

Thursday, January 27, 1983 O&E

(S, Ro-6B, F-10C, L-6C, R, W, G-10A) OJG

But go soon

Mexico offers travelers the year's best bargains

Mexico: You may never find another travel bargain like this one. For one American penny you can ride the metro or make seven telephone calls in Mexico City. Sixty pesos, about 40 cents, will buy you a movie or coffee on the room service menu of the Hotel Fiesta Americana.

An elegant dinner with wine costs less than \$10; a three-course luncheon in a regular restaurant costs less than \$3; and you can get it for \$1 if you go bargain hunting. Tortillas cost 5 cents a pound direct from the tortilla maker herself.

All of these bargains are available because of the most recent devaluation of the Mexican peso. The official rate when I was in Mexico in mid-January was 148.5 pesos to the dollar. Most people round it out to 150 for conversational and conversion purposes.

Inflation, 100 percent in 1982, will quickly eat up some of these bargains, so if you are planning a trip to Mexico, go now. Prices will probably be great through 1983 for anyone carrying American dollars, but I predict that they will never be as sensational as they will be during the next three or four months. It is unlikely, (but not impossible) that the peso will be devalued again soon.

Brief history: The peso was exchanged at eight to a dollar two years ago, but has been devalued three times since then. There was a great stir when the Mexican government devalued it to 70 pesos, nationalized the banks, and froze dollar accounts last September. I found confusing exchange regulations in Mexico at that time. Now the exchange rate has dropped to 148.5, and the confusion is mostly over for vacationers.



one-of-a-kind traveler

Iris Jones

contributing travel editor

EXCHANGING YOUR DOLLARS. I made one mistake on this trip, based on last fall's experience. I assumed that I would get a better rate in the United States than in Mexico, so I exchanged \$100 at 120 pesos to the dollar at O'Hare Airport on the way to American Airlines flight No. 57 from Chicago to Mexico City. The first thing I saw when I landed in Mexico City was the exchange rate in Mexico, 148.5. I had outsmarted myself.

You can convert your dollars into pesos at any Mexican bank, and some other establishments, at the official rate, now 148.5 and floating. You will get 10 or 15 pesos less per dollar at a hotel or restaurant. Credit cards purchases are exchanged at the official rate.

When you return to the United States you will always find an exchange desk open at the international airports, where you (the traveler) can exchange an unlimited number of pesos back into American dollars. (Mexican residents are limited in the amount they can exchange, presently \$1,000.)

GETTING THERE. There was a time when you could save money by asking a friend to buy your international air ticket in Mexico, but that is no longer true. Air tickets to other coun-

Prices will probably be great through 1983 for anyone carrying American dollars, but I predict that they will never be as sensational as they will be during the next three or four months. It is unlikely, (but not impossible) that the peso will be devalued again soon.

tries cost the same in pesos or dollars. Air travel within Mexico is another story.

Mexican domestic fares are ridiculously low. Instead of paying \$330 round trip from Mexico City to Los Angeles, for example, smart Mexican travelers buy a round-trip ticket for less than \$80 from Mexico City to Tijuana, walk across the border into the United States and go on by bus or plane from there. Save this kind of money by flying



photos by MICKY JONES

Baskets such as the ones being hawked by these enthusiastic young vendors go for anywhere from \$1 to \$5 in Mexico.

to and from any border town.

You can also save on tax. Taxes introduced into Mexico this month include 15 percent on domestic air tickets except to border towns or to outlying areas such as the Yucatan. On these you pay 3.75 percent tax, the same as on international flights.

That 15 percent also applies to restaurant bills, although it's 20 percent for luxuries such as caviar and champagne. Problem: Since this tax is new, and restaurant waiters may be confused, they could charge you either 15 or 20 percent on your whole restaurant bill.

You can take a first-class bus from Mexico City to Acapulco for less than \$5. In Acapulco, you can taxi anywhere for \$1.

HOTELS. The hotels along the strip in Acapulco are still relatively expensive, but the Exclasis Hyatt Continental, which was \$128 for two last year now charges \$72-82-88, depending on the room. You can stay at fine third-class hotels like the Casa Blanca or Culeta for under \$25 for two; they are clean, comfortable, but may not have a bath in the room. Insiders say you can stay in Acapulco for three dollars a night if all you want is a clean bed.

The Hotel de la Dorda in Taxco, high in the mountains on the way back to Mexico City, cost 2,520 pesos plus tax, about \$20 for two, for a simple room with bath in a gorgeous hacienda setting high on a hill. Lunch and dinner \$60 pesos, about \$4; breakfast 280 pesos, about \$3.

A much grander colonial hotel, the Hotel Hacienda Cocoyoc, an hour's drive south of Mexico City costs from 1,700 pesos (\$12) for a room to 2,800 pesos (\$19) for a junior suite to 3,800 pesos (\$26) for two in a master suite with its own swimming pool.

This was an old plantation, a convent, a sugar mill; nowadays the swimming pool, tennis courts, dining rooms and discotheque are set amid gardens, fountains and ancient stone walls.

RESTAURANTS are a bargain too. Chicken dinner with Mexican wine for under \$10 in a good hotel in Acapulco or Mexico City; an elegant meal for that in Restaurant Sumiya, in Barbara Hutton's former home near Cuernavaca-



Fifty cents will buy you a hand-painted burro from this Mexican craftsman.

caa, or in the brand new Antigua Hacienda de Tlalpan in Mexico City.

The latter just opened in a burst of pink walls, old gardens and antique furniture on the southern edge of Mexico City. It will compete with the well-known Hacienda San Angel and the Hacienda de los Morales.

You can walk into any simple restaurant in Mexico City and ask for the "comida corrida," a fixed-price three-course lunch, for \$1 to \$4.

I'm always very cautious about recommending "best buys in travel," but I have no hesitation about this one.

Mexicans are as charming, peaceful and friendly as ever. The black market is dying now that you can get nearly 150 pesos to the dollar, nobody needs it.

Mexicans are being forced to tighten their belts because of the economic situation there, but they want your tourist dollars so badly now that they are offering you the best travel bargain on the continent.

For information on Mexico, contact your travel agent or the Mexican Government Tourism Office, Two Illinois Center, 233 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1413, Chicago 60601.



The swimming pool of the Hotel Hacienda Cocoyoc is set amid ancient stone walls. An hour's drive south of Mexico City, the hotel's nightly room rates range in price from \$12 to \$26 for a master suite with its own private swimming pool.

Sail the Gulf Coast islands

Five-day sailing trips around Florida's Barefoot Islands are being offered during the winter by American Youth Hostels (AYH).

Sailing the Gulf Coast islands gives participants a chance to explore Captiva, Punta Blanca, Boca Grande and other islands with lots of time to sun, shell and beachcomb.

The trip is designed for do-it-yourself outdoor people ages 18 and older. Should you not already be a sailor this trip offers a chance to learn sail cruising with expert, informal instruction.

The trips will run February through April. The total cost of \$245.91 includes food, bunk, sailing instruction and running expenses — all except transportation to the starting point in the Ft. Myers area.

For more information and a free brochure, phone 545-0511 or write the American Youth Hostels, 3024 Coolidge, Berkeley 48972. AYH is a non-profit group that promotes outdoor recreation.

Some tips on enjoying winter trips

According to travel experts, more families are enjoying split vacations these days, taking one in the summer and one in the winter. Here, then, are some winter vacation tips from the experts:

- If you're changing seasons and heading for a warm climate, make sure you and the youngsters limit your first exposure to the sun to 20 minutes or less. Then you can increase your sunbathing daily to achieve a gradual tan.

- Don't forget to take along a sunscreen. Water-proof sunscreens resist removal by water or perspiration, maintaining their labeled degrees of protection for up to 80 minutes in the water.

- Remember that the weather and time of day affect the sun's strength. You can receive a severe burn even on a foggy or hazy day.

- If you've decided on a winter's ski vacation, remember that a high altitudes your risk of burning is greater because there is less atmosphere to absorb the sun's rays. No matter where you are, the sun is strongest between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

- It would be farighted of you, if you wear eyeglasses, to take along an extra pair, or at least a copy of your lens prescription.

Robert Davis Travel
644-5700

GREAT HOUSES, GARDENS AND ANTIQUES TOUR OF ENGLAND

Professionally escorted **\$2297.00**

28 May — 12 June

91 West Long Lake Road Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Weatherwax Terrace HOTEL

LUXURIOUS LODGINGS FOR LESS

\$24.65 Per Person Quad. Occup.
\$28.10 Per Person Trip. Occup.
\$37.04 Per Person Dubl. Occup.

Price include 2 nights lodgings 2 continental breakfasts (Comp. of Weatherwax Terrace) 2 Days trail fees, taxes, tips, gratuities.

IN THE HUB OF X-C-SKI COUNTRY

Phone Collect: (616) 547-9955
In Charlevoix The Beautiful

TRAVEL SHOPPERS SHOWCASE

SHORT-NOTICE TRAVEL DEALS

PLUS!!
20% EXCHANGE ON U.S. FUNDS

ONE WEEK AIR & HOTEL PACKAGES FROM TORONTO

NASSAU	BALMORAL HOTEL	\$344 C.A.D.
JAMAICA	CLUB CARIBBEAN	\$499 C.A.D.
BARBADOS	YELLOW BIRD APTS.	\$589 C.A.D.
CUBA	INCLUDES MEALS	\$595 C.A.D.

Travel Centres WINDSOR-CONCORD TRAVEL SERVICE, INC.
963-4802

KEEWAYDIN

Canoe Trip Camp For Boys
LAKE TRAVAGAN
ONTARIO, CANADA
ESTABLISHED 1982

Island Base Camp 300 Miles north of Toronto in a vast and lovely wilderness area.

Philosophy: To build strength of character through the discipline of canoe trip living over the six week season commencing June 29.

Boys 12 to 18 enjoy extended outdoor trips based upon age and ability.

Agas 10 and 11 can participate in two special three week programs.

For brochure, call or write:
Fred A. Palmer, Director,
4242 Brookdale St.,
Jackson MI 49201, (601) 352-1200
Local References:
R.B. Wallace
(313) 352-1200