



Chris Leigh, men's finalist

Bahías de Huatulco

by David Simmonds

It was September, a perfect weather month in San Diego when the tourists have returned to their less desirable hometowns, leaving the beaches and freeways to us wise enough to reside here, when I got an email inviting me on a press trip to Huatulco on Oaxaca's southern coast to cover a half-marathon in November. My first question was: "What's a half-marathon? Real short strong guys?" Ignoring my sarcasm, I was informed that Huatulco was hosting the event for the fourth consecutive year and that world-class male and female athletes would be competing in a 1.2 mile ocean swim, 56 mile bike ride, and a 13.1 mile run in oppressive heat and humidity that would liquefy the cerebral cortex in mere mortals. "Sounds like fun...any cold beer down there?" Assured that beer and AC would be amply provided, I immediately saw the opportunity to lengthen my summer by a

week by enthusiastically signing on for the trip. It proved to be a very wise decision, notwithstanding a scarcity of muscle-bound midgets.

In 1974 Mexico's National Trust Fund for Tourism Development (FONATUR) was formed to oversee and plan tourism projects in specific areas of Mexico, thereby raising the population's standard of living and encouraging foreign investment. The five original sites for development were Cancun, Ixtapa, Loreto, Los Cabos and Huatulco. Most observers would gauge the success of this plan by the number of hotel rooms that have resulted and the visitor traffic. By these measures, Cancun has been an enormous victory with Los Cabos a distant second, followed by Ixtapa, Huatulco and Loreto. Not surprisingly, I would reverse the order, based on my theory that "smaller is better," at least when evaluating places I like to hang.

Huatulco, with just 2,300 hotel rooms, was originally planned to accommodate ten times that many, but it just never took off when the demand wasn't there. Even though they have an airport that can handle large volumes, not many airlines fly in. Thankfully, the developers and FONATUR didn't build-out all at once, and when they saw that it was going to be a tough sell, they, and the times, decided that creating an environmentally friendly resort would be a wise move. And that is what we have today, a tropical, in many ways stunning, coastal resort with the daily pace of an indigenous village. The local building ordinance allows for no building to be over six stories and all



Museo Rodolfo Morales, Ocotlan, Oaxaca

by Lynne Doyle

Lynne Doyle is a longtime **Mexico File** subscriber and contributing editor from Maine. The object of the *Las Joyas de Mexico* feature is to highlight for MF readers some of the lesser-known but most rewarding of Mexico's geographic, human and artistic treasures. Lynne can be contacted at LinfordD@aol.com.

About half an hour south of Ciudad Oaxaca (or maybe forty-five minutes, depending on your driver), on Highway 175 is the market town of Ocotlan. Primarily known as the home of the Aguilar sisters (potters famous for their small red clay figures), Ocotlan was also the home of noted Oaxaqueno painter Rodolfo Morales, who passed away in 2001. Morales was a remarkable artist, but is remembered most in his home town for his very proactive activities in the economic improvement of Ocotlan.

Just past the workshops of the Aguilars on the right side of the highway is Morales' home. As he prospered as an artist, Morales sank most of his money into the town he lived in, but his home is nothing to sneeze at. As he was unmarried, the home was left to his family members jointly, and in his spirit, they have opened it to the public. I

Continued on page 2

Continued on page 4

I	N	S	I	D	E
	Más o Menos	2			
	Honduran Idyll	6			
	About Mexico	8			



The most popular political figure in Mexico, Mexico City's PRD party populist mayor, Manuel López Obrador, has been targeted by the other two political parties to prevent him from running in the presidential election in 2006. By Mexican constitutional law, high office-holders are immune from prosecution. But a recent legislative panel voted 3-1 to recommend that Obrador's immunity from prosecution be removed. There are enough votes in the House of Congress, where no party holds a majority of seats, to lift the immunity.

The charge involves an incident several years old when a hospital was approved to be built in a poor section of Mexico City, financed by the World Bank and the Inter-America Development Bank to the tune of \$44.5 million. The city agreed to build access roads to the new hospital in 1998. The then Mexico City mayor, Rosario Robles, could not reach an agreement with a land owner who was demanding too much money for the road access to be built over his property. The city then expropriated the land, and the land owner sued to stop construction on the day before Obrador took office, citing that he was being denied access to his land. Construction ceased, but the land owner later claimed that the equipment wasn't removed in a timely manner, still claiming his access was impeded. By now, President Fox got involved, claiming that Obrador was responsible for the delay. And for this he might be prosecuted in Federal court, making him ineligible to run for president.

The popular Obrador has threatened to call for civil disobedience if the charges against him continue, claiming that involvement by the Feds in this small matter is a clear sign of a conspiracy to prevent him from becoming president. It will be worth watching this unfold for the next few months, as it is widely believed that the Bush administration is strongly opposed to Obrador, who has made it clear that Pemex, the government oil giant, will never sell off any portion to foreign concerns. The old adage of "follow the money" should now be replaced by "follow the oil." Mexico has it, and the U.S. wants it. That's the way I see it.

Huatulco *Continued*



A wide view of Huatulco Bay

rooftops must be red tile. All of the locals in the tourist industry that I talked to were very proud and in support of the low-key plans for the area, quite sure that another Cancun is not in the making.

Prior to 1982 the Bays of Huatulco were mostly uninhabited with locals eking out a living by farming and fishing, much as they did when the Spaniards arrived in the early 16th century. For a brief period from 1540 to 1560 the area served as the major port between New Spain and Peru, eventually moving up the coast to Acapulco where the deep water bay proved to be more accommodating. The many bays and coves of Huatulco provided logistic havens for pirates Thomas Cavendish and Francis Drake, resulting in orders from Spain to destroy the primary port in 1616. Not much changed for the next 375 years, about the time coastal highway 200 was extended past Puerto Angel to the west, into the undeveloped coast. Soon, the government began displacing the local farmers inland a few miles into the Sierra Madre. A new town was conceived and born, Crucecita, on Bahía Chahué to house the construction workers, support service personnel and hotel workers who would be necessary for FONATUR's next tourist creation. Now numbering a population of 10,000, Crucecita reminds me of a small south Florida town, well-kept and clean, but with very few cars to disrupt the calm and quiet. Just to the west is Bahía de Santa Cruz, home to the boat harbor, followed by three undeveloped bays accessible only by boat or dirt trails, Bahía Organo, Bahía El Maguey and Bahía Cacaluta. These are followed westerly by Bahía Chachacual, and Bahía San Agustín. East of Chahué is Bahía Tangolunda, the major hotel zone, and then Bahía Conejos. Those are the nine, spectacular bays that comprise Bahías



Another view of Huatulco Bay

de Huatulco, measuring 25 miles from east to west.

The Half Ironman

Upon my arrival for the event, I was surprised to learn that nearly 250 participants from around the world pay



their way (unless they have a sponsor) to test their endurance in what is widely acknowledged as one of the toughest courses on the circuit. The triathlon had moved from May the previous year due to temperatures topping 100 degrees, to November, when the heat topped out at about 87 degrees. A major draw is the visual beauty of the area, presumably diminishing the effects of pushing the body to levels of exhaustion that would fell a yak. For most of the athletes, the goal is clearly to finish, content in the accomplishment. Once the race begins it is evident that there are just a handful of the participants who are trained and able to compete for the top prize. The race times separating the elite professionals from the amateurs are considerable. The Pro Purse totals \$25,000, with \$12,500 allotted for each gender. First place grabs \$5,000 with the remainder divided by the next

Continued on page 3



Jessie emerges from the water



Jessie Stensland, cooling off

four finishers. Attaining personal wealth is not a major, or realistic, motivating factor, although product endorsements are available to the top dogs.

At the pre-race dinner banquet, hosted by the Camino Real Hotel, I met Jessi Stensland, a New Jersey native who now lives and trains in Carlsbad, California. A young Kim Basinger look-alike, the ripped, 28 year-old is a magna cum laude graduate of George Washington University where she excelled in Division 1 swim competitions. Upon graduation, Jessie began triathlon training, winning her first event one year later at the St. Kitts International Triathlon. As we shared a dinner table with several others, Jessi confidently predicted a victory the following day, her first time to compete at this grueling distance. The table clinked margarita glasses and wished her luck, confident that a more experienced competitor would prevail.

Early the next morning all of the athletes were facing the ocean, male and female, awaiting the signal to start the 1.2 mile swim out to a distant buoy and back, fighting a slight chop and ocean currents. It is an amazing sight to see 500 arms churning in unison, the placid sea turned into a salty washing machine. Any doubts about Jessie's earlier prediction were quickly dispelled as she was the 6th overall to exit the ocean, and by a long

margin, the first woman. She appeared to be barely breathing as she sprinted off to her bicycle for the next leg., a 56-mile hilly, winding course that separates the contenders from the pretenders. Jessie increased her lead on the bike, with *only* a 13.1 mile run to go – just as the blazing sun was at full-furnace force and the spectators were scurrying for shade and something cold to drink. I think I noticed a trace of sweat on her at this point. Had she exhausted her reserves, failing to properly pace herself due to inexperience? Her first place finish for women, tenth overall, with a time of 5:05:49, proved her prediction of victory to be right on point. The second place winner



The bicycle portion of the event

was Kimberly Hager 16 minutes later, with Mexican 19-year-old Circe Saucedo finishing third with a time of 5:29:34.

Australian Chris Leigh was the men's champion, winning for the 8th time in the 10 event season for this circuit, with a second-ever best time at this venue of 4:13:27. Michael Lovato from the United States crossed the line 2nd, four minutes later, with New Zealand's Bryan Rhodes filling out the winner's podium with a time of 4:19:13. Mexican men boasted 5 of the top 9 finishers, a well deserved source of pride for the local hosts.

That night, many of the pro athletes met at a local disco to celebrate. The bar was equipped with a huge sound system and a stage in front of a huge aquarium housing a variety of tropical fish. Not being a big disco fan, I left after a couple of beers, but the next morning I heard that a few of the top marathoners displayed the passion that propels them to insanely train by stripping



The winner, Chris Leigh being interviewed by Telemundo

down to their skivvies and plunging into the aquarium. Somehow I think the Aussie might have been the lead spirit in that decision. Huatulco will host the event again this year in November, although the exact dates have not yet been announced.

Other Reasons to Go

So, is there anything to do if you don't go for the Half-Ironman? Although a bit sleepy compared to the more popular beach resorts, Huatulco offers an atmosphere for you to be as lethargic or active as you like. The beaches are as fine as any in Mexico, with the many bays providing safe swimming and world-class diving. There are coral reefs and steep canyons that house abundant marine life. The reefs haven't had the traffic and resulting destruction that you find at many Caribbean dive sites, and sport-fishing, if not as stellar as at Los Cabos in Baja California, is still very good. You can spend your days touring the bays by boat, mountain biking through lush hills, horseback riding, bird watching, white-water rafting in the Copalita River or visiting the nearby coffee plantations for a taste of "Pluma," Mexico's best coffee.

There is also a seldom used golf course, nestled in the coastal hills and extending down to an ocean green. It is not in great shape, but not bad either. You can play 18 with cart for around \$60.00.

Continued on page 5



From the room on the second floor dedicated to the life of Roldolfo Morales, this is my favorite photograph of the artist with his dog. A renowned animal lover, even now four years after his death, some of his surviving pets are cared for at Morales' home, several blocks away from the museum.

was there during Day of the Dead (a great time to be anywhere in Oaxaca), so the house was decorated accordingly and there was a great deal of cooking going on in the originally-equipped kitchen. Our driver dropped us at the door, telling us to “just go in” – one big problem in Ocotlan is finding some place to park – so we entered the open door and found ourselves in a very large, jungle-like courtyard. Constructed in a traditional Mexican manner, this home – while understated in furnishings – is extremely large and filled to overflowing with both fine and folk art. It is built in a square with the courtyard in the center surrounded by a portico, off of which are all of the home’s rooms. Fronting the street are the public



salons; down the right side are various private bedrooms and studios; and down the left side are the dining areas (indoors and outdoors), kitchen, and laundries. The back side opens onto a lovely patio and gardens. The second floor is not open to the public.

One wonderful little aside to Morales’s personal home is a large cage containing his parrots, one of which appears to be fluent in Spanish. When we first entered, we thought a human was speaking to us, as Pepe asked us questions and responded to our answers. However, we never saw anyone outside of the kitchen, and eventually found the cage in one of the back corners of the courtyard. While talking to the parrot was entertaining, to say the least, I felt sad for him. It is well-known that parrots often outlive their owners, and this guy in particular seemed lonely and starved for company, yelling after us long after we were out of sight.

As well as being a rewarding glimpse into the personal life of one of Oaxaca’s favorite sons, this house is also a great example of typical Mexican architecture. It is not, however, out of a magazine. It does have lovely art and there are fresh flowers

A view of the kitchen at the Ocotlan home of Rudolfo Morales including the impressive collection of Mexican pottery on the wall.



One of the many courtyards and a view of the cupola of the former convent that is now Museo Rodolfo Morales. Thanks to the forethought and generosity of Ocotlan’s famous son, the abandoned convent is now a painstakingly restored and beautiful tribute to the man and to the best of both the fine and the folk art tradition of the region.



Day of the Dead Altar. The Day of the Dead altar in tribute to Morales at his home during the festival of 2004. Traditionally it stands at the entrance to Morales’ home on Highway 275 in Ocotlan.

all over the place all the time (or so I was told), but this is a lived-in home – which, to me, made this an all the more valuable experience.

A little further down the highway is Ocotlan’s zocalo, surrounded by government buildings, shops and market stalls. On the

opposite side and corner from where the highway enters is the one-time convent connected to Ocotlan’s parish church. As it had not been in use for many years, shortly before his death Rodolfo Morales set about converting this convent into a regional museum without eliminating the remains of its original Dominican

décor. He cleaned up the grounds, repaired the basic structure (the majority of which remains in its original state) and added lighting, bathrooms and a small lunchroom. He then proceeded to gather an outstanding collection of religious, historic and fine art, as well as some older folk art items from famous local artists. He also donated some of his own work, as well as creating several



The first room that you enter as you come into the museum. During Day of the Dead, the tribute offrenda is placed in this room, and donations are accepted here. Note the remains of the original Dominican frescos decorating the walls – for the most part, the walls are original with a few repairs here and there, as are the frescos. The niches originally containing religious statuary now are home to various examples of pottery figurines contributed by some of the most famous artists of Oaxaca. Through the arch can be found a scale model of the entire convent, helpful to guests in finding their way around.

murals. It was during this acquisition period that Morales unexpectedly passed away, so the people working with him on the museum named it after him and added a room in tribute to him. This room contains some of his work and personal possessions, as well as a wonderful series of black and white photographs depicting his life. To the grounds of the museum that honors him, Morales added specimen palms and other notable Oaxacan plant life, as well as stone and iron benches. A mere fifty feet from the chaos and bustle of Ocotlan's markets, this spot is a tranquil, quiet oasis – warm, peaceful and a beautiful tribute to the man whose art was magnificent, and whose generous heart was even more so. The museum is not well-known (we were unaware of its existence until the driver taking us to shop at the Aguilers told us we should not miss seeing it), and therefore is not crowded, and when we were there, we were charged no admission fee (although I understand there is a minimal donation requested now). While Ocotlan is not one of my favorite places – mostly because of the crowds and noise – a trip to this museum is well worth the trouble of getting to it. It is almost impossible to park anywhere around the zocalo, especially on market days, so either a taxi or a private driver is suggested. No vehicles can get anywhere near the museum – a walk across the zocalo is necessary to reach the entrance – but to spend an hour or so walking around enjoying its history and spectacular art is, in my view, one of the high points of any trip to Oaxaca.



Huatulco *Continued*



Chris Leigh and the finalists in the mens event on the podium

Most of the major hotel properties are in Tangolunda Bay, with just eight properties nicely spaced around the perimeter. The most impressive, and most expensive, is the Quinta Real, perched on a hill overlooking the mouth of the bay. With only 28 suites, this blend of Moorish and Mexican architecture is a perfect splurge choice. The Camino Real Zaashila, the Gala Resort, and Las Brisas are other good options, all offering fine accommodations for reasonable prices. Nowhere in Huatulco will you be fighting the crowds or hiding behind a book to avoid time-share and trinket salesmen. And if you want to get a little crazy there is always the disco where you might find a

A grand view from the balcony at Quinta Real



drunken marathoner aquarium-swimming late at night, in training for the next big event.

Huatulco Information

Luxury

Quinta Real

Tel. Mexico 01-800-508-7923. U.S. and Canada 1-800-728-9098. Paseo Benito Juárez Lote 2, Bahías de Huatulco, Oaxaca, Mexico 70989. email ventas-hux@quinta-real.com. www.quintareal.com. Serene luxury, 28 suites, many with private pools, beach club, tennis court, 2 swimming pools, gourmet restaurant.

Camino Real Zaashila Tel Mexico: (011 52 958) 581- 0460, U.S. 1-800 7 CAMINO Fax Mexico: (011 52 958) 581-04 61 Blvd. Benito Juárez No. 5, Bahía de Tangolunda, Bahías de Huatulco, Oaxaca 70989 email zaa@caminoreal.com http://www.caminoreal.com/zaashila_i/index.html

Large, tropical setting, low-rise with just 128 rooms. **120 meter** pool faces the bay. A 400 meter beach private beach is the best in Tangolunda.



The golf course at Tangolunda

Gala Resort Huatulco

Tel: Mexico (011 52 958) 583-0400, Fax (01152 958) 581-0220. Blvd. Benito Juarez # 4, Bahía de Huatulco, Oaxaca 70989. email: reservhux@galaresorts.com.mx

<http://www.gala-resort-huatulco.com/> All-Inclusive resort. Five swimming pools, three lighted tennis courts, 300 rooms, four restaurants on safe-swimming, sand beach.



The view from the balcony of Gala Resort with its fine beach

Budget

Hotel Villablanca

Tel Mexico 01 800 712 7757, Tel U.S. 1-888-844-7429. Blvd. Benito Juarez and Esquina Zapoteco, Bahía de Huatulco, Oaxaca 70989. email hotelvillablanca@prodigy.net.mx www.hotelesvillablanca.com.mx 40 room hotel a short walk to the ocean, AC, Cable TV, excellent bar and restaurant, nice pool area

Hotel Castillo

Tel Mexico: (01152 958) 587-0051.

Continued on page 8



Islena Plane to Roatan

A Honduran Idyll

by Gale Randall

photos by Kim Randall

Gale Randall is a frequent contributor to the Mexico File. She lives in Palo Alto, California.

We're flying into the San Pedro Sula Airport, en route from Miami. The seatmate to my right, a blond North American, has pulled out a copy of Isabel Allende's memoir, *Paula*, and we begin discussing how much we enjoy reading Allende. She suggests I also try Gioconda Belli's, *The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War*, about Belli's native Nicaragua. It turns out my seatmate is a Peace Corps volunteer working out of Copan Ruinas, our first Honduran destination. She volunteers that her Peace Corps project has entailed working with a group of Mayan Indians on small business development, that she's enjoyed living in Copan and feels safe there. This friendly encounter turns out to be fairly typical of all our encounters in Honduras.



Copan taxi, ready to assist you

The Honduran trip has come about as a kind of compromise between my daughter and myself. Kim is addicted to diving and wants to dive off of Roatan, one of Honduras' lovely Bay Islands. I'm nutty about ruins and antiquities, so visiting Copan is my goal. We decide to spend a few days at Copan and the remainder of the week on Roatan. We arrive in San Pedro too late for the Hedman Alas

afternoon bus to Copan, so are met at the airport by Hector Cueva, owner of Trifunio Tours (www.copanhonduras.org), who has set up our entire stay in Copan. The 2½ hour drive out to Copan Ruinas takes us through intensely green mountainous country dotted by cornfields and banana plantations, cattle ranches and small hamlets. En route we pass through a colorful village funeral procession and just miss barreling into a herd of slow-moving cattle.

The colonial town of Copan Ruinas, nestled in coffee growing country and close to the Guatemalan border, turns out to be adorable – it's just one kilometer up the hill from the actual Copan ruins and reminds me a bit of Oaxaca. Hector points out an internet café up the street from our hotel and deposits us at Don Udo's, our digs for the night. A beautiful small colonial hotel centered around a grassy courtyard, Don Udo's (www.donudos.com) is just one year old, comes highly recommended and is owned by a Dutchman! For our one evening in Copan we had planned to attend an authentic Mayan dinner at Hacienda San Lucas (www.haciendasanlucas.com), an eco lodge just outside of town, but for some quirky reason because it's a primary election day, the inn has been closed, so no Mayan meal. What a disappointment! But the food at Don Udo's turns out to be quite good.



Hotel Don Udo's, Copan Ruinas

The next morning Hector picks us up at Don Udo's and takes us down to the ruins where he hands us over to Fredy, our guide at the archaeological park. A UNESCO World Heritage Site and often called the Athens of the Mayan World, Copan exhibits strong Olmec influences and is noted for its striking sculptures and stelae. Believed inhabited some 2,000 years B.C. and ruled by a dynasty of warrior / builders, Copan's classic period lasted just a few hundred years, from 465 to 800 A.D. The archaeological park is an



Hotel Don Udo's, Copan Ruinas

impressive place – lovely in a leafy kind of way and well run. At the entrance we spot a very tame flock of brilliant macaws perched on a fence and of course have to photograph them. After a long walk down a shady path we climb up to a group of buildings known as the Acropolis. We then move on to the Eastern Court, a three-sided building with courtyard and an intriguing jaguar sculpture set into one of the buildings. Fredy points out the entrance



The Acropolis, Copan Ruins

to an excavation area housing the famous Rosalila temple which was completely covered over by another pyramid and discovered intact in 1989. (And yet another pyramid, Margarita, has been found underneath Rosalila.) A true-scale reconstruction of Rosalila, a brilliant red temple, was put up in the park's museum, which, most unfortunately, is closed during our visit. Kim and Fredy scramble to the top of one of the pyramids to view the Copan River below the ruins, while I gaze in wonderment at these ancient edifices. We all head down to the grand Ceremonial Plaza to view a partially covered hieroglyphic staircase, ball court, and some impressive stelae – my favorite being a turtle stela – and leave this incredible place, contemplating life here some 1,000 years ago.

We meet Hector at park headquarters and he takes us into town to visit a small

Continued on page 7



The Ball Court at Copan

archaeological museum on the plaza and then to lunch at the Marina Copan, another gorgeous in-town hotel. Then it's back to San Pedro Sula and the short flights on small Islena (Taca) planes to Roatan, which is some 30 miles off the coast. The first flight takes us to La Ceiba, south of San Pedro, where we have to change planes for Coxen Hole, Roatan.

For our Roatan stay Kim has found what turns out to be a lovely, laid back place, the Paradise Beach Club (www.roatanvillas.com) at West Bay, Roatan's most popular beach area. The resort is PADI certified and offers a combination of hotel rooms, villas and penthouses (our attractive room with all amenities, including a safe, is \$90 a night, a reasonable rate for February in the Caribbean). Here Kim and I settle into a

Turtle Stela at Copan Ruins



routine of sorts. Most mornings she takes off for diving expeditions while I follow a more mundane existence – wandering about taking pictures, swimming in the pool and gentle surf off of our beach, and plowing through the current Spanish bestseller, *Shadow of the Wind*. Kim returns from her dives excited by the marine life she's glimpsed off of Roatan's amazing barrier reef – enormous black grouper, angelfish, blue parrotfish, barracuda, crabs and lobster – and vows to return someday with a waterproof cover for her digital camera. She also tries some snorkeling, and we discuss going on an island excursion – to a swamp tour, a swim with dolphins, or a visit to an iguana farm. Somehow, though,



The Head of an Old Woman, Copan

we never make it to these activities. We often lunch at the casual resort next door, Cabana Roatan, where we get to know the gal who runs its drink stand. Originally from British Columbia, she tells us she followed her parents down here after they bought property on Roatan. It appears that, well past its heyday as a banana republic (and as a training ground for the Contras), Honduras is still getting a lot of foreign investment.

Sporting two vocal green parrots and a family of friendly orange cats, our resort has a good restaurant, offering a lot of seafood and typical Central American fare



Macaw at Copan Ruins

– plantains, fajitas and platos typicos – a lot like Mexican food. Some evenings it really gets lively, with folk singers entertaining one night and a troupe of Garifuna dancers on another occasion. Adding to the international mix here, the resort is run by an Italian who's married to a Costa Rican and there's a comical group of Italians currently in residence.

The morning of our return to the States, our cab doesn't show up, so Rico, the charming hotel manager, drives us to the airport – a gesture very typical of the hospitality we experience here. Back in San Pedro Sula, the airport is a hive of activity – gringo divers, Honduran families and student groups headed to unknown destinations. Kim discovers the airport's internet café and I engage in a long conversation with a pleasant young man who's just moved to Tegucigalpa as a business liaison between the Canadian and Honduran governments. This turns out to be yet another friendly encounter in a friendly country. It appears Honduras has not yet been spoiled by mass tourism.

Back home in Palo Alto, I begin unpacking and pull out my small stash of Honduran souvenirs: a few bags of aromatic Honduran coffee, a shimmering plastic bracelet that resembles a band of blue seed pearls, two tiny hand crafted boxes,

Continued on page 8

The Beach at West Bay, Roatan



THE MEXICO FILE

Published ten times a year by Simmonds Publications
5580 La Jolla Blvd., #306 ■ La Jolla, CA 92037
Voice mail: 800-563-9345 ■ Phone/Fax: (858) 456-4419

E-mail: dave@mexicofile.com ■ Website: www.mexicofile.com

Subscription rate is \$39.00 per year in the U.S., \$49.00 per year outside the U.S.

PDF version available, see subscription box for details

Promotional rates are sometimes available. ©2005 Simmonds Publications

The Mexico File's contents are intended for the independent traveler. The information given is believed to be reliable, but cannot be guaranteed for accuracy due to constant changes that occur in a country this size. ■ Unsolicited stories, photos and letters are welcomed and encouraged. Postage should be included for any items to be returned. ■ This publication may not be reproduced in any form without written permission from the editor and the author of the article.

Editor: David Simmonds

Publisher: Robert Simmonds, Ph.D.

Contributing Editors: Lynne Doyle, Jane Onstott ■ Design/Layout: Paul Hartsuyker www.hartworks.net

About Mexico

New Trade Pact

After three years of negotiations, Japan and Mexico have signed a free trade agreement. Japan's hope is to increase exports of autos and electronics and Mexico wants to export more farm products as well as entice more foreign investment. The pact immediately eliminates 91 percent of Japan's tariffs on Mexican goods and 40 percent of Mexico's tariffs on Japanese goods. Mexico has now signed eleven free trade agreements with 42 countries, including the powerful European Union.

NASA looks at Mexican Lakes

In the hot Chihuahua Desert is a series of lagoons surrounding the town of Cuatro Ciénegas that evolutionary biologists have studied for years. Now scientists from NASA's Astrobiology Institute are investigating the primitive pools where turtle, snail and fish species reside that are much like those in the Galapagos islands. The hope is that the organisms will help identify the unique atmospheric conditions created by primitive life on planets in other solar systems in helping to determine if life exists there. The theory is that planets near other stars could be populated by similar colonies of primitive bacteria, which comprised the basis from which multi-cell plants and animals that inhabit the earth later evolved.

Sea of Cortez Fishing

A leading environmental group, the Natural Resources Defense Council, has directly accused the Mexican government and a San Diego company, Ocean Gardens, owned by Mexico's foreign trade bank, of causing rapidly declining fish populations in the once-abundant Sea of Cortez, the body of water separating Baja California and mainland Mexico. Shrimping techniques, over-fishing and lax enforcement of existing laws are identified as the cause. The shrimpers employ huge nets that sweep the ocean of all marine life, often resulting in scoops that contain as little as four percent shrimp. The remainder are allowed to die before dumping them back into the sea, as shrimpers are allowed to harvest only shrimp. Ocean Garden is the largest exporter of shrimp from Mexico to the United States.



Honduran Idyll *Continued*

and assorted postcards. And I dream of a speedy return to this gorgeous, verdant, mountainous country.

If You Go

Accommodations in Copan Ruinas:

Mid-Range

The 16 individually decorated rooms at **Hotel Don Udo's** range from \$30 to \$80 per night, including a continental breakfast. All rooms have A/C, phones and hot showers. There's a library, sauna, jacuzzi and sundeck on the property. Tel: 504-553-2675, 651-4527/33; fax: 557-2040. www.donudos.com.

Also highly recommended is **Hacienda San Lucas**, on a 100-year-old family owned hacienda outside the town of Copan Ruinas. Rooms, with a full breakfast included, are from \$50 to \$80. The hacienda's special Mayan dinners run \$25 per person, including transport to and from the hacienda. Other activities include horseback riding, a visit to Los Sapos, the hacienda's archaeological site, and hiking its nature trails. Tel/fax: 504-651-4496. Email: info@haciendasanlucas.com; www.haciendasanlucas.com.

Expensive

Hotel Marina Copan, a lovely in-town hotel near the central plaza, with pool and restaurant. Rooms range from \$75 to \$120. Tel: 504-651-4070; fax: 504-651-4477. Email: info@marinacopan.com; www.hotelmarinacopan.com.

On Roatan:

Paradise Beach Club, West Bay, Roatan. A full service resort with pool, restaurant, dive shop and beautiful tropical grounds. Double rooms run from \$74 per night, villas from \$167 per night. Tel: in USA, 1-800-291-0288; 504-455-5723, 995-8316. www.roatanvillas.com.

For a guide and tour operator in Copan, contact **Hector Cueva, Trifinio Tours**, P.O. Box 15, Copan Ruinas. Tel/fax: 504-651-4023. Email: hacueva@hondutel.hn; www.copanhonduras.org.



Huatulco *Continued*



Jessie Stensland, women's finalist



Blvd. Santa Cruz 303, Bahía Santa Cruz Huatulco, Oaxaca. 107 rooms located across from the marina, Restaurant, Cable TV, swim-up bar, private beach club with outstanding food.

A Reader's Note

Dear Dave,

If any of your readers would like to go bird watching in Mexico City, I recommend Manuel Grosselet birdinnet@yahoo.com. We saw more than 100 species of birds at UNAM's botanic garden and Xochimilco in just one day. He also has a web site www.tierradeaves.com.

Ann Holt-Harris
Geneva, Illinois



Subscribe to The Mexico File.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Cost:

Printed version —

\$39.00 per year (10 issues)

\$65.00 for two years (20 issues)

(Add \$10.00 to price if outside the U.S.)

PDF version —

\$18.00 per year (10 issues)

\$34.00 for two years (20 issues)

Send check or money order to:

Simmonds Publications
5580 La Jolla Blvd, Suite #306
La Jolla, CA 92037

Phone **1-800-5MEXFILE**