancing by the pool, a movie or a disco that can and often does run until dawn (so I heard).

Club Med Guaymas has two smaller restaurants besides the main dining room. The one by the tennis courts is open for breakfast from 7:00 am to 11:30 am. The beach restaurant has tables for two or four and can be reserved for dinner. Here the menu is different from the main dining hall and is usually a special dish prepared by the head chef just for that evening. It is quiet, more intimate and a nice change of pace.

Instead of a show for the third night, it was the start of the Crazy Olympics. Two teams were organized from the G.M.s (Gentil Members-guests) and a series of bizarre events were staged. These included relay races on sailboards and paddleboat races using straw brooms as paddles. Cheering them on were those of us 'too shy to show off our athletic prowess. The contestants ranged in age from 7 to 47 years old, which just goes to prove you're never too young or too old for Club Med.

The Crazy Olympics ended the fourth night with the G.M. show. The Red and White teams staged a series of comedy skits and song & dance acts to compete for the cheers of the audience. It was hilarious and brought the house down. To be honest, I can't remember which team won the Olympics. It really wasn't important because everyone was having too good a time.

On the fourth morning, a group of us took the Club Med half day shopping tour into Guaymas. Although our escort tried to inform us about the history and culture of Sonora State, it was difficult to hear his commentary in the

ramshackle bus. We did, however, hear him recommend a certain sea shell shop (several times) that the bus conveniently parked near.

Shopping in Guaymas proved disappointing to us as few shopkeepers spoke English and the selection was extremely limited. For example, we could not find stores specializing in Mexican art, handicrafts or, surprisingly, silver (although Sonora is noted for its silver mining).

Those who wish to really see Guaymas would be advised to hire a taxi to take them into the city (check with the Club Tour Desk about booking a cab and approximate fares into town). A cautionary note: take U.S. dollars or travellers cheques with you into Guaymas. None of the banks will change Canadian dollars and only one bank claimed to have the facilities for changing Canadian travellers cheques.

As the morning of our fifth day broke, it was a pretty depressed group of travel agents who gathered for breakfast. In just a few hours we were leaving to return home. After breakfast, a few of us took a long last walk around the complex and then headed for the pool for a farewell swim and to try to get in some power-tanning.

All too soon we were gathered at the front entrance ready to board the collection of vans and taxis that would take us to the airport. It was an emotional scene as we shook hands with Michel (the Chef de Village), Mopps (Head of Sports) and a number of other G.O.s who had come to bid us adieu. How can you adequately thank someone who treats you more as an honored guest than a paying customer? We shook hands, hugged and murmured "Merci Bien" and were on our way.

After a brief stopover in Tuscon (long enough to down a few Coors), and a change of planes in Los Angeles, we landed in Edmonton just after midnight — to a temperature of 8°C. I knew we were home.

Tips on staying at Club Med:

- There are no keys to worry about because your room can only be locked from the inside — hence the reason for depositing your money and valuables at the bank upon arrival.
- Take along a beach towel. They are not supplied by the Club.
- If you are an avid tennis player, bring your own tennis balls. Balls are provided only for lessons. Tennis racquets are free of charge and can be signed out for your entire stay.
- If you are planning on doing any horseback riding (and I recommend the two hour evening ride), bring a pair of long pants with you. Boots, chaps and hats or helmets are provided. Horseback riding, golf at a nearby course and arts & crafts are the only activities that there are extra charges for.
- Unless you are on one of Club Med's charter packages, remember that there is a 1600.00 peso departure tax that must be paid in local currency at the airport. Be sure to keep some pesos aside for this.
- Take a good sunscreen lotion with you. Like Hawaii, the Mexican sun is powerful and even on hazy days you can get a severe sunburn.
- Canadian citizens need to present either a passport, birth certificate or citizenship card at Mexican Customs. You also need a Mexican Tourist Card which can be obtained from your travel agent or the delivering airline.

Keep in mind, at Club Med you are there to enjoy yourself. The rules are few, the pleasures are many and the experience will be long remembered.

David Ward is Assistant Manager and Senior Travel Consultant at Edmonton Travel. He has travelled extensively and he visited Club Med Guaymas during August of this year.

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