

There's This Place:

Puerto Escondido

A New Look

by Capt. Bill Simpson

As we sailed north from La Paz into the middle of the Sea of Cortez, we wondered what we would find at Puerto Escondido. Like so many other people over the past four to five years, we had read and heard a mixed bag of opinions regarding Puerto Escondido. Many people had told us that the area was a run-down cruiser hurricane hole not worth a visit, with little more than a tiny cruising community made up of a dozen or so boats, a few derelicts, a one-room cruiser 'yacht club' and the remnants of a failed government development. Not exactly what we wanted to hear.

Nevertheless, like some other cruisers this season, we sailed the *Iron Maiden* north in anticipation of attending the annual Loreto Fest, which as it turns out, is actually held in Puerto Escondido and not at the city of Loreto. Puerto Escondido is approximately 130 nautical miles north of La Paz and 90 miles south of Santa Rosalia.

We rounded the dangerous reef that extends seaward a considerable distance from Punta Marcia and then headed northwest as we entered the straight that is bounded by Isla Montserrat on the east and the Baja Peninsula on the west, at a point about 25 miles south of Puerto Escondido. From this vantage point looking north, several islands come into view as well as the spectacular Sierra de la Giganta Mountains that tower along the western side of this passage northbound.

When we arrived at Puerto Escondido, we dropped anchor at the 'Waiting Room' which is a deep-water

anchorage on the outside of the inner harbor under the protection of Punta Coyote. It's easy to see why they sometimes call Puerto Escondido the 'Hidden Port' as it cannot be seen until you are well inside the Waiting Room. Boats wishing to anchor in the Waiting Room should expect to anchor in depths ranging from 50 - 80 feet. Vessels drawing less than nine feet of water can safely enter the channel into the harbor and anchor in the 'Ellipse' which is a small bight lined with a cement wall on the south side of the channel, or continue on into the inner harbor and Puerto Escondido where there is ample room to anchor in depths from 12 feet to 40 feet. Alternatively, Singlar offers moorings at reasonable prices.

We launched our shore boat and headed into the inner harbor, which is a very well protected bay considered by many as a 'hurricane hole.' It is surrounded by land and is only accessed through a 200-foot-wide channel that connects the Waiting Room to the inner harbor, which is about one mile in length going north and south, and about one-half mile wide.

As we headed up the channel and approached the inner harbor we were pleasantly surprised by what we saw. We tied our dinghy to the dock, which looked to be nearly new and made of state-of-the-art materials. As we walked up from the dock onto the marina grounds, several beautiful modern structures came into view including a three story office building and a large two



story complex. The two story complex contains several businesses, including a high-end restaurant, bar, mini-mart, the Hidden Port Yacht Club and even a lap pool and jacuzzi on the second floor. There are also many restrooms which are on the order of those seen in private clubs, completely tiled with showers and spotless clean! The modern architecture that house these facilities now gracing Puerto Escondido has certainly made the port more user-friendly for both boaters and travelers arriving by land, and is rarely seen on the Baja outside Cabo San Lucas or La Paz.

Fonutar began a development project in the area of Puerto Escondido in 2005, which unfortunately was not completed and has led to the many rumors of an ‘abandoned government project,’ which is far from being accurate. Singlar remained engaged with the project, and the marina and it’s current facilities reflect a lot of hard work by Singlar and its current management and staff.

Singlar, which is a division of Fonutar, operates the marina and boater services at Puerto Escondido. They have a new 50-ton travel lift and a large paved dry storage area that can accommodate most boats. There are also



many services available for boaters needing anything from bottom paint to major repairs. In addition to these services, Singlar operates the Pemex fuel dock which has diesel and gasoline available. They have tankage holding 40,000 liters of diesel and 35,000 liters of gasoline. Marina Singlar also has moorings in place to accommodate up to 117 boats in size ranging from the smallest up to 140 feet.

The local manager of Marina Singlar at Puerto Escondido is Constanza C. Noriega Curtis. Constanza holds a masters degree in urban development and is a very diligent worker. Constanza also oversees operations at the Singlar facility at Santa Rosalia. She is fluent in both English and Spanish and heads up a staff of nine at Puerto Escondido. We found Constanza and all of her staff to be very friendly and they constantly strive to meet the expectations of all visitors.

This jewel of a port is certainly an eye-opener in the wilderness of Puerto Escondido. But wait, is Puerto Escondido really the 'out back' of the Baja? This 'hidden port' is set before the backdrop of the rugged and magnificent Sierra de la Giganta Mountains towering to the sky on the west and facing the azure-blue Sea of Cortez and several islands on the east. It wasn't too long ago when Puerto Escondido and the nearby town of Loreto were dusty, little known places, visited only by the more adventurous traveling by land down the Trans-Peninsular Highway or by boat on the sea. That also has changed with the addition of new facilities at the Loreto Airport. With the recent addition of a new airline terminal, tower and improved runway, the Loreto Airport had become more attractive and accessible to the major airlines, which now service Loreto with regularly scheduled flights. In fact, our 10-year-old grandson recently flew into Loreto on his own via Alaska Airlines from Portland, Oregon without any problems.

The new terminal is well designed and cool, and the infrastructure makes arrivals and departures a breeze compared to many airports. Boaters can meet their guests one of two ways. We chose to sail the 13 miles to Loreto from Puerto Escondido and anchored offshore at Loreto in 18 feet of water. We then took our shore boat into the small marina there and quickly found a taxi to the airport from the Loreto Marina, which is just three miles away. Alternatively, boaters can easily catch a ride with someone from Puerto Escondido over to Loreto or rent a car, which will be delivered to you at Puerto Escondido. There is also taxi service from Puerto



Escondido to and from the airport. Car rental costs are quite reasonable and the taxi ride round trip is on the order of \$50.00 USD using a van.

In addition to all of the great things we have already described, as a boater I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention the fantastic destinations and anchorages at the nearby local islands, several of which are just a few miles away and a short cruise from Puerto Escondido. All of these beautiful islands are part of a national conservation program and are virtually pristine. They are all currently uninhabited except for the caretakers at the historic salt mines at Salinas Bay on Isla Carmen. We visited these ruins and it's definitely a trip back into the old Wild West. Still, other locations include remote anchorages where the water is crystal clear and its like swimming through an aquarium every time we dive in! Frankly, it just doesn't get any better than this in our opinion.

Puerto Escondido is now our new favorite port, and no trip to the Baja would be complete without enjoying a few colorful sunrises and sunsets over the beautiful islands to the east and the majestic Sierra de la Giganta Mountains to the west. ⚓

