

Pacific Sol

A luxury beach retreat wins with clients

By Anne Z. Cooke

There are dozens of beach resorts on Mexico's Pacific Coast. Chances are you've toured some and stayed at others. Most are multi-story hotels, catering to groups and families. A few go for the celebrity trade.

But if clients are looking for a luxury beach retreat that wins rave reviews from nearly everybody, treat them to a few days at Villa Del Sol in Zihuatanejo, a Spanish colonial-style resort on Playa La Ropa, the best and most beautiful beach on the bay.

Designed like a village, the resort's one- and two-bedroom casitas are tucked away beneath mature palms and flowering vines and ferns. Secluded enough for a honeymoon or anniversary, they are private enough so that no one hears neighbors, and parents with kids have their own separate space. Red tile roofs, cool courtyards and winding garden paths connect the lagoon to the tennis courts, the swimming pools to the restaurants and the ocean to everything else.

The Villa's two restaurants and the Cantina Bar perch on the edge of the beach, a long sandy crescent sloping out through the shallows into deeper water. Here, long rolling breakers, slowed by a narrow ocean channel, make for exciting but safe ocean swimming. Thatched *palapas* shade tables and lounge chairs set up on the edge of the sand, making it perfect for relaxing. The beach staff, on duty from early morning until sunset, bring clean towels and take drink and lunch orders.

Villa Del Sol, 180 miles north of Acapulco, opened for guests in the late 1970s, when the property's first owner, Helmut Leins, built nine ocean-front casitas. Gradually Leins built more units and



Villa Del Sol resides on Zihuatanejo's Playa del Ropa.

planted landscaping, eventually adding four pools, a gift shop, tennis courts, a gym and exercise center and a reception center and office.

With five in our family, we stayed in one of the two-bedroom, second-floor garden units, an air-conditioned suite decorated with hand-painted ceramics, Mexican floor tiles and wicker and leather furniture. Our private patio had a hammock and plunge pool. Maids delivered hot coffee, pastries and a newspaper early each morning.

As comfortable as our room was, the first nine rooms built, numbers 1-9, are still my favorites. Small but colorful, they have a sitting area and chairs downstairs, natural wood trim and open beams, with a king bed in the loft.

Resort-wide amenities include 400-count cotton linens, satellite TV, electronic safes, hairdryers, air-conditioning, overhead fans and broadband Internet service.

While in Zihuatanejo, be sure to stroll through the Central Market, where traditional open stalls sell fruit, beans, nuts, flour, juice, wheels of cheese, whole piglets to roast, chops and steak, baskets, buckets, brooms, toys and children's clothes. Look

for souvenirs, beach balls and sandals on Calle de Cinco de Mayo. Quality shops in the waterfront marina sell hand-embroidered clothes, masks, fine weaving and crafts and art. Prices range from \$5 to \$8,000.

To go to town, take the bus from the corner two blocks up the hill. It stops at 10-minute intervals and costs 45 cents.

To get to the hotel from the airport, buy a taxi voucher for the pre-set price of \$21 at the desk near the baggage claim. Do not negotiate at the curb. The trip from the resort back to the airport is \$29. Go figure. ❖

THE DETAILS

Hotel Villa Del Sol

A Superior double room for two is \$380 per night from now through Dec. 17. Add \$60 per person, per day, for breakfast and dinner, mandatory during high season. The five-night Escape to Paradise package is \$1,320.

888-389-2645

www.hotelvilladelsol.net ❖