

TRAVEL

Searching the web uncovers a great Mexican vacation

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Searching the net for travel information and deals has become a popular way to plan vacations.

Though a travel agent is still likely to provide a traveler with the latest and best information on what's available, searches on the net and a quick call to a travel agent can sometimes result in happy travel opportunities at low prices.

That was the case for Lonie and Fred Erdman of Redford and their friends when a search on the Internet located an all-inclusive vacation in Puerto Vallarta.

"It was an all-inclusive deal we couldn't pass up," said Lonie Erdman. "It included food, drinks, non-motorized sports, entertainment every night, water aerobics, volleyball, basketball, a hot legs contest for men and, for a little extra cost, massages, facials and all that stuff."

This package at the Quilston Club and Spa was \$948 per person, including airfare.

The Erdmans had traveled to Mexico before, to Cancun. And though this trip, Jan. 10-17, to Puerto Vallarta was less active, Erdman said it was worth the

price.

"They treated you like royalty," she said. "We didn't venture off too much from the hotel because they had everything we needed."

The surf was kicking up and surf boards and boogie boards were taking advantage of the high waves. Erdman said they confined their swimming to the hotel's pools but she said the ocean was "postcard blue."

Best of all, their 11th floor room sported dramatic views in every direction.

"We had planned the trip since July," Erdman said.

She said she and her husband weren't really planning on a big vacation this year, but when the friend who had planned the Cancun trip in 1996 came up with this trip, it was too good to pass up.

She said every day was sunny with temperatures rising to the mid 80s.

"One day, we rented a Suburban and drove up the mountains on a one-lane road. The people who live there drive like maniacs," she said.

The ubiquitous tourist restaurants Hooters, Planet Hollywood and Hard Rock Cafe lined up with the high rise hotels. But

Erdman said her favorite place was a restaurant built around a waterfall, complete with ropes to swing on.

She said the food at the resort was good.

"It was Mexican food, refried beans with everything, tacos. Most people in our group didn't enjoy the food, but we did," she said. "Everything was spicy, jalapenos in everything, from eggs in the morning until dinner."

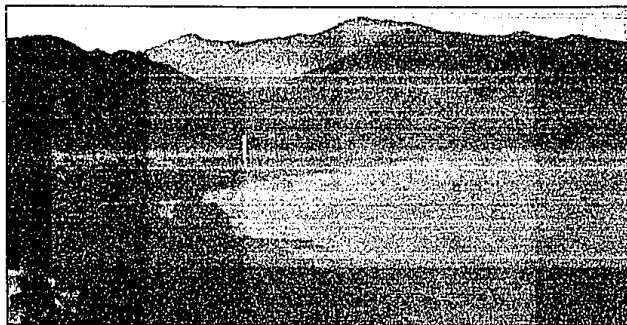
Erdman said she'd go back because she liked the all-inclusive resort idea.

"We've been on cruises and I like being in one spot," she said.

Erdman works at First of America and her husband works for Infatrate Construction.

You can do your own searching of the World Wide Web by checking out several helpful travel websites. These sites allow you to check on the latest air travel prices, map out a course for a automobile trip, get the latest map of a city, check on and make hotel accommodations, get recommendations for the most interesting attractions and find out what's happening where and when. Of course, the services of a travel agent are usually required when planning a long trip or a trip overseas, but the websites help prepare you in advance and help guide you to places you might not have considered visiting.

The Lonely Planet On-Line (www.lonelyplanet.com) provides information on off-the-beaten path attractions and activities, reports from other travelers and a slide show of travel photographs. Travel Source (www.travelsource.com) provides for online reservations and an information guide to travel destinations, specialty vacations such



Great view: This dramatic view was a definite highlight on a trip to Puerto Vallarta.

as ecotours and vacation home exchanges. The National Park Service provides a guide to National Landmarks (www.cr.nps.gov/nr/tourism.html).

Conde Nast, publishers of Traveler magazine, offers Epicurious online (www.epicurious.com), which includes travel "deals of the week," guides to restaurants, hotels, arts and shopping. Travelocity.com is another source for package vacation deals, latest air fares and other travel information.

To find out where you're going and how to get there from where you are, several map sites are available including Mapquest (www.mapquest.com) and Delorme (www.delorme.com). To find your way around airports check out QuickAID (www.quickaid.com/airports/). Travel guide giant Fodors has



Surf's up: The Pacific waves were coming hard at Puerto Vallarta.

a website offering information similar to that in its famous guides (www.fodors.com). To check out hotels at their own sites, check the All the Hotels on the Web site linking to more than 6,500 hotels worldwide (www.all-hotels.com). For educational travel opportunities check

out the Shaw Guides site (www.shawguides.com).

The web search Yahoo also has extensive links to travel sites (www.yahoo.com).

This only skims the surface, so go surf and you might find a deal that like the Erdmans is "just too good to pass up."

Happy travelers: Lonie and Fred Erdman of Redford took advantage of a good deal to travel to Mexico.



GREAT ESCAPES

"Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 32261 Woodcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-2279 or e-mail at hgallagher@o.ehomecomm.net

ISRAEL CELEBRATION

The Jewish Community Center is presenting a "Journey Through Israel," 2 p.m. Sunday, April 26, at the JCC-Jimmy Prentiss Morris Building, 15110 W. 10 Mile, Oak Park, to commemorate Israel's 50th anniversary. Participants will experience the tastes, touch, sights and smells of the many regions and cities of Israel and will receive a passport to climb aboard JEFF

Airlines for a free family trip to Israel. Interactive activities will be available for adults and children of all ages. The community wide event is sponsored by the Jewish Community Center and the Agency for Jewish Education's Jewish Experiences for Families. For information, call (248)967-4030.

TITANIC TRIP

Rec Diving of Royal Oak in conjunction with Deep Ocean Expeditions of Great Britain and the P.P. Shirshov Institute of Oceanology in Moscow is offering an opportunity to dive the RMS Titanic. Rec Diving founder Mike Kohut will lead the expedition. As an expedition member

you will make one dive in a submersible research submarine on the Titanic. You will stay aboard the 400-foot research vessel Akademik Keldysh with a full-staffed crew, other expedition members and professional scientists. This is the same ship and submersible that were used in the filming of the Oscar-winning

film, "Titanic," and an IMAX film done in 1991. The cost of the one-week adventure is \$32,500. A \$6,500 deposit is required to hold your spot and assignment is on a first paid, first served basis. For reservations and more information, call Judy Shafir at Rec Diving, (800)999-0303, send e-mail to dive@recdiving.com or

Mike Kohut, (305)872-4289.

CYCLING TIPS

Dan Harrison will present "Invitation to Cycling," 7 p.m. Thursday, April 23, at REI, 17559 Haggerty, Northville. He will talk about all aspects of the sport of cycling. The talk is free.

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