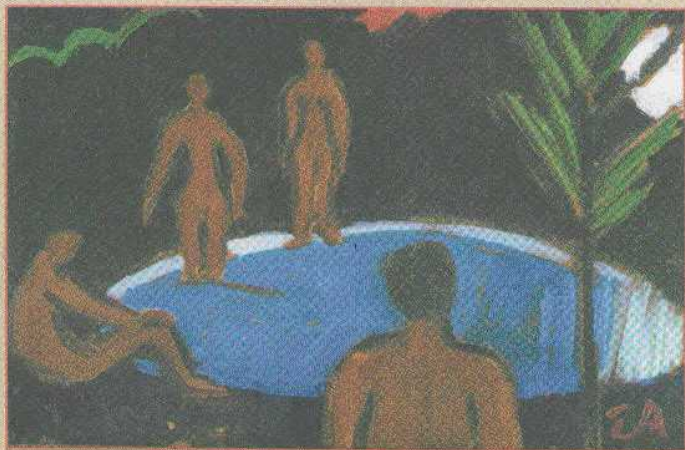




# ¡OLÉ JALISCO!



Mark Storey

**I MAY DOPE SLAP THE PERSON I HEAR** voicing wussy concern over travel in Mexico. Our friends and neighbors to the south offer fabulous vacation opportunities, and if you know where to look, you can do so as Nature intended.

I've for years had the best of times in Mexican resorts frequented by moneyed-naturists, ultra-low-budget hotels used by locals, beach huts, ocean-side campgrounds, trailer parks, and clothing-optional B&Bs. My first visit was on a month-long recreational vehicle tour through northern Mexico and Baja in 1978 with my grandfather. I've had the pleasure of visiting at least eight states throughout the country, and I've *never* had anything approximating a serious problem. People are routinely friendly, helpful, honest, and understand that an English-speaking gringo tourist may be feeling uneasy when visiting another country for the first time. *¡No hay problema!* No problem!

Mexico has one of the world's finest cuisines, which may come as a shock to those who are familiar only with the over-cooked, inordinately sauced "food" served at most Mexican restaurants here in the northernmost countries of North America. And authentic Mexican food is delightfully regional, as the grilled beef dishes of the northern states of Sonora, Sinaloa, and Chihuahua differ radically from the fresh seafood served at the beach cafes along the Baja coasts, or the rich mole sauces featured in Oaxaca, or the to-die-for banana-leaf-wrapped pibil sim-

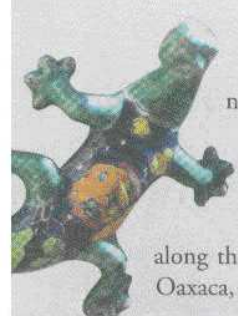
mered on the Yucatan peninsula. My wife Kathy raves about the fresh fruits and vegetables readily found there.

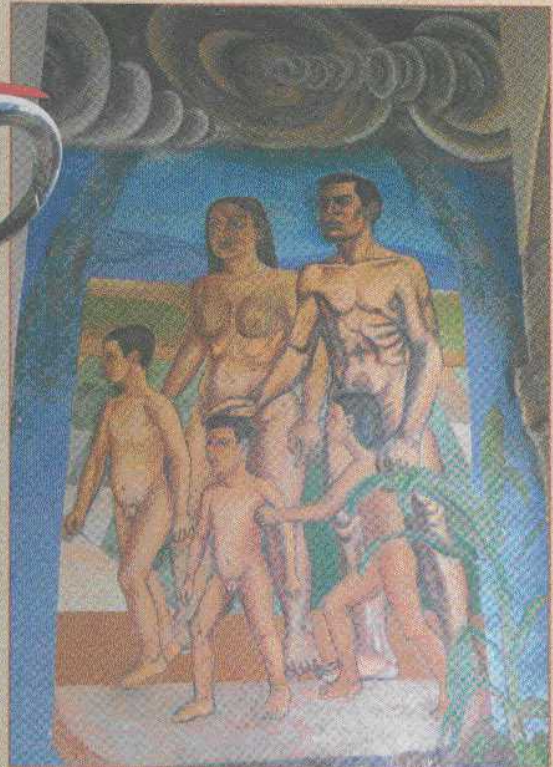
We hear in the U.S. about Mexican drug-related crime, and that's a tragic reality for many Mexicans today. But, that crime rarely impacts gringo tourists, as the drug cartels are too busy trying to feed our voracious appetite for their product to worry about hassling skinny-dippers sunning their buns at a clothing-optional beach or other naturist-friendly setting. Visitors simply stay out of the drug zones, and relax in the vast majority of Mexican neighborhoods and countryside.

Mexico is also making a disserted effort at a public facelifift. Cities throughout the country announce on signs, billboards, and TV ads municipal efforts to pick up trash, to stop all littering, and to be proud of their cleaner environment. On my recent trip to Guadalajara—the second largest city in Mexico—I was pleased to find it neater than ever, and much cleaner than most U.S. cities I've visited.

Major restaurants and small local cafes are also taking strides toward being as healthy as they can. On my trip this past December I often saw cooks in even the smallest cafes wearing clean gloves, hairnets, and face masks. Sinks with plenty of soap—and signs encouraging people to use them—were ubiquitous.

In short, if you use common sense, you'll be just as safe in a Mexican city as you will be in one to the north; it's easy to be as fastidiously clean as you wish; language is not much of a problem, as most people working with tourists speak enough English to





Art abounds in Jalisco, and occasionally reflects an interest in social nudity. Previous page paintings by Emily Allen (left) and Enrique Velázquez (right); above: street mural in Ajiic (left) and mural in the Museo Regional de Guadalajara.

help you order food or get a room in a hotel; and once you get there, the prices are still easy on your wallet compared to the costs you face back home. And Mexico is way cool, even if a good vacation means getting sun on your cheeks!

### CASA ENCANTADO

**ONE OF THE EASIEST WAYS TO INTRODUCE** yourself to Mexico is with an easygoing visit to the new naturist bed-and-breakfast, Casa Encantado. Host couple Brian and Moira hale from New Zealand and have practiced nude recreation and living for years. Having long enjoyed Mexico, they selected the Lago (Lake) Chapala region south of Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco as their new home. As English-speaking naturist ex-pats who know Jalisco well, they make ideal hosts for those wishing to give Mexico a try...or in the case of Kathy and me, for yet another visit to this sun-blessed land.

Spanish-speakers among *N*'s readers may wonder at the mixed use of gender in the B&B's name, *Casa* ("House") being feminine and *Encantado* ("Delighted," or "Enchanted") being masculine. The explanation seems to be that Brian and Moira blended the masculine gender of their gated community's name with the feminine gender of *Casa*. The grammar of "Casa Encantado" may thus not be quite standard, but it's an exquisitely comfortable home, both to the host couple and to you during your stay.

Casa Encantado is located in the foothills of the Sierra Travesaño mountains, in the small lake-side town of San Juan

### CAVENDISH, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, CANADA



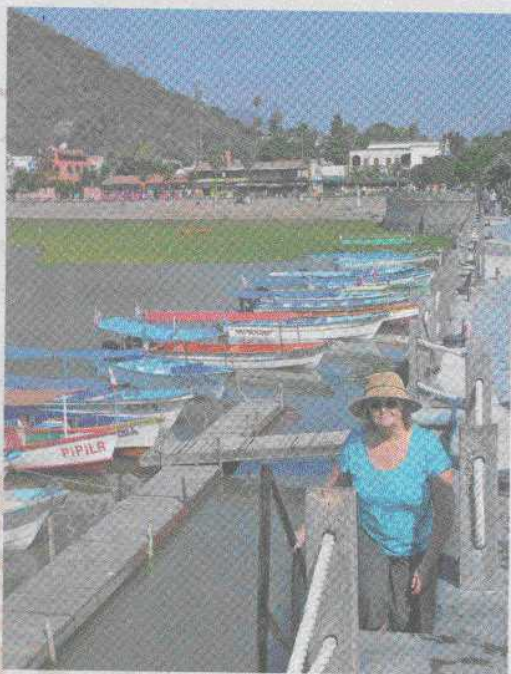
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Breakfast is a treat at Casa Encantado (top); boats await private tours of Lake Chapala, and have been enjoyed clothes-free (middle); back at the B&B, the pool awaits.

Cosalá. It's advertised as being in the slightly larger adjacent artist community of Ajijic (ah-HEE-heek), since most Mexicans and many foreign travelers hear of it more often. The B&B sits up just high enough to offer views of the Lake Chapala from every patio and deck. In the foreground lie undeveloped hillsides, a house or two, the one main road running along the north shore of the lake, some greenhouses, the lake itself, and the mountains on the other side. It's a mix of rustic village semi-development, and less trammled nature.

Moira and Brian began construction of the fully clothing-optional Casa Encantado in 2005, and opened it as a B&B in 2012. The house itself is large, stretching over 5005 square feet. Two rooms are available to guests (singles, couples, and small families are welcome), both are spacious at 300 and 600 square feet, and each has a ceiling fan, private bath, and full access to a large outdoor veranda in front of the house and overlooking the lake. A 10x20-foot swimming pool (4-feet deep throughout, 87-92F), shaded and sunny areas for lounging, and an upstairs patio to catch even more views and evening breezes on those particularly warm days are open for use.

Moira makes a delicious breakfast each day at a time convenient for you. When Kathy and I were there this past December, our meals consisted of cereals, fresh fruits, yogurt, coffee, juice, muffins, and a hot dish. We never walked away hungry. Moira and Brian enjoy being nude, so if it's to your taste, you will feel welcome being clothes-free 24 hours a day, at and away from the outdoor breakfast table. Some of their guests, they told us, never leave the property as they wanted to be nude all the time. The only neighbors who have a small chance of seeing onto a portion of the property are a nearby naturist couple, and Brian has capably landscaped the yards so that no matter where you walk it feels sensuously open while being quite private.

The atmosphere at Casa Encantado is fully consistent with Naturist Society values. The hosts understand that the warm, sunny atmosphere may bring thoughts of romance to mind for many couples, but *el amor* is reserved for one's private room. Smoking and illegal drug use are not allowed on the property. Relaxation, good camaraderie, and a pleasant time are encouraged, though.

Guests thinking of bringing pets need to contact Casa Encantado beforehand, as Brian and Moira own two happy, friendly dogs. Both canines are rather charismatic, making a joyful noise to the Lord on a fairly routine basis, due—I guessed—to cars entering the distant entrance to the gated community, a gardener



Fishing has long been a local industry on Lake Chapala.

working at a neighbor's house, or passing butterflies. Soft music is piped into every public space on the property, which may or may not be to everyone's taste. All in all, though, guests will feel welcome and catered to.

Lake Chapala is one of Mexico's favorite vacation spots, in part—according to Brian—because of its ranking by the likes of *Time* magazine and *USA Today* as the world's second best climate. Rain is rare here, and the altitude of 5000 feet keeps temperatures from getting too hot, with average lows of 53F in winter ranging to average highs of 84F in summer. That means sunny and comfortably warm days year round. Summers are the wettest, but rain usually comes only in the evening. Spring and fall are ideal, although I had no complaint regarding the sometimes-cloudy weather I experienced in December. I still never had clothes on when I could be nude.

Due to its popularity among Mexican vacationers, the north shore boasts an endless supply of excellent dining choices, some within an easy 15-minute walk from the B&B. Because there are so many upscale communities along the lake—often inhabited by U.S. and Canadian expatriates or Mexican government officials—you can spend some serious money at some highly respected restaurants. Most dining establishments, however, cater to the more financially mundane likes of me. For less than what you'd spend for dinner up in *El Norte*, you'll get a meal that's twice as good. Some of the best meals we had were actually the least expensive.

Getting around is easy, as there is only one arterial two-lane road running along the lake shore. Brian and Moira will help you get taxis if you wish them, but the bus system is easy and inexpensive. Find a map or grab a guide book, and you'll find that reaching your intended town is no problem, and it doesn't matter too much where you get off as the towns are small and you'll want to explore them on foot anyway.

You can rent a car readily at Guadalajara's international airport, but far easier and cheaper is to pay Brian and Moira less than a taxi to meet you at the airport, and have them give you a guided



Street markets in every city and village provide tasty food, brilliant color, and a healthy dynamism.



Every space at Casa Encantado is a delight, including the upstairs patio (top), the kitchen (middle), and the main lower patio (bottom).

tour of the area as you make your way to Casas Encantado. By the time you arrive, you'll understand the lay of the land, the simplicity of the road system, and where to find good restaurants nearby.

Over a half dozen small towns line this north shore of Lake Chapala, each featuring a slightly different atmosphere. In Ajijic you'll find streets lined with galleries run by local and ex-pat artists; as well as a *panderia* (bread shop), a *carnicería* (meat shop), or—and this was a new one for me, and shows the liberal side of the region—a *dildoería* (yes, that's what the shop specialized in).

The nearby town of Chapala boasts a lakeside *malecón* (a waterside walkway), old buildings, churches, art galleries, shops, a tourist market, and a quiet vibe perfect for easy-going strolls. You'll not be hassled by venders trying to drag you into stores, as this is light-years away from a commercially-crazed border town. This is relaxed Mexico at some of its finest.

Brian and Moira are ready to help you find what you might be looking for. I saw the calm water of Lake Chapala, and figured someone would have kayaks for rent. Brian phoned around and found one kayak club on the lake, contacted them, and determined that there is as yet no kayak rental shop in the region. Kathy and I were not too disappointed, as we had plenty of things to do; we just wanted another opportunity to be nude, and we know that once out in a kayak, playing in the sun clothes-free is a free-spirited breeze.

## LAKE CHAPALA

**CASA ENCANTADO WAS A GREAT** naturist home base for exploring the Lake Chapala towns. But that warm water was driving me crazy. I wanted to nudify it somehow. I had been seeing more artworks than usual for Mexico of nude families and skinny-dipping boys. The nude family images I could attribute to a "Comic Family" theme not uncommon in early and mid-20th century Mexican art, but the nude swimmers portrayed at Lake Chapala had me wondering. I walked into an Ajijic art gallery run by artist Enriqueo Velázquez, and found a watercolor of some boys disrobing and jumping into the lake. I told him that my father, brother, and I used to do that, and he smilingly said that it was not uncommon some years back when the coastline was less developed.

Public murals depicting regional history featured clothed women doing laundry at the lake with naked boys swimming and playing nearby. Those nudes seem to be more metaphorical, pointing to a time and setting of innocence, while the men were out industrializing the region with railroads and modern communication systems.

The artwork only added to my desire to get naked on the water and in the sun. The shoreline near the towns, however, is fairly developed, and—given that the lake level goes up and down with the rain and release from upstream dams, even the undeveloped stretches of shoreline were uninviting. Moreover, although Lake Chapala may be Latin America's third largest lake, it averages only 14 feet in depth, and its muddy bottom is stirred up with the

slightest wind. I thus wanted to boat the lake nude, not swim it. What was a TNS-trained naturist to do?

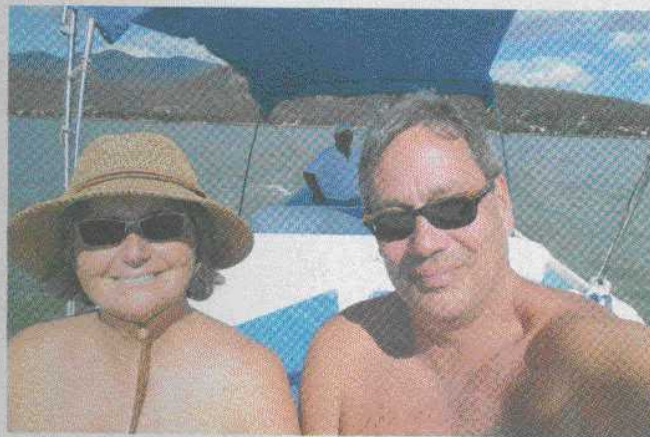
At the lake-side center of Chapala, you'll find a long pier drawing visitors to vistas of the water. Every adult will be approached by a friendly man offering to take you and your group on a boat tour of the lake. The price is the same for two or ten people, so if you are in a group, the hourly cost is not bad. There's no pressure, as a simple "No, gracias" and a smile will do the job. After a couple of days thinking about it, though, I wondered, might one of these guys be up for a nude excursion?

Kathy is used to my looking into such possibilities, and claims to be okay with it. So on a warm, sunny day, I finally walked over to the ticket booth to get a sense of the mood among the "captains" of the colorful launches tied to the docks off the pier. A bored teenage boy sat slumped in the booth. Nope; I doubt if he'd understand what I'd be asking in my halting, limited Spanish.

Soon enough a grinning guy in his 40s walked up and asked in Spanish if I wanted to go for a tour. I noted that no one else was within hearing distance, as what I was about to ask him might embarrass him if he were within earshot of his buddies. I smiled, and said (I think with some degree of communicative efficacy), "With respect, sir. My wife and I want to go on the boat, but we are nudists" (*Nosotros somos nudistas*). He's still smiling, but now looked puzzled. "We don't like clothes" (*No gustan las ropas*). I pick at my shirt as if to whisk it away. Bigger smiles now: "No problem!" I did my best to rephrase what I was intending, adding that we understood that we'd remain dressed while near shore or other boats. He assured me that it's okay. And he's still smiling, and in good way. I tell him I have *dos amigos* who may wish to join us, so I'd be back *mañana* at 11:00 for a one-hour boat ride around Scorpion Island (*Isla de los Alcacranes*; named for its shape, not its denizens). With a "*Mucho gusto*," I introduce myself as Mark, and Reyes replies in analogous manner.

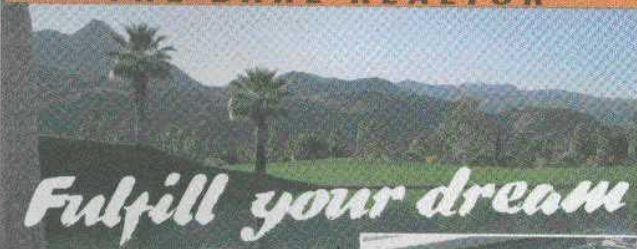
Brian and Moira were unfortunately busy with something the next day, so Kathy and I returned alone by bus to find Reyes waiting, and still smiling. Prices are fixed and noted on clear signs near the ticket booth, so there is no haggling over cost. Reyes sat in the back of his launch and slowly routed us away from the small amount of boat traffic on the lake toward the nearby island. Kathy and I were soon naked from the top of our heads to the bottom of our feet, and spent a delightful time putting about the water, soaking up some sun, wishing we had naturist friends to join us.

I asked Reyes if others had ever asked about boating nude before, and he said it's not that uncommon. Couples or small groups often wish to do so, and it's not a problem, as it's easy to lay a course that keeps passengers far enough away from others. I asked if he was the only "captain" who was comfortable with nude passengers, and he said (in Spanish), "No, it's no problem for the other captains." Some groups like to swim; others bring a lunch. The ideal day trip in my mind would be to have two or three naturist couples split the cost of a three hour tour, and to bring a cooler of sandwiches and beer (with enough to offer the



With a respectful smile, bit of nerve, and a smattering of Spanish, it's amazing how much of Mexico naturists can enjoy au naturel.


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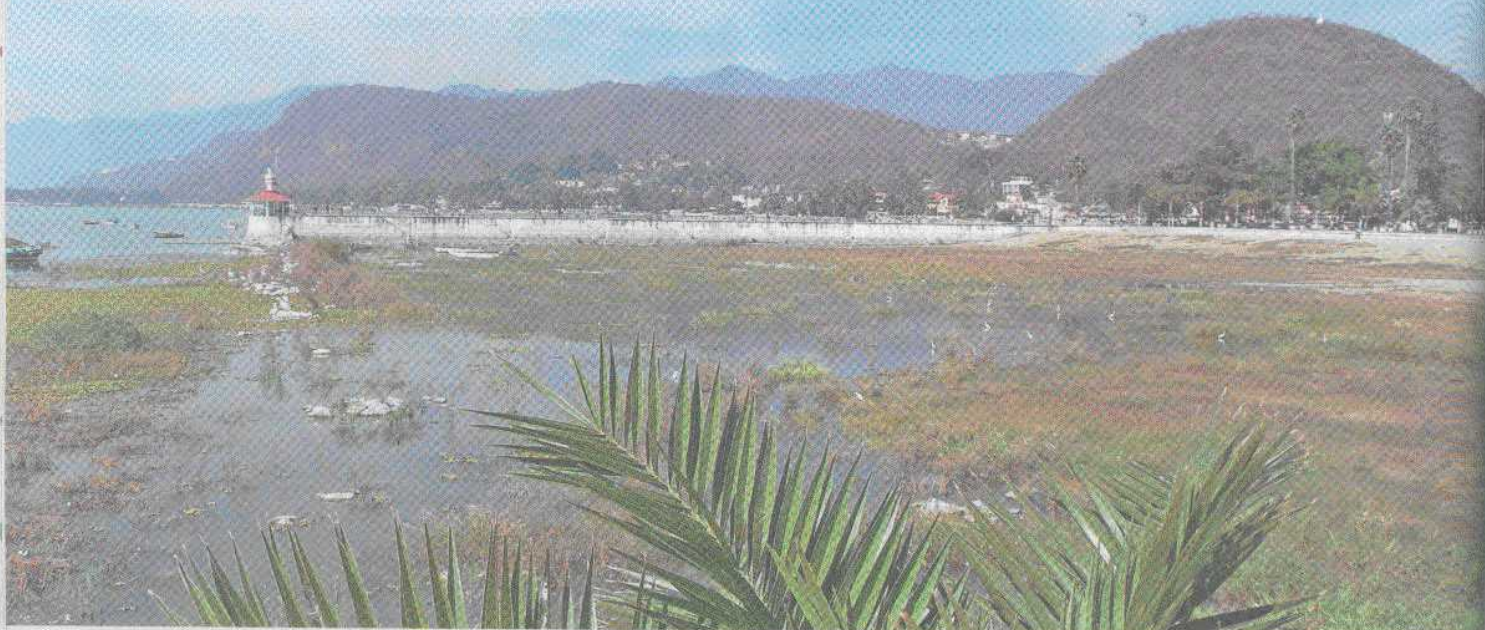
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The town of Chapala lies along the shore of the similarly named lake. Good food, markets, hiking, water activities, and some of the world's best weather draw visitors internationally.

captain). *Isla de Mezcala* lies beyond Scorpion Island to the east, and a three hour nautically nude jaunt back and forth around each island would make for a great 11:00-2:00 naturist adventure. A cooling skinny-dip would be an option anywhere along the trip.

## ELSEWHERE IN JALISCO

**GUADALAJARA AND ITS SURROUNDING REGION** offer many side trips for vacationers. The town of Tequila may seem like a tourist trap, but you'll get a good tour of a tequila factory, and a sense of what more rural regions of central Mexico are like. The nearby towns of Tlaquepaque and Tonalá have more craft and artisan shops than anyone could possibly explore in a week. The touristy Tapatío open-air bus tours may look goofy, but are an easy way to see a lot of what Guadalajara and surrounding neighborhoods have to offer. Also, commercial hot springs catering to textiles abound in the outer areas. Murals by the famous artist José Clemente Orozco seem to show up everywhere you look.

Two naturist friendly sites need mentioning. To the west of Guadalajara, Río Caliente Spa was a pricey hot spring facility catering to rich North Americans wanting a little "European-style" clothing-optional soaking. The site has been closed for over a year now, so that option is no long available to naturists visiting the area.

On the coast of Jalisco, and about a four-hour drive from Guadalajara, is the all-inclusive resort of Punta Serena. This resort used to make its swimming pool and spa areas clothing-optional, but according to Brian of Casa Encantado, some guests were

complaining that they didn't want to dine while seeing naked folk at the pool. Punta Serena now appears to limit its clothing-optional use to the ocean beach below its cliffs. Since there is no access to the sand except via the resort property, it's a de facto private beach, and may be worth the time and money for some naturist vacationers.

If you have a week, my suggestion is to look for a four-night stay at Casa Encantado, then spend a couple nights in Guadalajara. By the time you're near the end of your stay at the B&B, Brian can help make reservations for you at a good, affordable hotel in the historic heart of "Guad." From there, you can take a taxi back to the airport to fly home. Brian may suggest his favorite, Hotel de Mendoza. It's comfortable, not too expensive, and perfectly situated adjacent to the town squares surrounding the main cathedral. For a little less cost, though, you can stay in the 400-year-old Hotel Frances nearby. The rooms are less modern, but what a fabulous atmosphere. If you want a modern feel and "know what you're going to get," there's the Holiday Inn in Guadalajara Centro Historico. Be sure no matter what you do, stay in the central historic district so you can walk to nearly all that's worth seeing, and easily find taxis and buses to take you further afield.

Information and reservations for Casa Encantado are acquired through the Clothing Optional Home Network. I found COHN easy to work with, and look forward to exploring additional listings they have for North America. Contact them at (866) 268-8852 or [clothingoptionalhomenetwork.com](http://clothingoptionalhomenetwork.com). Useful guidebooks on the area include Bruce Whipperman, *Guadalajara (Including Lake Chapala)*, and Teresa A. Kendrick, *Mexico's Lake Chapala and Ajijic: The Insider's Guide*. **N**