

# Club Med

## It's not just for swingers, but a little togetherness won't hurt

By Iris Sanderson Jones  
special writer

**M**OST OF US are sunbathing, swimming or sailboating here in this hidden cove on the Pacific coast of Mexico. Marco is gathering candidates for an hilarious water-exercise class, held late every morning in the pool.

A few people are playing tennis, riding horses or taking scuba diving lessons. These bathing suits and shorts will soon be lined up for food and wine at the groning board that fills the dining room here every day at lunch.

Just another day at Playa Blanca, the Club Med resort north of Mazatlan, due west of Guadalajara, Spain.

**DOES CLUB MED** deserve its young swinger, slightly risqué reputation? Could the experience be enjoyed by men and women es, gray-haired travelers, and women traveling alone?

I came to this conclusion at Playa Blanca: Any single or married traveler of any age or sex could enjoy this Club Med experience if they like sports, togetherness and the idea of mixing for a week with the same crowd — mostly young, friendly adults.

I met only one traveler who looked like she didn't belong here, a 55-year-old, unmarried woman, too shy to mix freely. Club Med is a resort vacation experience designed for the young single adult but more and more enjoyed by others.

It began when a group of young Europeans, who enjoyed camping on the Mediterranean, formalized their experience into a tenting resort in 1950. Eventually, Club Med expanded into a resort of small huts in Italy, a ski village in Switzerland and a luxury resort in Morocco.

**THERE ARE NOW 88** self-contained resorts in 25 countries throughout the Mediterranean, Caribbean, Middle East, Africa, Mexico, Bahamas, South Pacific, South America, Asia and, with the introduction of Copper Mountain village in Colorado, the United States.

Club Med makes hundreds of millions of dollars every year by betting on its vacation philosophy: that city people want vacations in surroundings completely different from their everyday environment, one in which they can meet others in a casual, no-roles vacation for a reasonable amount of money.

Club Med resorts are self-contained villages in private, sometimes remote, locations. Playa Blanca, for example,

is a red-brick complex that starts at the main building beside the pool and climbs in small, staggered units up the sides of steep hills overlooking a small bay. The resort is entirely tucked away between two rocky promontories. Only "members" get through the gate, but \$25 buys any vacationer a membership.

This in no overnight stop; you must sign up for a week, usually Saturday to Saturday. Your fee covers everything except the bar, gifts and any special excursions you might take to see the countryside. Even then you don't spend money; you wear a string of pop-it beads around your neck so that you can go unencumbered from the swimming pool to the bar, where you spend the beads just like money.

Dress is always casual, so you can wear a bathing suit or a long skirt to dinner, at will. There are no televisions, radios, newspapers, no locks on the doors and no single rooms. If you come alone, you are matched with a roommate of the same sex, just like the good old days at summer camp.

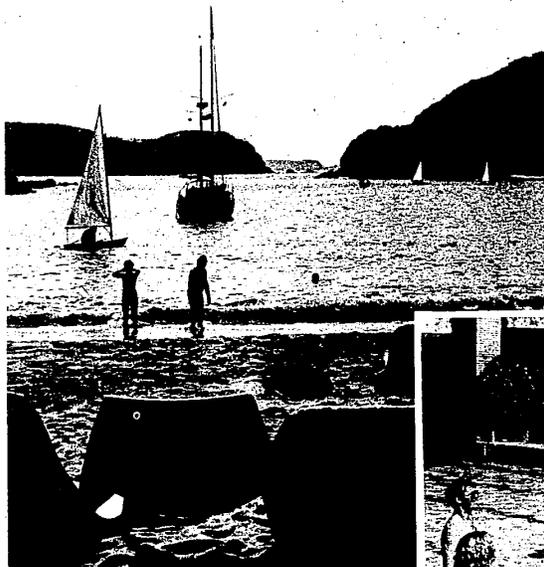
**IN FACT**, Club Med has been called an adult version of summer camp, with everybody enjoying outdoor sports activities during the day, eating, dancing and watching the "camp show" at night. That's where G.O.'s like Luc Distelmans and his staff at Playa Blanca come in.

Playa Blanca is a resort, but G.O.'s (for gentils organisateurs or "nice organizers") are definitely not like any hotel staff you ever met. Club Med's staff are French, and they are assigned to a location for six months, so that they can work as a team during the day and put on good stage presentations at night.

Here's a typical day at Playa Blanca. At 7:30 a.m. the beach is deserted. By 8:30 a.m. there are a few lone bodies on the beach. Most people are getting breakfast. The G.O. hostess seats you at round tables, first-come, first-served, so that you're always meeting new people. Breakfast, like every meal here, is a groning board of food served either buffet or family style.

After breakfast, the beach fills up with sunbathers, swimmers, a few sailboaters and scuba divers, some taking lessons, some just soaking up the sun. There are always a few topless girls on the beach, but this is tastefully done, and nobody feels any compulsion to join them.

Activities accelerate during the day: water exercises in the pool, water volleyball, horseback riding, tennis and usually a special event of the day.



Playa Blanca in Spain is one of Club Med's places in the sun.

**THE FIRST DAY** is a sports day designed to introduce you to all your fellow vacationers and to make you feel at home with guests and staff. Ensuing days include picnics, sailboat outings, and other affairs.

Guests are usually in shorts, jeans or even skirts for before-dinner drinks. After dinner, everybody gathers in the auditorium. While we were there, the entertainment included an excellent Mexican dance troupe from a nearby village, and a theater presentation of "Jesus Christ, Superstar" by the club staff.

That was followed by upstairs dancing till midnight, when the downstairs disco opened; it stays open as long as anybody wants to dance, usually until about 3 a.m., sometimes until dawn.

Most of the clientele are young Americans and Canadians in their 20s and 30s. There are, however, a significant number of grayer heads in the crowd. They include a couple in their 50s who really enjoy the sports but skip the disco, several couples and some singles in their 40s who blend easily into the crowd.

The one 55-year-old woman who doesn't fit in had two strikes against her: She is too shy to mix in with a younger crowd and too old to attract the other single men in the crowd; most of the other guests her age are married.

**SO WOULD you** like Club Med? The rooms are spartan, including very firm beds and simple shower and lavatory facilities. The food is terrific, the staff will make you feel comfortable and as involved as you want to be. Location and facilities usually insure good sun and good sports facilities. If you don't like sports and togetherness, you'll be bored.

The price is roughly \$500 a week per person, plus airfare. Club Med sells tour packages that include air fare, transportation from the airport, your accommodations, all meals (including fixed table wine with lunch and dinner), free use of all club sports facilities and free expert instruction.

For information, contact Club Med at 40 W. 57th St., New York, NY 10019 or contact your travel agent.



Virginia Ross (left), Luc Distelmans and Isabelle Francois are the "nice organizers" at Playa Blanca.



Water volleyball is one of the group sports on Club Med trips.

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travel log  
**Iris Jones**  
contributing travel editor

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