

Introduce Yourself

What's Your Story?

Life in Puerto Vallarta and COVID-19 By Sherrie and Jack Berlin



We're the Traveling Berlins, Sherrie & Jack. We have been asked to write about our yearly travels to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and our love of our adopted second home. From 2004 through 2015, we vacationed for one week each May at our Puerto Vallarta timeshare. But then we talked with a friend about getting a feel for actually living there. The next January, 2016, we wound up driving down and renting a house for five months. Thus began our love of actually living in a middle class Mexican neighborhood as quasi resident/tourists.



A Mexican Community

Our primitive ability to speak Spanish improves yearly and Jack claims to speak excellent restaurant Spanish, although as soon as we try practicing our Spanish, the natives want to practice speaking English with us. We love the variety of excellent, inexpensive restaurants and have become friends with many of the neighborhood restaurant owners. We can walk to a local fish market and the house we rented this year was four blocks from an excellent, modern supermarket and Costco. We also have a neighborhood tortillaria where we get freshly prepared tortillas.

We have made many new friends—U.S. expats and U.S. and Canadian yearly visitors, as well as many native Mexicans. We have found the people we meet, especially the Mexicans, to be warm, friendly and helpful.



The public art is amazing and there are art galleries galore all over town. One of our favorite activities is to take visitors on a tour of the sculptures along the beautiful malecon (boardwalk) where Gary Thompson, a local American expat art gallery owner and friend, conducts tours discussing the artists and the history of the sculptures. Another of our favorite activities is the weekly Xuitla (Chutla) Folklorico dance performances by students ranging in ages from 8 to 20.

Puerto Vallarta is an environmentally friendly city with clean beaches and buses that run on natural gas. When we aren't walking, we take them everywhere. Puerto Vallarta also boasts a world class Botanical Garden about an hour south of the city, encompassing almost 80 acres, which, as members, we visit frequently. Closer to home is an estuary which offers educational tours conducted by university students.

Jewish Holidays Away from Home

Several years ago friends that we had met at a farmer's market invited us to join them on the 2nd annual Chabad Purim cruise. We had a great evening and met a lot of interesting fellow Jewish travelers and discovered that the owners of Vallarta Adventures, who supplied the boat and drinks for the cruise, are Jewish. Last year our friends encouraged us to stay and

join them at the Chabad Passover Seder. We reluctantly agreed and were pleasantly shocked to find that the evening was fun and the kosher food and wine were delicious.



Coping with Covid

By lucky timing, we found that the best way to cope with Covid-19 was to remain in Puerto Vallarta. This year we had planned to return home in mid-March with the expectation of hosting two Seders. However, a week before our planned departure, our son called and bluntly informed us to stay, explaining that the market shelves in most of Southern California were empty and there wasn't a roll of toilet paper to be found in most stores. We spoke to our landlady, who was only too happy to have us stay. We called and cancelled our flight and watched as the number of cases in L.A. rose.

Puerto Vallarta started shutting down tourist access to the city, thereby making it much safer. The weather was still great; the restaurants were still open and life was pretty normal for a few more weeks. Chabad wound up cancelling this year's Seder, but we managed to put together a family seder with our kids & grandkids in Cleveland and Temecula via Zoom.

As the pandemic exploded elsewhere and Mexico's president downplayed it (sound familiar?) Puerto Vallarta's mayor reacted correctly. All business establishments had hand sanitizer at the entrances; restaurants that wanted to remain open had to remove tables so they were at least six feet apart, and although not yet mandatory, masks were becoming more common on the streets and in markets and restaurants. We really felt we were safer there than we would have been here in L.A.



Zooming with Friends

In the meantime, the world was discovering Zoom and we were able to attend lectures, meetings, discussion groups and social get-togethers with friends in ChaiVillageLA and Temple Isaiah. With everyone isolating, we were just like everyone else in our Zoom rooms—just in a different time zone. We did get to know many more ChaiVillageLA members through our weekly Tea with the Levines and the many interactive activities that ChaiVillageLA provided. These activities started filling our days to the point that we had to start making daily schedules to keep track of who we were meeting and when! We returned May 14 and we've passed our 14 days of quarantine and are healthy. Although not much has changed about our day-to-day activities, it's good to be home and in the same time zone with the rest of you.

Did you enjoy Sherrie and Jack's story? If so, let them know at monsherrie@gmail.com.

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