

March 2013

Manzanillo

SUN

Manzanillo's Lifestyle E-Magazine

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Foxtail Palm, *Wodyetia bifurcata*
 Family: *Areceae*; Sub Family *Arecoideae*

This is a pleasingly unique and delightful looking palm that originally grew in Northeastern Australia. It is named after Wodyeti, an Aboriginal bushman, said to be the last of his line and a veritable treasure trove of knowledge regarding this palm in its natural habitat.

This fast growing beauty – which naturally occurred only in the remote area of Queensland – adapts to a wide range of well drained soil conditions (quite important to remember if you wish to have this in your lawn or garden). It thrives in both sub-tropical and tropical environs but is not drought tolerant, enjoying soil kept reasonably moist through regular watering. But, be careful, do not overwater. I deeply water mine once a week during the non-rainy season.

Its more common name is derived from the visual appearance of its leaflets which are in a lovely, bushy appearing, circular arrangement which looks quite similar to - well duh – a fox's tail! If well taken care of, in maturity, it may exceed thirty feet in height, with a very attractive, smooth grayish tan trunk. (Each morning at Casa Ola Brisa, from our second story master bedroom, we look under the gentle swaying fronds, of ours, out into the Santiago Bay.)

A strong grower, it, in several ways, resembles those massive beauties of the *Roystonea* family (Royal Palms from Cuba), but without their more massive trunks. It can live in moderate light but seems to prefer, and



The bushy appearing, circular arrangement of the frond leaflets do, indeed, look quite similar to a fox's tail!

thoroughly enjoys, full sun, even when young. For those not from our immediate area, it thrives in hardiness zones 10 – 11. Mature trees can survive temperatures as low as 26 degrees Fahrenheit. . . . which is better than me these days!

Its attractive, robust, trunk is slender and swollen at the base, ringed with delightful circumscribing leaf scars, and gradually tapers to a smooth, olive green crown shaft. Its beautiful canopy consists of eight to twelve arching, but full, fronds which are then made up of hundreds of leaflets attached to the trunk at several levels. In case you've not perceived by now, I think it to be a very pretty palm!

The full-bodied and plume-like fronds are eight to ten feet long and short-stalked. The leaflets on them are six inches long and nearly two inches wide. These grow from all angles of the rachis (the primary stem of a compound leaf) with the widest point being mid leaflet. They have raggedy, fishtail looking tips – as opposed to sharp and pointed, like many pinnate palm leaflets.



This picture was taken a year ago. We now look under these fronds out into the Santiago Bay from our second story master bedroom.

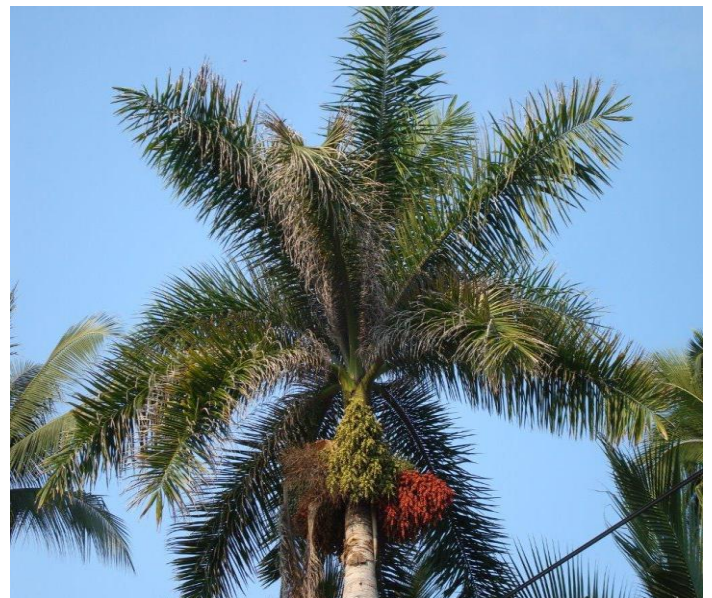
The whitish green, petiole (stem of the palm leaf) is six inches to a foot in length with brown scales. In turn, the crownshaft (the tight, surrounding envelope formed by the tubular, leafed frond bases sheathing each other around the stem of the top of the trunk) is narrow and green with waxy, white colored scales.

The green inflorescence appears below the crownshaft and sports both male and female, creamy-green blooms on the same branch. (This means, obviously, that – unlike the Date Palm - it is self-pollinating.) The flowers are white and the clustering 1 ¼” to 2 ¼” orange/red fruits – like all else of this palm - are quite attractive.

A self cleaning palm (fronds fall off when dead), it loves fertilization and is tolerant of salt, wind and coolness. A word of caution - the seed (though pretty) is said to be poisonous if ingested.

This magnificent tree is moderately salt tolerant. Pest free, it is, however, susceptible to leaf spot fungi if regularly watered from overhead – exempting rain, of course! Its seeds sprout and grow fast - in two to three months and it is easily transplantable.

If you’ve room for it would I recommend one for your place? You bet!



The clustering 1 ¼” to 2 ¼” orange/red fruits are beautiful but not edible.



FLORA EXOTICA

Freda Rumford -

with many thanks to the Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens

Forever it seems; orchids have been a joy to me, the delicacy of the flowers the transparency and waxy feel of the petals and the glorious colours. Oh those glorious colours.

We were lucky several years ago in being able to go to an Orchid Nursery on the side of Mount Haleakala on Maui, Hawaii, and spent far more time than expected in wandering through the lines of exotic flowers. The freezing chill of being at the top of the volcano before sunrise then completely forgotten as the warmth of the sun at last penetrated the skin which had been so unprepared to be frozen in the tropics.

Now in Mexico, I had forgotten my previous experience and was surprised to not only find a beautiful specimen for a friend's birthday but realise how inexpensive they were to buy. Not only that but when I finally had a beautiful mauve orchid of my own, how very unforgiving it was to a person who slaughters plants on a regular basis.

On discussing orchids one evening at a Thirsty Thursday dinner, I was delighted to hear that there was an orchid nursery not far from Manzanillo and decided that I would find its whereabouts and pay a visit just as soon as I was able. Unfortunately, perhaps due to the lack of advertising and promotion, the nursery is not to be found. Other people have been there, so I will continue to search, but in the meantime I have discovered a prize.

I have discovered the "Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens!" Although absolutely not a green thumb myself, I have had the pleasure of going to the annual Chelsea Flower show in London, and to Kew Gardens while loving the beautiful show of dahlias that my husband grew in our greenhouse as a novice gardener. I can appreciate the beauty, perfume, colours and everything about plant life. Just don't leave it with me to tend.

Not being in a position currently to go physically to the Botanical Gardens, I discovered contact names and emails on the web and wrote asking permission to use excerpts or perhaps an article from one of the subscribers to the web site. What I actually got in very short order was immediate permission from the board of directors to use whatever material I needed from the website. This was help indeed.

I browsed the material getting more and more excited and enthralled as I went. This was absolutely wonderful and whatever I did not visit, this is now an absolute must for me to see.

In the beginning

The following is taken from the Web site for the Botanical Gardens:

"The Vallarta Botanical Gardens started in 2004 with a vision of building Mexico's greatest botanical garden in the enchanted tropical highlands of Jalisco, Mexico. The twenty acres that are now the Gardens were ranch property, nearly half of which was overgrazed cattle pasture, the other half, old growth tropical deciduous forest.

"The first building constructed was the Hacienda de Oro Visitor Center and Restaurant, the centerpiece structure of the Gardens. Next came the nurseries for plant propagation, trails throughout the property, a statuary making facility, and of course many plants.





“Over 6000 Blue Agaves (*Agave tequilana*) adorn our ‘Blue Agave Hills’ while this area is being re-forested with native tropical hardwood trees. Over 1000 native *tabebuia*, mountain pine and mahogany trees have been planted in this former cattle grazing area, deforested over 30 years ago. Native oak species are being grown from acorns to establish our Mexican Oak Collection. Considering that Mexico is the world leader in oak diversity with over 160 different species, this is sure to become a prized feature of the Garden.

“The success of the Vallarta Botanical Gardens has allowed us to give back to our community in a variety of ways. We provide free admission to the Gardens to over 1,000 visiting school children each year. We have collaborated with Grassroots Natural Resource Conservation and indigenous knowledge proponents including the Maya Nut Institute and the Center for Traditional Medicine. We have participated in tropical plant research with the American Orchid Society and Sam Houston State University.”

“The Botanical Gardens are situated about 20 kms. from the southern outskirts of Puerto Vallarta and can be reached by the local bus service.

“This is an ideal place for those wishing to see a little more of Mexico but concerned about the potential dangers of travelling within Mexico currently. There are many hotels that offer reasonably priced accommodation and dozens of places to dine and maybe dance a little. A visit would make a nice weekend even though in the middle of the week maybe? Ranked #9 of 70 attractions in Puerto Vallarta.”

Mexican Orchid of the Month:



Artorima Erubescens
Found as an epiphyte in evergreen cloud forests among the high peaks of Oaxaca and Guerrero, the *Artorima Erubescens* produces showy, fragrant flowers in the

winter and early spring. Continued logging in those regions has caused this orchid to become a rare find. It is reported to require freezing nocturnal temperatures to bloom, making it a tricky plant for amateur gardeners to care for. The stigma’s T-shaped slits, which catch the feet of bees, make it unusual within the orchid family. (*Many thanks to Vallarta Orchid Society President T. J. Hartung for permission to draw on information from his publication “Orchids Found ONLY in Mexico,” available in the Gardens’ gift store.*)

Garden Amenities and Services:

“Visit the Gardens’ Hacienda de Oro Restaurant for authentic Mexican food and brick-oven pizza. Our new menu includes delicious dishes such as fish and shrimp tacos. Hike the Gardens’ nature trails and bask in tropical mountain scenery. Experience the Orchid Conservatory, Gift Shop, plant nursery, tequila tasting and more. You can even shop the Gardens remotely through our online store. The very best of Vallarta!

“The Gardens and the Hacienda de Oro Restaurant are available for weddings and other special events.” Please contact us at: info@vbgardens.org.

“The Leaf” Newsletter from Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens is available on line.

Much more information can be found at www.vbgardens.org.

There are many special days throughout the year. The following are just some of them.

March: Vallarta Flower and Garden Show

February 22–March 3.

Many of the Gardens’ celebrated native and exotic flower collections will be in peak bloom from February to early March.

Vallarta Bird Festival March 7-10:

The Vallarta Botanical Gardens are proud to again host the Vallarta Bird Festival. The full description of this event—including tours, speakers and other activities—is now posted at www.vallartabirdfestival.org. Make your reservations today!

April:

April 1 — Gardens are closed on Mondays from April until December.

April 22 — **Earth Day Celebration at the VBG.**

April 20-28 — **Vanilla Blossom Expo at the VBG.**



May:

May 4-12 — **Hummingbird Week at the VBG.**
May 17-25 — **Bougainvillea Festival:**
May 17 — Bougainvillea Festival's Candlelight Procession.
May 18 — Bougainvillea Festival's "Salute to Mexico" Street Party.
May 19 — Bougainvillea Festival's Tour of the Vallarta Botanical Gardens.
May 23 — Bougainvillea Festival's Traditional British High Tea Party.

June:

June 5 — **World Environment Day at the VBG.**
Jun 1-16 — Blackberry Harvest Festival.

July:

Jul 11 — Mexican National Arbor Day at the VBG.

October:

Oct — Butterfly Celebration at the VBG.

November:

Nov 2 — Day of the Dead at the VBG.
Nov 28 — Thanksgiving at the VBG.

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The Vallarta Botanical Gardens are members of:
Botanic Gardens Conservation International of Surrey, England
Patron HRH Charles, Prince of Wales.

The American Public Gardens Association of Kennett Square,
Pennsylvania, USA.

Asociacion Mexicana de Orquideologia of Mexico City
(Districto Federal).

The Gardens are registered as an UMA (Unidad de Manejo Para La Conservacion De Vida Silvestre), an official Wildlife Conservation Management Unit through SEMARNAT (Secretaría de medio ambiente y recursos naturales), Mexico's Agency of Environment and Natural Resources.

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(The following is the twelfth installment of a slightly embellished and bit fictionalized account of an almost real event!)

Tommy Clarkson

We have all met 'em . . . (XII)

. . .you know those sort of folks, who, no matter what you say claim to have done much more and lots better than you ever have or could. Well, it seemed that their Grand Champion sat next to me recently, on a six and one-half hour flight!

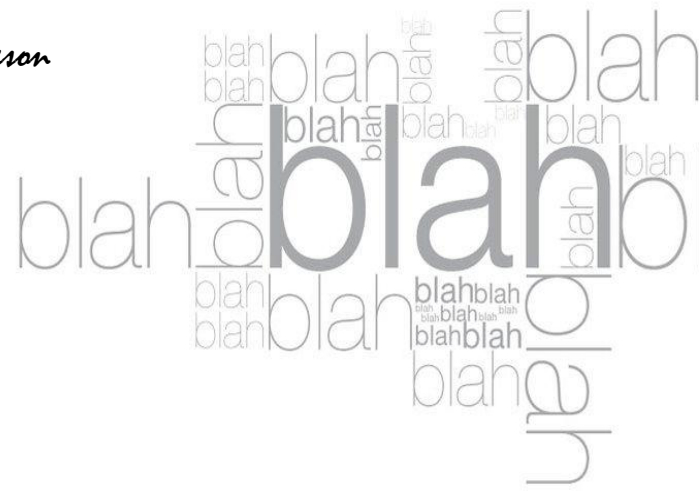
Now I'm familiar with what constitutes "white sound". I've also heard the explosive din and whistling zings that are a part of life jeopardizing combat. I've even experienced the frightening, freight train roar of a too close tornado. But the oral onslaught with which I had been barraged by this man and defied all manner of logic, basis for a mutually shared dialogue or even simple conversation. It was an veritable, unabashed cacophony of sound, in the form of words, sentences, paragraphs and oral pages of self serving pomposity. But yet, each utterance he made was delivered as self-believing, absolute truth and abject fact.

My seatmate, continued, ". . . and then, swinging up in a 180 degree move from where I dangled on the nose wheel of a Lear jet at 2,800 feet, I used a Quin Hua karate kick - I'd learned in a Himalayan temple many years ago - to break the windshield, use the toe of my shoe as leverage to swing up and into the cockpit and from which I then took the controls and saved the lives of the NATO Peace Delegation. (I wasn't about to admit - so overwhelmed was I by this time - that, numbly, I'd missed the first part of his story!)

Sensing a response was in order I managed a stuttered, "Wow! That's really something."

"Nah, not really," he said, "not when one considers some of the real, on-plane, shoot outs I had while helping create the Air Marshals. But, of course, all of that was kept from the public as my pal - the Director of Homeland Security - and I didn't want to scare the American public with the real facts, you know." He raised his finger to his lips in a "shoosh, can't tell" gesture and gave me a knowing look out of the corner of his eye.

His pause was less than a nanosecond. "Of course, when I created the 'Black Ops' team overview of what constitutes our nation's SEALs, Delta Forces, Rangers and



Special Forces activities, well, now, let me tell you, that was really quite the fun operation!" Smugly, he chuckled, "Of course, you'd well understand that I had to exceed the physical and mental qualifications for them all so as to set the standard for these elite forces."

He wistfully looked upward, in seeming contemplation and continued, "How I miss the days of training 'my boys' by racing up Mt. Rainier, nonstop from the base, with 185 pounds in my backpack, carrying a SAW - that's a 'Squad Automatic Weapon' M-249 light machine gun - 40 or 50 pounds of ammo and a couple of M-79 anti-tank rocket launchers swung on my back. A'hh, those were the great days gonads guts and gunfire!"

Amazingly he actually stopped speaking for a moment at which time I responded, "You certainly seem to have had an intriguing life of diverse experiences."

Furtively he glanced around, turned, grasped my arm, peered into my eyes and began with, "Like most people, you probably don't think we've yet been to Mars I bet . . ."

And we'd been airborne less than an hour!



Mexico's Indigenous People I

By Kirby Vickery

The Aztec Priesthood

When the words "Aztec Priests" are presented to most Anglos, preprogrammed thoughts and mental images crop up of a big jawed, broken nosed, short but colorful skirted, man with a long and bloody stone dagger held over his head in preparation of dispatching some slave or surf in a sadistic ritual of blood sacrifice, comes to mind. How many times have we seen that both by real actors and in animation? Is, what we've seen true? Probably, but, I'm sure that these guys had other functions which probably all didn't deal in death and destruction of the local populous. The truth be known, some of their sacrificing and bloodletting was done on themselves purely to maintain their cleansed status. How could they expect the general populous from supporting this function if they couldn't do it internally (within the order).

They had other tasks to perform within their culture. The foremost being education which was widely practiced and organized. Their schools were set up into primary and secondary levels. The students were also separated by sex. The girls were taught by 'Nuns' or female priestesses while the boys were instructed by male priests. The secondary schools were called 'calmecac.' They taught religious instruction, astrology and divination, other forms of math, and the deciphering of manuscripts or 'pinturas.'

Another major task performed by the order was the control of food. The priesthood was established and set up similarly to what was going on in Europe at about the same time. Externally they ended up controlling large amounts of land just as their counter parts in individual cloisters did only to have the priests tend to their gardens whose bounty was always shared with the poor. There was also a law of 'first fruit' which enabled the priesthood additional produce which was shared.

On the throne sat the emperor. He was supplemented by his council which was similar to The Cabinet in both the U.S. and Canada. The head of the Aztec priesthood was second only the royal family. He was called Mexican Lord of Divine Matters of Mexicatl Teohuatzin. The second in command within the order was the secluded high priest of Quetzacoatl. The priests of this order were called by name after their tutelary deity. The Quetzacoatl priesthood was probably a holdover from older "Toltec"



times. The bulk of the priesthood was made up of black clothed, long haired ordinary Priests whom were named the Tlenamacac. The only ones under them were the newly graduated trainees called the Lamacazton or 'Little Priests.'

The priesthood enjoyed no easy existence, but led a stern life of fasting, penance, and prayer, with constant observance of laborious and exacting rituals, which embraced sacrifice, the upkeep of perpetual fires, the chanting of holy songs and mantras to the gods, dances, and the superintendence of the ever-recurring festivals. They were required to rise during the night to render praise, and to maintain themselves in a condition of absolute cleanliness by means of constant ablutions.




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Carnaval

By Terry Sovil

Carnaval or Carnivale is a period of festivities which is generally held before Lent. In the United States of America it also called Mardi Gras.

This Mexican holiday is a five-day celebration held before the Catholic period of Lent. Carnaval is celebrated exuberantly with parades, floats, costumes, music and dancing in the streets. Carnaval is equivalent to Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

Lent, or the Lenten period, is celebrated by the Catholic Church and is a significant part of their Liturgical year. Latin, it means "take away or goodbye to flesh". It is the six weeks just prior to Easter. This period is a time for fasting and other religious practices. By tradition, no parties or celebrations are held. People also refrain from eating rich foods (meats, dairy products, fats and sugars). The period is 40 days and is a reminder of the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness.

So just prior to Lent the rich foods were disposed of or cleaned out of the house. The consumption of all of these items turned into a giant community party and is often named as the origin of Carnival. Traditionally the Carnaval was 5 days prior to Ash Wednesday then leading to Easter.

History seems to indicate this celebration started in the Middle Ages and came to Mexico with the Spanish. It was accepted in Mexico because it was held about the same period as indigenous celebrations such as Nemontemi, for the Nahuas, and Cabik for the Mayans. Both of these refer to the "lost days" when faces were covered to repel evil.

In Mexico, many cities, approximately 225, celebrate Carnaval and have celebrations of various sizes. Mazatlan and Veracruz are known for their celebrations. Mazatlan is known to attract over 300,000 people which would put it 3rd behind Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans. Port towns such as Veracruz and Manzanillo are also great places to watch the parades and festivities.

The size and intensity of the festivals vary throughout Mexico. Manzanillo's biggest event is the parade which is spectacular and an event no one wants to miss! The various events can include outdoor festivals, rides, organized parties, music, live bands, DJs or a boom box. Fireworks displays are common.

The coronation of the *Carnaval Queen* and sometimes *El Rey Feo* or the *Ugly King*.



Most of the Caribbean islands have a Carnival. Carnival is an important period and event for the islands of the Dutch Antilles including Aruba, Curacao, St. Maarten,

Saba, Saint Eustatius (Statia) and Bonaire. I can also vouch for the fact that Saba and Bonaire have world class SCUBA diving. The festivities include "jump-up" parades with beautiful costumes, floats and live bands. There are often middle-of-the-night parades that end at dawn when the burning of a straw King Momo is done. Tradition says this is when the island is cleansed of sins and bad luck.

Most the large public celebrations died off during the 19th century but made a comeback in the early 20th century. The events are divorced from their religious roots and now it is more commercialized. They have become important as social and tourist events. These events are not without critics.

Disorderly conduct, excessive alcohol and fighting in the streets are not uncommon. The Veracruz event has critics for moral reasons. The 2012 event in Puerto Vallarta was considered "too sexual in content". And this year Veracruz has forbidden political candidates and parties.

Cozumel Carnaval



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'HAPPINESS'

Suzanne A. Marshall

I am a shameless 'Googler'. It seems that whenever I want to know something, the quickest and easiest option usually turns out to be the internet. On one of these adventures I was tracking a news story on the World Happiness Report. This got my curiosity up because the big question for me is: how on earth can they measure happiness? And where do Canada and Mexico fit in? (Or any other country for that matter.)

In this pursuit I found an article titled "**Lessons from Mexico**". It was an excerpt from a publication called: Thrive: Finding Happiness the Blue Zones Way by Dan Buettner, 2010. Most of us who winter and live in Mexico will probably agree that the vast majority of Mexicans seem very happy. Sure they have problems and sadness like anyone, but for the most part they have the sunniest dispositions that I have ever encountered. The author goes on to say that in spite of serious problems, intelligent and talented people stuck in labor forces; financial challenges; high levels of corruption; low levels of development; and questionable governance, Mexicans are described as 'blessed with happiness assets'.

HAPPINESS ASSETS IN MEXICO

THE SUN:

Having more annual hours of sunlight than most northern neighbors and hence more vitamin D, exposure to sun prompts the manufacture of endorphins and elevates mood among a myriad of other beneficial attributes.



A PERSONAL SENSE OF FREEDOM:

The sense of individual freedom of choice is by far, the variable that contributes most significantly to happiness. It's difficult not to notice here in Manzanillo, how many entrepreneurs there are who start their own small businesses, open restaurants and taco stands and other self-employment activities.

NURTURING LAUGHTER:

Mexicans laugh at all the crap going on around them. They laugh at themselves, laugh at taxes, and laugh about crooked cops and politicians on the take. Laughter is thought to lead to social bonding due to shared positive emotions and the discharge of negative ones. People who laugh more tend to be more extroverted, have higher levels of self-esteem, and lower levels of depression. It can lower stress and release beneficial hormones.



JUST ENOUGH MONEY:

Mexicans it seems, have an easier time getting their financial lives in tune. If you're an average Mexican you're likely surrounded by people who are not competing with you, there is less pressure to keep up with the 'Jones' and thus people feel good about themselves and don't compete for the big house, the big car and the latest fashions.

FAITH:

Religious people tend to be happier than non-religious people. But it's not just about believing in God. There are very religious countries as in the Middle East for example, where happiness is elusive. "Somehow the Mexican combination of indigenous influences integrated with Christian beliefs has yielded a more uplifting faith than that commonly found elsewhere. Strong faith, someone to listen to you, socialization and religious community help people cope with hardship."



OVERSOCIALIZE:

"Mexicans understand the importance of social interaction. A lot of time is spent socializing with family and friends. "Psychologists have identified two types of happiness – *experienced happiness* and *remembered happiness*. We tend to remember high points and low points in our lives but *experienced happiness* is the sum of the little joys

throughout the day." Making room for them often in daily life will increase your overall happiness. Perhaps a joke, a little favor, a greeting and a smile, sharing lunch or a drink all contribute. We should make lots of time for friends.



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FAMILY FIRST:

In Mexico I have learned to admire the closeness and extension of 'family'. In North America, we tend to spread out across the country for work etc. and lose a lot of 'closeness' as a result. For Mexicans, family is an expansive term that includes mom, dad, brothers, sisters, your grandma's sister's daughter, your uncle's neighbor and friends like us from Canada who live in the community. (Our experience anyway). On a personal level my family has spread out all over Canada and I have unfortunately lost track with most of them. Even my children are in different provinces so I am grateful for new technologies that keep us in touch even though I'd really rather make them Sunday dinner and give them regular hugs. I have noted to friends how welcomed and belonging I feel in Manzanillo. The genuine warmth and welcome from our neighbors and friends is addictive and inspiring and I have to honestly say I do feel happier here.

Mexicans can cope with huge problems and disorder in their environment as long as the family is okay. They support each other. Grandmas take care of the grandchildren so mom can work and earn money. The second generation takes care of their elderly and this adds to the happiness factor. This New Year's I watched my neighbor dance with his 96 year old mother as she swung her cane around and delighted in the music. Truly remarkable.

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS:

Armando Fuentes Aquirre, the Wise One reminds us that 90 percent of happiness is the pursuit of simple *contentment* – actively appreciating the good around us. The more we can take the focus off ourselves and forget our problems, the happier we'll be.

To close this article, I eventually found the First World Happiness Report launched by the United Nations. Looking it over gave me cause to think that something called 'happiness' is an extremely subjective thing and an individual will know the difference by experiencing it. To measure it however is probably not possible in the true emotional sense of the word. There are factors in this report that are different. There findings for example state the happiest countries tend to be the richest. Rich in what I wonder? Surely something more than money.

This report found Canada to be 5th, U.S.A. 11th and United Kingdom 18th. I'm still looking for Mexico. It is far too complex to discuss in this edition but extremely interesting. If you would like to check it out, just 'Google' the following text. It's pretty fascinating stuff.

happy-planet-index-report.pdf

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Suzanne A. Marshall

El Avuelo -Flight (Cinepolis Manzanillo)

We admit to our shameless love of the cinema. Although we can wait and see most of the movies via video distribution in the comfort of our own home, there's just nothing like the big screen, big sound and the smell of popcorn. And as I said before, it's like a good old fashioned 'date'. Remember those special times of our youth anyone? I can remember so far back that people were still smoking in the theatres. They eventually made them all sit in the back rows or up in the balcony making it really awful for the non-smoking 'neckers' who wanted to be out of sight!! Oh boy, have things changed.

This time we took advantage of a movie in Guadalajara while touring Tonalá, Tlaquepaque and the Lake Chapala area. First let me say the theatre was top notch again in a Cinepolis facility with comfortable seating and superb cleanliness. But to our astonishment and delight they offered seat selection so you could buy early and get a good seat without having to hang around for rush seating. How civilized can it get?

We chose to see El Avuelo (flight) with Spanish subtitles because of Denzel Washington and the interesting promotions. So while we expected to see great acting and action, we were pleased to find that it involved so much more. This is a movie about the human condition, our fragility and often our denial. There is no denying though that the scenes involving the emergency landing of the aircraft are heart stopping. The movie whizzed by in 2 hours and 19 minutes. When we left the theatre we both felt that we had gotten so much more than expected and were truly impressed with the entire production. Be aware that there is some full frontal nudity in the early scenes so decide accordingly.

Directed by Robert Zemeckis (Cast Away, What Lies Beneath), Denzel Washington is nominated for an Academy Award for his portrayal and Best Original Screenplay for John Gatins. I have to say that the performances by Kelly Reilly as 'Nicole' and John Goodman as a friend and drug dealer are also outstanding.

This film has received thus far an IMDB rating of 7.3 out of 10 based on the viewings of 70,000 voters. I would easily give it an 8+.



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The Malecon adjoins the center of the city. A wonderful place to go for a walk in the evening.

Letter from Havana

David Fitzpatrick

The first thing that strikes you as you arrive in Havana is the darkness. The airport appears to be lit with 25-Watt bulbs and the drive into the city (at night) is as black as the road through an American forest. The occasional house gives off a dim glimmer of light but most are hidden in the gloom. Even on arrival in the city, one is struck by the dimness and obscurity.

And then suddenly, a great blaze of light! The travel agent in Montreal has booked me into an old 19th century palace of a hotel. Enormous in size, it is bathed in flood-lit splendor. Its artistically sculpted façade would fit neatly into any district in Paris.

The lobby is redolent of past grandeur – gone only a little bit to seed. The walls are covered with mementos of better times: photographs of various managers in the company of Isadora Duncan, Ernest Hemingway, Clark Gable, etc., etc. My room turns out to be a monument to past glory. Elegant furniture from the early 20th century - not copies! – the originals! - and clearly very used. The bathroom is state of the art - for 1910.

When I venture out on the street by daylight, the first things that hit me in the eye are the cars!!! It is not a legend that the 1950s are alive and well in Havana. About half the cars on the road are old American models from the '50s and even the '40s. Some have been lovingly maintained in just-rolled-off-the-assembly-line condition. Others are rusted out hulks still somehow, inexplicably, on the road. There are also a large number

of Japanese and Russian models – much newer, but far less spectacular. A Russian-built Lada of any vintage shrinks into invisibility beside a bright red '57 Chevy!



There was a time in my life when my highest ambition was to own a '57 Chev

The second impression, after the cars, is the wealth of historic buildings in the city center. Havana has not experienced the urban renewal that most European and American Cities have witnessed over the last half-century. The old 18th and 19th century buildings are still there, many in a state of near ruin, but others, like my hotel, still in pretty good shape. The point of this is that when economic conditions change, and it becomes

possible to rebuild the center of Havana, the Cubans, hopefully, can learn from our mistakes and renovate the old historic buildings, rather than tearing them down and starting over. There is an extraordinary wealth of historic architecture which could, in the right conditions, metamorphosize [sic] into a truly imposing city.



Havana possesses an enormous wealth of historic architecture. This is the Plaza Hotel, a real museum piece from the 19th century. The travel agent in Montréal, not knowing I am a "Mexico on \$5 a day" kind of traveller, booked me into this place

The mention of economic conditions brings me to the people and what I observed in their daily lives. Let it be said at the outset that communism really doesn't seem to work for the ordinary people. It is clear that the man in the street has only a few pennies in his pocket. Drab government-run stores carry a meager selection of shoddy merchandise on scantily stocked shelves. There is no attempt to present an attractive, eye-catching display. More upscale establishments – particularly restaurants – cater only to tourists. Their prices are many times what the local people can afford. An explicitly double economy exists: the convertible peso has approximately the same value as a US dollar. It is available to tourists only and the upscale establishments accept only this form of cash. A parallel currency, the Cuban peso, is worth only a fraction of the Convertible Peso. It is the only money accepted in the local stores. I tried to find out how a tourist could obtain the local currency, but no one could (or would) tell me.

The local people are friendly and welcoming in the extreme. Everyone is more than willing to pass the time of day with a foreigner and many invite you into their homes. Sometimes the friendly contact segues imperceptibly into a request for money or a suggestion that everyone should go to a restaurant together (which clearly, only the tourist could afford). But mostly, the people seem to be genuinely interested in making friends with outsiders and have no ulterior motive.

And while we are on the subject, how "ulterior" is it for a man who has no money in his pocket and nothing to eat to ask his new-found "friend" to buy him dinner? More than once, I was happy to invite people to share my evening meal.

The fact that nobody has any money hits you in the face at every turn. Even well educated, professional people with "good jobs" will tell you that their good job does not permit them to buy the basic necessities of life. I had a long conversation with a hospital lab technician who told me that the hospital provides him with meals, clothes (uniforms) and a few other necessities, but his only monetary payment amounts to about \$10 per month. He lives with his parents because he can never hope to have an apartment of his own.



Another example of the classic architecture of central Havana. This is the Hotel Inglese

One obviously has to wonder to what extent these economic problems are the result of inherent weaknesses in the communist system and to what extent they are the result of the blockade which has isolated Cuba from all North American trade for over half a century. When President Kennedy first instituted the blockade in 1962 in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis,

it was seen as a temporary measure to bring pressure on the Cuban government to adopt a less hostile attitude towards the West. In particular, it was hoped Cuba would cease to serving as a "Trojan Horse" for the Communist bloc. The general opinion was that Fidel Castro could not survive the blockade more than a few months and we would soon see a new, more friendly régime in Cuba. Well, fully 50 years later, Castro is still there and there has been little fundamental political change.

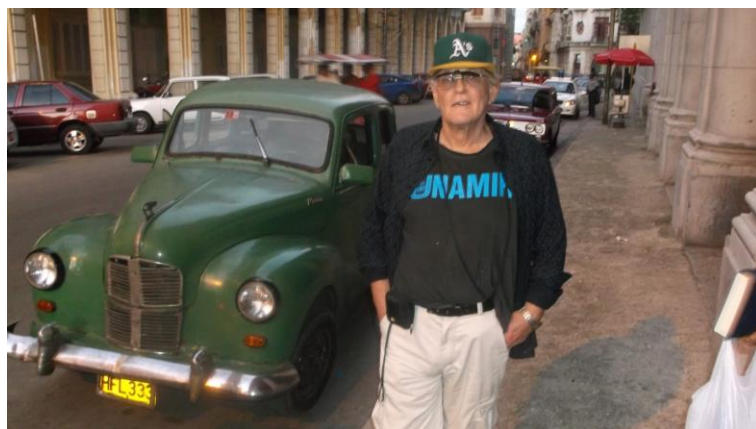
But on the international scene, there have been mighty changes: the Cold War is over; the Soviet Union has collapsed; Cuba cannot serve as a Trojan Horse for a political system that no longer exists. Today, it represents little military threat to its neighbors. And yet the blockade remains. If someone had told John Kennedy that his "temporary sanctions" would still be solidly in place 50 years later, he would probably have fallen off his chair.

Their only effect now is to blight the daily life of a warm, friendly, and hard-working population and prevent the development of what could be a vibrant economy. The people are talented, educated, and industrious. Given a chance, they could build an economy to match their neighbors in the western world.

I think it is time we gave them a chance!



1 This is the Cuban parliament. Architecturally impressive, but today – Alas! – it serves only as a museum.



Does anybody remember the Austin?



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Want to keep in touch?

Señior Techie

One of the challenges of living in Mexico is communicating with friends and family back home. My wife Señiora Notsotechie (she wanted to keep her maiden name) and I have a Canadian phone line that does just that.

You may say, I have Skype, and it is free. That is true, but it is a pain to keep your computer on to receive calls.

Skype

Your friends and relatives can call you (when they use Skype from their computers). You may purchase credits to make calls to landlines and cellphones in Canada and the US.

Skype also offers a Skype Out option (at this time there are no Canadian phone numbers that people can call you, they will have to contact you through their computer). If you make a lot of calls consider a yearly prepaid account for \$60.00. Depending on the plan you select, you will be able to make unlimited calls to either the US or Canada. Or for a yearly fee of \$144.00, you can make unlimited calls worldwide (go to www.skype.com for a complete list of countries). The Skype Internet phone should be a consideration if you elect to subscribe. A Skype Internet phone is available for \$100.00 and connects to the Internet. You can call out without the use of a computer; incoming calls are made to your Skype user name.

Magic Jack

Another option is Magic Jack. The Magic Jack Plus costs US \$69.95 plus shipping (\$79.95 in Canada). I did a Google search on them and found a lot of billing complaints from people who purchased direct from Magic Jack. The product is available at Radio Shack and The Source. They also have a product called Magic Jack which is \$30.00 cheaper. I would not consider the Magic Jack as it requires your computer to be on to make or receive calls; the Magic Jack Plus only requires a wired Internet connection. Once your Magic Jack Plus is plugged in to both power and the Internet you can connect any phone and start making calls. Your friends and family need only to call your Canadian or US number to contact you. The purchase price includes the first year of unlimited calling to both Canada and the US. The annual subscription cost is \$29.95 for Canada and \$19.95 for the US. For \$19.99 they offer to port your existing landline number.



Vonage

Vonage is available in both Canada and the US for \$24.99/ month for unlimited calling to the US and Canada. You can port your existing number or get a new local number. For an additional \$5.00 a month you get unlimited worldwide calling to landlines (go to www.vonage.com for a complete country listing). As with the Magic Jack Plus plug into the power, Internet, and phone to make calls.

In Canada, Primus www.primus.ca offers a similar plan to Vonage called Talkbroadband.

All the services above are VOIP (voice over Internet Protocol) services and will require a wired Internet connection. In order to get a good quality, get the fastest internet speed you can afford. If your Internet

connection is slow, call quality will suffer, especially when someone else in the family is surfing the net while a call is in progress.

The options mentioned all have limitations, the low cost options are more complicated, the higher cost options are easier to use. All plans offer features that the telephone companies charge extra for. For instance, I get an email message when a voicemail is left. I am able to listen to the voicemail message through the email or from the telephone.

While we are in Mexico, our friends call our home line at no cost and we can talk as often and as long as we want.

Señor Tech resides in Manzanillo during winter and in Canada for summer and fall.

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How You Can Avoid Common Mistakes in Retirement Planning

To make a comfortable retirement possible in Mexico (or anywhere for that matter), proper financial planning is crucial. You need to know your sources of income, the amount you can expect to receive from each source and whether those sources are likely to last throughout your retirement years.

Mistakes can prove disastrous to your financial future. So try to avoid the common ones noted below:

- Putting other financial goals first. You probably have several financial goals. You may, for example, be saving for a down payment on a second home south of the border. Don't let other goals supersede your goal of a financially secure retirement.
- Underestimating your life expectancy. As life expectancy increases, you may need to plan and invest for a longer retirement.
- Incorrectly calculating retirement expenses. You may believe you'll need a certain percentage of your preretirement income in your retirement. But should you plan based on a general percentage? It's easy to underestimate, even if the cost of living is sensibly lower in Mexico.

•Ignoring inflation. Investors who are uncomfortable with market volatility and therefore decide to invest only in Treasury bills, insured fixed-rate CDs and savings accounts must accept the fact that inflation could potentially eat away at their investment return. That's because inflation could be higher than the returns offered by these investment vehicles.

•Not taking full advantage of all available tax-deferred investing options. If you're no longer contributing to a 401(k) plan, consider investing in another option such as an IRA if you still have active income.

Your financial advisor can help you compare options to get the most from your retirement.

Yann Kostic is a Money Manager and Financial Advisor (RIA) with Atlantis Wealth Management specializing in retirees (or soon to be), self-reliant women and Expats in Mexico. Yann works with TD Ameritrade Institutional as the custodian of client's assets. He splits his time between Central Florida and the Central Pacific Coast of Mexico. Comments, questions or to request his Newsletter "News You Can Use" Contact him at Yannk@AtlantisWealth.com, in Mexico: (314) 333-1295 or in the US: (321) 574-1529.

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March 7-11 – Friday to Tuesday
2013 MARCH PATA STERILIZATION CLINIC

Where: Casa Ejidal, Salagua (4 blocks NE of jardin)
Time: 8:00 am daily
Contact: stan@patamanzanillo.com
Facebook Event Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/186843094787824/>

Donations needed: medical supplies, towels, sheets, drinks/snacks/full meals for veterinarians and volunteers.

March 9 – Saturday
SPECIAL AWARDS DINNER FOR FFC

Where: Ballroom of Pez Vela Hotel – next to Monkey House
Time: 7:30 pm
Cost: \$400.00 pesos
Contact: Pastor Lee at Coffee Bean
or rmayfordhill@hotmail.com

Tickets available at the Coffee Bean. Reserved seating for 60 people only.

March 9 – Saturday
AZTEC CELEBRATION – GALA DINNER/DANCE CULTURAL EVENT

Where: Naval Base – Officer’s Club
Time: 6:00 pm – 11:00 pm
Cost: \$400.00 pesos
Contact: deerdarcy@gmail.com
Tickets – Darcy Reed

March 16 – Saturday
PONCHO CHALLENGE GOLF TOURNAMENT

Where: Club Santiago
Time: 8:30 am – registration, continental breakfast, putting contest
9:30 am – qualifying round tee off
Contact: Rick Bayer 333-8094

We will have water, soda, Bloody Mary's, Screwdrivers, and beer on the course. **All for only \$20 pesos!** And all delivered personally by some exceptionally lovely cart girls! The lunch offering will include a new

surprise dish that some of you Oasis veterans might find familiar.

There will be a putting event on every hole that pays out \$100 pesos (chance to win your entry fee back, eh!?).

Format is being revised based on some good feedback you all have provided as follows:

1. Matches will be 18 holes instead of 9.
2. Handicaps will be calculated @ 80% and we will split into 2-4 flights.
3. Flight champions will pair off in 18 hole matches and get us down to one winner.

Gonna be a fun time! Get your name on the signup sheet or just tell Alfredo or me that you are in.

And spread the word to any of your friends that might want to play!

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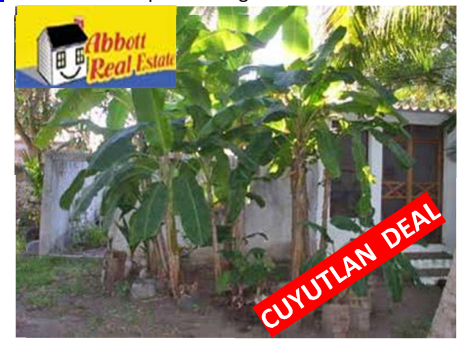
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www.manzanillosun.com



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