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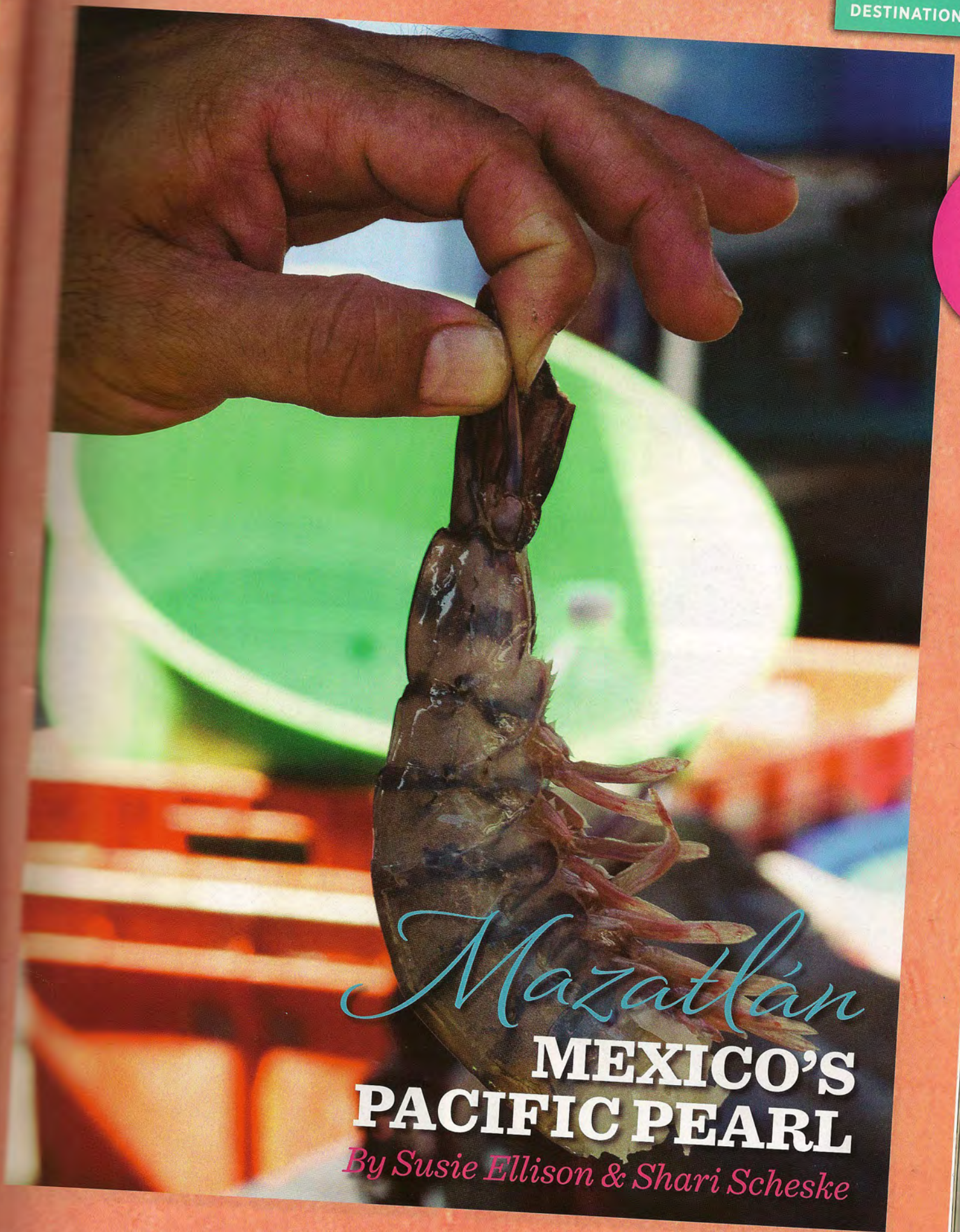
FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO read, LOVE TO eat AND LOVE TO travel

MEXICO

THIS PAGE Mazatlán's shrimp market is open daily. **FACING PAGE** Giant shrimp for sale.



Mazatlán
MEXICO'S PACIFIC PEARL

By Susie Ellison & Shari Scheske

MAZATLAN
(desde) 1963

WHERE ON EARTH

Susie Ellison and **Shari Scheske** commandeer a glorified golf cart to explore the Shrimp Capital of the World.

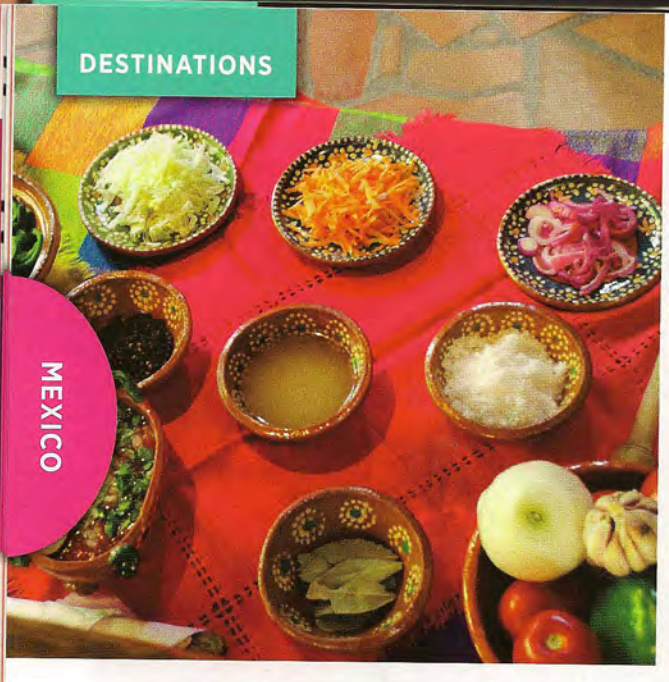
YOU'D EXPECT TO FIND SOME decent shrimp in a town that holds the Guinness record for the world's biggest shrimp cocktail (weighing in at 1,187 lbs). Mazatlán is home to the largest shrimping fleet in the Pacific and its catch supplies markets and restaurants all over Mexico.

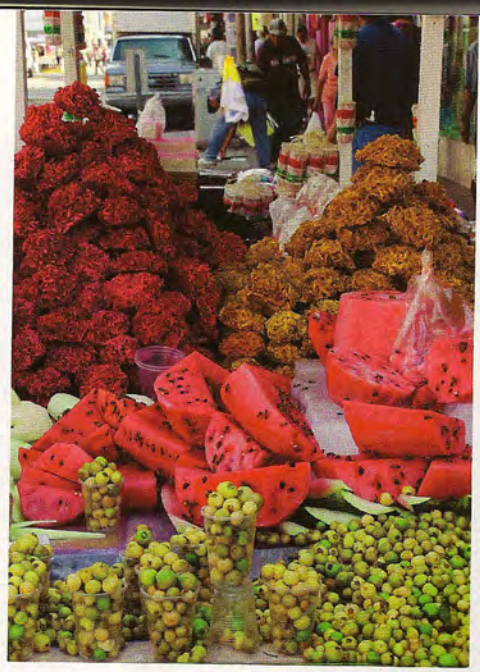
A *pulmonia* is the preferred method of transportation in this laid back but lively port city in the state of Sinaloa on Mexico's northern Pacific coast. Flag down one of these oversized golf carts and you can whizz around town, hopping on and off as you please for a few pesos a ride. Our Spanish needs improvement but it didn't take long to master "*A Mercado!*" To the market!

Mazatlán's impeccable shrimp are displayed in heaping tubs of ice at the *Mercado Camarón* (shrimp market) in the historic district and at impromptu fishermen's stands called *camaronera* at Playa Norte, one in a string of beaches linked by the promenade that loops around Mazatlán's picturesque bay. (At 13 miles, Mazatlán's *malecon* is one of the longest in the world). We were determined to eat our fill and to see what local chefs were doing with this ocean bounty.

We watched the fishermen, who still use traditional small boats and hand nets, unload their catch as frigate birds wheeled overhead and fat pelicans waddled up hoping for scraps. The principal species landed here are Pacific sailfish, marlin, yellowfin tuna, wahoo and dorado. You can have your fish gutted right there on the beach and fried to order on a makeshift stove fashioned from a 44 gallon drum. Meanwhile, far out to sea, the commercial fishing fleet uses purse seine nets and helicopters to haul tonnes of fish destined for the city's large tuna cannery and seafood markets all over the world.»

FACING PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT El Shrimp Bucket restaurant decor; Beach vendor; El Shrimp Bucket patio; *Caguamanta*. **THIS PAGE FROM TOP** Butterflied shrimp at Diego's Beach House; Serving tacos.





...Our Spanish needs improvement but it didn't take long to master "A Mercado!" To the market!...

«At the bustling *Mercado Camarón* shrimp are graded by size, from the tiny to the truly enormous. There are also glistening heaps of scallops and curly octopus tentacles, buckets of crabs, molluscs and other piscine creatures. We watched a vendor deftly cleaning a dozen huge sea snails for a customer. "How.. you.. cook?" Susie (with phrasebook) asked the well-dressed woman buying. "I stew them for a long time, with oregano and garlic," the señora replied in perfect English, "They're very tasty!"

We ate shrimp every way we could find it... pan-fried, deep-fried (a specialty at popular El Shrimp Bucket restaurant) and barbecued, in ceviches and cocktails, pounded into a silky pâté and shredded as a filling for tacos and empanadas. Shrimp this pristine can even be eaten raw. At La Puntilla, an open-air restaurant in the port area where you can dine on just-caught seafood amidst the clanging and banging of cargo ships and ferries, we ordered *camarones en aguachile* — raw, butterflied shrimp dressed with lime juice and hot Serrano chiles. The texture of raw shrimp took a bit of getting used to but its cool silkiness offered a perfect counterpoint to the biting heat of chile and tangy jolt of citrus.

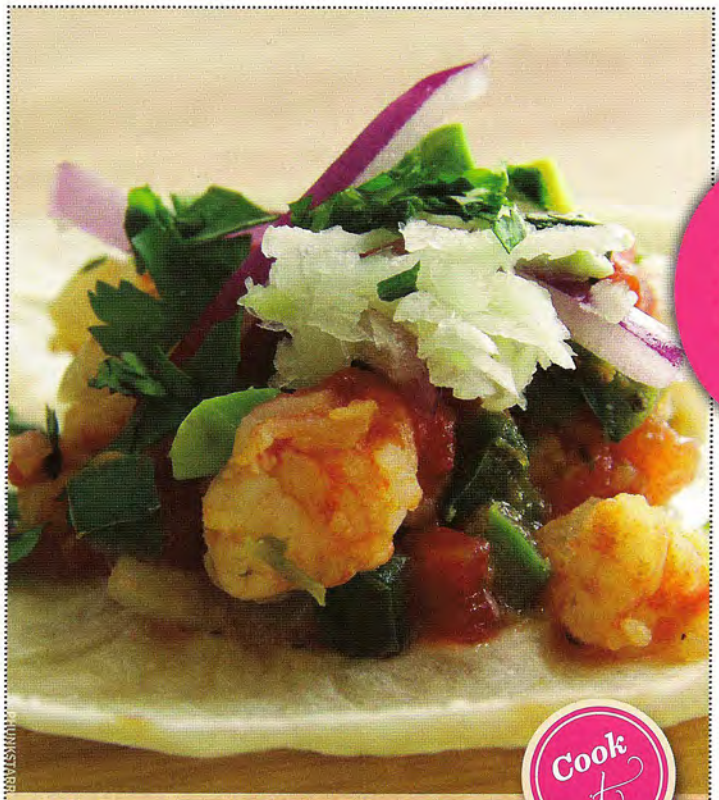
At Diego's Beach House, a barefoot hangout with great food and a ringside view of waves breaking on the sand, we had gorgeous shrimp simply grilled over mesquite wood and painted with garlicky butter. Chef Diego Becerra, a native *Mazatleco* who has returned to his roots after working in the U.S. with celebrity chef Richard Sandoval, introduced us to *Sangre de Christo*, (Blood of Christ) an inspired mix of beer, seasoning sauce and Clamato juice, and urged us to try his version of *pescado zarandeado*, a local specialty found on menus all over town. *Pescado zarandeado* typically involves a whole fish that's butterflied through the spine, cooked over charcoal and topped with grilled vegetables. The dish has its origins in the way fishermen traditionally cooked their catch on the beach over a fire of mangrove wood. Becerra adds a gourmet spin, slathering his fish with a spiced-up mayonnaise

grilling it over mesquite chips (mangrove is now protected) and serving it *sin verduras* (without vegetables). The mayo forms a golden crust that keeps the fish from drying out and tastes it with flavour. Rolled into fresh tortillas with pickled red onions and salsa, Becerra's *pescado zarandeado* made spectacular fish tacos.

Another Sandoval protégé Mariana Gómez-Rubio holds occasional cooking classes in Mazatlán. She taught us to prepare empanada dough moistened with shrimp shell broth and filled with shrimp *machaca*. *Machaca* is a regional Sinaloan dish typically made with shredded beef that's fried and mixed with tomatoes, garlic, onions and chiles, all charred on a *comal*. In Mariana's version, shrimp took the place of beef.

Mariana also showed us how to make *caguamanta*, a mock-turtle stew. Turtle meat was a popular local delicacy in the past but loggerhead turtle (*caguama*) is now a protected species and these days *caguamanta* is made with tuna fin and manta ray, which have a similar texture. At lunch we passed around dishes of sliced avocado, Mariana's home-made salsa *verde* and a fresh white cheese made in a village on the outskirts of Mazatlán. If the only *queso fresco* you've encountered is the kind you find in North American supermarkets, the artisanal version is a revelation — sweet, creamy and tangy.»

FACING PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Cooking class lunch; Fruit stand on the street; *Pescado Zarandeado*; Tequila tasting; Empañadas; Homemade gelato. **THIS PAGE** Mariana making empañadas.



PHUNKSTARR

Cook it

SERVES 6

Shrimp Machaca

Shrimp[1] 1 lb raw shelled meat, coarsely chopped

Vegetable Oil 3 Tbs

Onion 1 large, finely chopped

Poblano Chile 1, seeded and finely chopped

Jalapeño Chile 1, seeded and minced

Roma Tomatoes 2, diced

Shrimp or Chicken Stock 1 ½ cups

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

Lime Juice to taste

Corn or Flour Tortillas 12 small

Optional Garnishes

Cabbage shredded

Red Onion thinly sliced

Cilantro chopped

Avocado sliced

Salsa

Mariana made empanadas stuffed with this versatile shrimp mixture and also served it with a variety of garnishes as a filling for tacos.

1 Heat the oil and sauté the onions and chiles until soft. Add the oregano and shrimp meat and cook, stirring for 2 minutes. Add the tomatoes and stock and cook until the liquid has mostly evaporated.

2 Season with salt and pepper, a squeeze of lime juice and a dash of hot sauce if you like. Roll up in warm tortillas with your choice of garnishes.

[1] *If you buy shrimp in the shell, use the shells to make a stock by simmering them in water.*

Drink it

SERVES 2

Sangre de Christo

It's easy to drink too much beer when you are hot and thirsty. This refreshing beer cocktail tastes great and won't have you heading for the nearest hammock!

Lager 1 x 12 oz bottle, chilled

Clamato Juice 8 oz, chilled

Maggi Seasoning Sauce[1] 1 ½ tsp

Ice Cubes

Coarse Salt

1. Wet the rims of two 16-ounce glasses and dip them in coarse salt.
2. Add a few ice cubes and divide the Clamato juice equally between the glasses.
3. Add the seasoning sauce, stir and top up with beer.

[1] *Or soy sauce.*

« As travelling cooks we're always on the lookout for lodgings with kitchens so we were delighted when Mariana's father invited us to stay at the Melville Boutique Hotel, a former Carmelite convent he has restored and converted into holiday apartments. Alfredo Gómez-Rubio is President of the Mazatlán Historic Project and the driving force behind the revitalization of the city's charming historical quarter, which just twelve years ago was a deserted ruin.

Technically, the destination billed as Mexico's only colonial city with a beach is a post-colonial city. Mazatlán was visited only sporadically by Spanish traders and the first permanent European settlement was established in the 1820s, after the Mexican War of Independence. Architecturally Mazatlán's historical quarter, with its cobblestone squares and ornate nineteenth century mansions, has more in common with New Orleans than with Mexico's Spanish colonial cities.

Hotel Melville is located just a few steps away from the social hub of Mazatlán, *Plazuela Machado*, a tree-shaded square lined with restaurants, cafes, bars and art galleries housed in the elegant buildings that were once home to Mazatlán's wealthy European traders. On one side of the square a pedestrian arcade leads to the beautifully restored Angela Peralta Theatre where we heard the Mazatlán Symphony Orchestra perform Mozart's dramatic *Requiem*. Another evening we dined under the stars at Pedro y Lola, a picturesque local hangout with live jazz and sidewalk tables overlooking the Plaza. We worked our way through every shrimp dish on the menu (and a standout dish of octopus with guajillo chiles) sipping margaritas, watching people browsing the evening craft market and listening to some very cool tunes laid down by a bunch of runaway musicians from San Francisco.

Tostiloco

We loved poking around in Mazatlán's Pino Suarez market. That's where we discovered a crazy and delicious snack called *Tostiloco*. A bag of corn chips is split open and topped with carrots, flaked fish, chopped cucumbers and pinkish curls of pickled pig skin. A squeeze of lemon and a squirt of hot sauce and your *Tostiloco* is good to go.

Singer-songwriter Lori Davidson and bass player Ken Embrey are seasoned session musicians (they've performed with John Lee Hooker, Janis Joplin, Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis to name a few) who sailed their yacht from California to Mazatlán in 2008 and have never left. "Mazatlán is very supportive of the arts," says Lori, who recorded her album *Who I Am* in the city. "I also love that it's a working, blue collar city and not just a place for tourists."

After less than a week in Mazatlán we were also feeling at home. Mornings at the Melville began on our terrace overlooking the courtyard fountain with rich coffee brewed from highland Chiapas beans and pastries purchased from the art deco *Panamá* bakery around the corner. One morning Mariana took us to a street cart for a local breakfast of 'sweaty' tacos. Instead of being grilled on a *comal*. in the usual fashion, 'sweaty' tacos are steamed, allowing the true flavour of tortillas and fillings of beef, pork and chicken to shine. Afterwards we stopped at an ice cream cart that's been on the same corner in the historic district since 1938 selling homemade gelato with amazing flavours like mandarin and prune. Then we visited Suaves Germán Evers, a family-owned confectionery that has been producing hand-cut coconut marshmallows for more than 50 years. We bought some to go and Shari couldn't stop eating them, even after Susie accidentally sat on the bag!

Another morning we swapped our *pulmonia* for a car and driver to make the one-hour trip to La Noria, a village in the Sierra Madre foothills that's home to Vinata de Los Osunas, a 130-year old blue agave distillery. The countryside surrounding Mazatlán is a verdant landscape of gently rolling hills intersected by the Tropic of Capricorn with large tracts of open countryside between towns and villages. On the way our driver Chuey pointed out pink hedgerow flowers called *coronini* that local women wear in their hair to mark the start of the rainy season, and brilliant Yellow Wing Caciques.

Los Osunas is a boutique distillery that produces 100,000 litres of agave spirit annually using a combination of modern and traditional methods. In a blind testing of 22 *reposado* tequilas held San Francisco in 2011, Los Osunas *Maduro* 100% Blue »

THIS PAGE Walking in El Quelite.

Cook it

SERVES 4

Sinaloan Shrimp Cocktail

Whole Shrimp 1 lb, unpeeled, heads removed

Red Onion peeled and chopped, ¼ cup

Cucumber peeled and chopped, ¼ cup

Avocado 1, peeled and diced

Tomato 1, diced

Fresh Cilantro a handful, chopped

Tomato Juice ½ cup

Lime Juice from 1 lime

Tomato Ketchup 2 Tbs

Worcestershire Sauce 1 tsp

Tabasco Sauce 1 tsp

1 Simmer the shrimp in water until just pink. Drain, cool and peel.

2 Mix all the ingredients gently together and divide between 4 parfait glasses or tall beer glasses.

3 Garnish with lime wedges and tortilla chips.

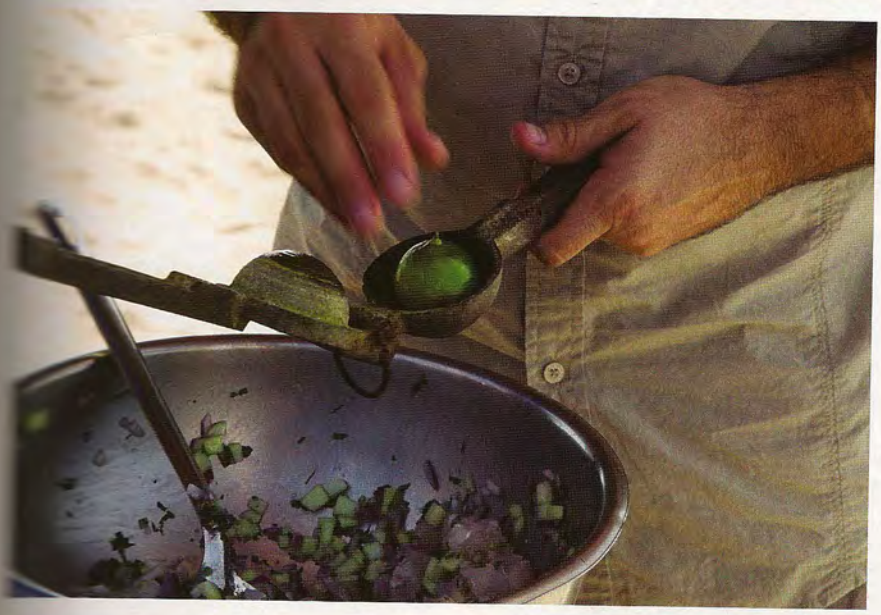
«Agave won first place. We found it smooth enough to drink straight, with a complex layering of flavours — pineapple, honey, caramel, raisins, resin and even a hint of chocolate. We briefly debated the wisdom of downing shooters for breakfast under the blistering sun but after the first round we had another and then threw caution to the wind and bought a bottle.

...Shrimp this pristine can even be eaten raw...

With appetites primed by our alcoholic morning, we headed for El Quelite, a picturesque historic town named for an edible weed (*quelite*) that grows in the area. If Chuey noticed the tipsy titters coming from the back seat, he was gentleman enough not to comment and soon enough we arrived at El Mesón de los Laureanos, a wonderful antique-filled restaurant housed in the family home of local personality Dr Marcos Gabriel Osuna. El Mesón de los Laureanos specializes in the rustic regional cuisine of the Sierra Madre foothills, which is based on cattle ranching and wild game that is still hunted in the hinterland. We dined on charcoal-grilled quail and steak, stews of tongue, pig's feet, beef and lamb, served with freshly made tortillas and a variety of salsas and pickled vegetables. Jugs of refreshing iced *horchata* (a beverage made from ground rice) and *jamaica* (hibiscus) water were passed and we rounded off the meal with a dessert course of sweet tamales, custards and candied pumpkin. This kind of rustic fare rarely finds its way onto tourist menus. Our enjoyment of the unique meal was enhanced by visitations from a hand-held toad, wig-wearing donkeys and a loud-mouthed parrot called Lola.

Back in Mazatlán we went in search of more home cooking and were told to go to a *cenaduria*. *Cenadurias* (from the verb *cenar*, to have supper or dinner) are simple restaurants, often in the front room of a private house, serving traditional home-cooked food. They open in the late afternoon and close around midnight or when the food runs out. Shari opted to play it safe with enchiladas but Susie, inspired by the whole pig's heads we'd seen for sale in the market, ordered pozole, a rich stew of hominy and chopped pig's head swimming in a tasty broth. "How do you like the snout?" asked her neighbour at the communal table. "Good!" said Susie, who almost got to the bottom of her bowl before declaring herself righteously stuffed. T&T

FACING PAGE FROM TOP Fishing boats on the sand; Making ceviche; Street food condiments; El Shrimp Bucket breakfast plate. **THIS PAGE** Blue agave at Los Osunas distillery.



Visit

Mazatlán

Cenaduria Chayito
Teniente Azueta
2407 Rosales y Luis Zuñiga
Mazatlán

Diego's Beach House
Privada La Florida s/n Mazatlán
www.diegosMazatlán.com

El Meson de los Laureanos
Francisco Bernal SN, El Quelite
www.elmesondeloslaureanos.com

El Shrimp Bucket
Olas Altas 11, Mazatlán

Hotel Melville
Constitución No. 99 Centro
Histórico, Mazatlán
www.themelville.com

Hotel Riu Emerald Bay
Av. Sábalo-Cerritos #3404
Mazatlán
www.riu.com

La Puntilla
Playa Sur, Interior Muelle Turistico
s/n Mazatlán
www.lapuntilla.com.mx

Pedro y Lola
Ave. Constitución esq. con
Carnaval, Mazatlán
www.restaurantpedroylola.com

Pino Suárez Mercado
Occupies a city block between
Aquilles Serdan and Benito
Juarez and Melchor Ocampo and
Leandro Valle, Mazatlán

Shrimp Market
Aquiles Serdan, between Luis
Zuniga and Alejandro Quijano
Mazatlán

Suaves Germán Evers
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