

PUERTO PEÑASCO WITH 'FAMILIA DE CINCO'

Rocky Point delivers family fun, a few challenges

By Stephanie Jarnagan

Puerto Peñasco, also known as the south-of-the-border beach town dubbed Rocky Point, has long been a popular vacation spot for many Arizonans, since it's home to the closest beach for both Phoenicians and Tucsonans (approximately a four-hour drive from our home in the southeast Valley). My first experience with the locale dates back to the late 1990s when thousands of fellow Sun Devils and other spring breakers converged on the small tourist town for some college-age shenanigans.

Our family—which includes three offspring ages 18, 15 and 11—had been reluctant to visit due to heightened cartel crime in northern Mexico, but after years of cajoling by my brother, whose in-laws have owned a home on the Cholla Bay peninsula since the 1970s, we finally took a trip there last spring and enjoyed ourselves. Most recently, however, we visited the Las Conchas area on the opposite side of town for a fall break trip with neighbors.

A rocky start

One of the tactics we employ to alleviate travel-related stress into a foreign country is to caravan with fellow travelers. This has always worked well, and we had encountered no problems during our first trip with my brother. This trip, how-

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ever, began with our neighbors being pulled over by Mexican police shortly after crossing the border. Our neighbor happens to be fluent in Spanish and after they had tried to shake him down for \$200, he was able to negotiate the “speeding fee” down to \$40 cash and be on his way.

Our neighbors were driving a late-model Toyota 4Runner with a trailer hauling a dune buggy—yes, it basically screams “wealthy tourist”—and we were driving our reliable Ford Explorer Sport. These are ideal vehicles for travel to Mexico, where there’s an endless amount of dirt and sand to traverse! (Pro tip: When traveling in Mexico, don’t forget to secure Mexican insurance, which we did via Sanborn’s prior to leaving the States.)

When we arrived at our beachfront villa, rented via VRBO, we encountered problem number two. The beach was nearly inaccessible because both sets of stairs and the sea wall had been destroyed by a hurricane that hit a few weeks prior. Repairs were in progress during our stay, with no prior notification by the VRBO owner. Fortunately, we were all able-bodied and scrambled down the neighboring sand hills to hit the beach each day, so we just made the best of it.

Soaking up nature

We spent many hours simply swimming and kayaking at the beach, discovering starfish, sea anemones and even an octopus during low tide. The Sea of Cortez has one of the most remarkable tide fluctua-



tions in the world, coming in around number three with an astounding 27-foot fluctuation at extreme high tide. We visited during a full moon in October, and our beachfront property saw a difference in tides that was at least the length of a full football field, if not longer. I highly recommend visiting during this time because the water was the perfect temperature, with highs in the upper 80s and low 90s during the day.

One of our favorite places to visit was the Morua Estuary. Located about 15 minutes southeast of town, on the Sea of Cortez in Sonora, this 2,700-acre ecosystem hosts more than 140 species of endemic and migratory birds that make the bay their winter home or stop over enroute to destinations further south.

While we did not indulge, the estuary is also home to the El Barco oyster res-

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taurant, where the oysters are cultivated on site by the only women's oyster farming cooperative in Mexico.

Our kids enjoyed hiking the sand dunes and "surfing" down the hills into the water—some trips were successful, others not so much. But a good time was had by all, without any injuries, thankfully.

Bring on the food

Our visit to Rocky Point would not have been complete without indulging in local cuisine—Mexican food happens to be our favorite. Churros y Elotes is a simple roadside stand in town that serves up to-die-for churros complete with a variety of dipping sauces. Prior to our stop here, I thought Disneyland served up the world's best churros. Not so!

We also made sure to visit Wrecked at the Reef for an afternoon of adult and virgin beverages and standard bar food, as well as some great live music and beach volleyball action.

One of the most memorable food experiences we had was hiring a local chef



to prepare a Mexican taco feast at our VRBO, which was money well spent and a luxury that we will all remember. It also resulted in some of the tastiest nachos made the next day from the seemingly endless leftovers!

For a quick trip that checks off two ideal vacation boxes—1) beach town and 2) interesting international destination—Rocky Point is full of adventure for spring breakers and families alike. ■

