

Spring break takes on a jungle flare

By J.T. Mollner
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It was nine o' clock. Los Angeles was cold. Dave, my cousin, and I just stepped off an American flight that offered one complimentary beverage to each person, and we were just stepping on to our connecting flight: Mexicana Airlines, direct service to Puerto Vallarta.

The culture change was immediate. We were surrounded by a sea of Mexicans—few who spoke English and 20 minutes into the flight, there seemed to be a full fledged party in the isle. Tequila and Brandy were the drinks of choice, and it was all free.

When we finally taxied into our gate in the early afternoon, the plane was full of drunk travelers, and the old stench of alcohol, sweat and vomit was thick.

Puerto Vallarta was hot and steamy.

I began to sweat the minute I entered the airport. After picking up our bags and going through customs, we were met by our guide, Leno—a short, middle-aged Mexican man with a large smile on his face.

"Hola amigo! You ready to go to hotel?" he asked.

We said yes and he took us to a cambi (a beat-up, old Volkswagen bus). We jumped in and went to our hotel.

It was beautiful, an artists paradise. The sun was melting over



by J.T. Mollner / The Rebel Yell

A view of Las Palmas, Mexico.

a picturesque blue ocean as we pulled up along the cobblestone streets to our seaside hotel. It was a sunset I had never seen in the states, and the night was creeping upon us.

As we entered the lobby, I could see the policia strolling down the streets, passed the roadside chicken and fish vendors with sub-machine guns slung over their shoulders.

We went in and sat down with our guide at the bar.

"Pedro!" said Leno to the bartender, "Tres Tequilas pronto—1800 Anejo."

We watched as the bartender put a few drops of tabasco in each shot, cut limes and shook us some salt. We all raised our glasses.

"Welcome to Mexico," said Leno in a thick Spanish accent, and we threw down the shots simultaneously.

I immediately asked if he could take us to the jungle and the small non-tourist villages in the mountains surrounding Puerto Vallarta. I asked him if we could go alone, or if it would be wise to take a guide.

He told us he had a guide who could take us anywhere.

"Don't go anywhere like that without a local," said Leno. "It is very dangerous. There are banditos who hide and live in the jungle along with strange plants and animals. The mountain towns also are dangerous. The people in those villages don't take too kindly to

gringos."

We thanked him and planned a trip through the small local village of Las Palmas and into the jungle on horseback. He told us to be waiting in the lobby at 8:30 a.m. the next day.

We went out that night in a good mood. We met tourists and locals. We ate great food and drank tequila at the open cantinas along the beach. The policia stopped and searched me for drugs. They stole 800 pesos from me (about 100 dollars). I shouldn't have been carrying so much cash.

The phone was ringing. We woke up with pounding headaches. It was time to go to the jungle. We threw on clothes and went on a bumpy bus ride across the country

side to Rancho Bonita where we ate breakfast and had morning Bloody Marys that calmed the Mexican hangovers. We drank orange and pineapple juice, and we ate fresh bananas with chopped pineapple. It was all so sweet and juicy, picked from the farm down the road.

We saddled up. My horse was old and sick. It vomited when I sat down, and when I asked the guide for another horse he told me it was all right.

There was an old, sick black dog that followed us the whole way that had a chunk removed from its side. There was a red and wet open wound and a piece of skin hanging off of it. I felt bad for the dog.

There were about eight other Americans riding with us. They all looked rugged and well traveled. They looked like adventurers who were used to this sort of thing. One man we met said he had been to this jungle before, and it was nice. He told us he had been to the jungle in Borneo once before also, and it was more lush. He gave me jerky and I tasted the salt with hot spices.

We entered the small mountain village of Las Palmas. I couldn't believe my eyes. The easiest way to describe it would be to say it looked like something straight out of a Speedy Gonzales cartoon.

I didn't notice power lines.

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PRIMAL SQUAT



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