

“WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CORI BRETT?”

August 2011

“MAZATLAN GOLF BY THE SEA”



The 16th green at Estrella Del Mar.

Book a foreign vacation four days before departure? Not my style. But we couldn't resist the invitation to Estrella del Mar – fabulous golf course, 3.5 miles of private beach, and good friends with a lovely condo to share. An easy two-hour flight from Phoenix to Mazatlan, ten-minute drive from the airport, and we were splashing in the waves by noon. Spontaneity may just be the way to go.

I love playing golf along the seashore – waves rhythmically breaking, fresh breezes blowing, and the sheer beauty of it. At Estrella del Mar, six holes run right along the ocean, opening up some spectacular views. Tall palm trees line the fairways. It's balmy and divinely tropical, with lush plantings around lakes and tee boxes.

No. 4 and No. 14 face the ocean and play directly into the wind. Definitely club up. I found the course played long, at 5,458 yards from the forward tees, especially the par-five's. Putts sped toward the ocean as if drawn by a magnet. Some fairways are connected by exquisitely tiled archways that lead into ivy-covered tunnels. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. and opened in 1996, it's a beautiful course and fun to play. www.estrelladelmar.com



The 9th hole at Estrella Del Mar.

Estrella Del Mar encompasses 816 acres in a gated community that includes oceanfront condos, available to purchase or rent, and the 27-room Las Villas Hotel and Spa. This intimate little retreat has “honeymoon” written all over it. We sipped on delicious fresh tropical fruit smoothies at the pool bar after a terrific massage at the spa.

I had always heard that Mazatlan was a premier sport fishing destination. Fishing charters can be booked from several locations. Even surf-fishing is good. Our friend hooked a large mahi-mahi from the surf just outside the condo. Delicious grilled!

Don't expect to find turtle soup on the menu. The Estrella del Mar Sea Turtle Sanctuary is just a short walk down the beach and provides a natural habitat for the endangered creatures. It's a rare treat to participate in the ritual of releasing the adorable baby turtles into the ocean. Like most babies, the little sea turtles can be a bit rambunctious. Some take off the wrong way and have to be gently redirected.



The 15th hole at Estrella Del Mar.

Old Town Mazatlan is a must-see for first-time visitors, and only about a 30-minute drive from Estrella del Mar. At Plaza Machado, the heart of Old Town, restored historic buildings, art galleries and cozy restaurants create a lively cultural and entertainment scene. We strolled under leafy shade trees lining the Plaza, stopping in to hear live music at an outdoor café. Topolo was the unanimous choice for dinner. Strings of brightly-colored “chili pepper” lights decorated the outdoor walls surrounding the courtyard, where we dined on tasty fresh fish presented with warmth and pride by Fernando, Topolo’s owner.

I really enjoyed visiting Old Town, but honestly the best part of the vacation was just being at Estrella del Mar, playing golf and going to the beach. Entire afternoons were lost to naps under a big, floppy “palapa,” which is a thatched-roof cover made of woven palm leaves. Some days we stayed in the huge infinity-edge pool until dusk, watching the sun set over the Pacific. I’m still looking for that famous “green flash.”

*“Escape with Cori” on assignment to exotic and fun golf destinations. First-hand impressions from an experienced golf travel writer and AWGA member. www.coribrett.com
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