



# MEXICO

## MAZATLÁN

**WHY GO NOW** During the late 19th century, the Pacific Coast town of Mazatlán was a playground for vacationing members of the German, French, and Mexican aristocracy, who took up residence in the Centro Histórico, or Old Town. Its reputation as an elite hot spot continued through the early 20th century. But in the 60's, the city—just a three-hour flight from L.A.—became a popular port for cruise ships. Soon after, southern California-style strip malls and Señor Frog's restaurants sprouted up along the Zona Dorada, a 12-mile stretch of beach 15 minutes north of the Centro Histórico. And the Neoclassical mansions with 16-foot ceilings and wrought-iron balconies—remnants of Mazatlán's heyday—were abandoned and all but forgotten. Until now, that is.

**THE DETAILS** The 282 acres that make up the Old Town are experiencing a renaissance, with stylish cafés, boutiques, and hotels opening on seemingly every corner. Local Alfredo Gómez Rubio jump-started the revitalization in 1997 with **Pedro y Lola** (*Avdas. Constitución and Carnaval; 52-669/982-2589; dinner for two \$40*), a Nuevo Mexicano restaurant named after Mexican actor Pedro Infante and *ranchera* singer Lola Beltrán. Housed in a 130-year-old Neoclassical building, the former social club, which hosted prominent dance performances in the 1800's, serves regional dishes such as *molcajete* (chunks of *arrachera* beef with grilled nopales, onions, and fresh *panela* cheese) in a wood-beamed dining room.

Soon after, artists Miguel Ruíz and his Belgian wife, Helene van der Heiden, opened **Casa Etnika** (*50 Calle Sexto Osuna; 52-669/136-0139; casaetnika.com.mx*), an art gallery and crafts shop. Inside, Michoacán silver necklaces hang alongside colorful paintings by local residents. More galleries followed, as did a complete overhaul of the nearby 1874 **Teatro Ángela Peralta** (*1024 Avda. Constitución; 52-669/982-4446; teatroangelaperalta.com*), an 841-seat Italian Renaissance-style theater with an open-air lobby and triple-tiered balconies—all of which helped put the area back on Mexico's cultural map.

In 2007, Conchita Valades de Bocard created **Casa Lucila** (*16 Calle Olas Altas; 52-669/982-1100; casalucila.com; doubles from \$185*), Old Town's first seaside boutique hotel, built on the site of a 1940's nightclub frequented by John Wayne and Ernest Hemingway. Overlooking Olas Altas beach, the eight contemporary rooms are outfitted with custom-made mahogany doors, Italian ceramic-tiled floors, and local wood furniture. Around the corner, **Melville Suites** (*99 Avda. Constitución; 52-669/982-8474; themelville.com; doubles from \$78*) is more traditional: it's a 19th-century former nunnery converted into 20 large suites that are brimming with hand-carved armoires and Mexican antiques.

Jaime Flores was a manager at Denver's historic Broker Restaurant for 10 years before returning home last January to help open **El Santo y La Panga** (*1505 Niños Héroe; 52-669/985-4124; dinner for two \$78*), Old Town's newest addition. The pint-size seafood joint packs in locals nightly, who come for tuna tostadas with chipotle mayonnaise and avocado. "Mazatlán has turned a corner from what it was 40 years ago," says Flores. "It's an exciting time to be here." —JEFF SPURRIER



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