

Cancun: Cure for the sick-of-winter

By DENISE McDONALD

If you're wondering why last week's column is appearing now, the reason is simple. I'm still on Mexican time.

Only in Cancun, can five minutes be stretched into two hours.

"I'll get to that right away senorita," said one amigo as he settled down for his four-hour siesta. Never hold your breath waiting for something to happen in Mexico, you'll suffocate.

But then I should have known. The telltale signs were evident from the beginning. The plane was four hours late.

Take-off was a piece of cake. Until the pilot hit the jets and I suddenly found myself sitting in a vertical position with a severe tilt to the right.

But it didn't take me too long to relax. That is, until I heard someone

ask a companion what it felt like the time his plane dropped 20,000 feet for no apparent reason. It's a wonder I had any fingernails left upon arrival, they were gripped so hard into the chair's arms.

Arrival made the flight a distant memory. The only thing my mind was concentrating on was the sudden onslaught of sultry 80°F winds blowing in my face.

Mexico is the country of which holiday dreams are made. White sand, that's never hot on the feet, blistering days and cool nights and endless beaches surrounded by crystal blue waters of an indescribable hue.

However, the customs take some getting used to. First, there are very few laws in Mexico.

Bars and restaurants stay open until the last patron has determined which way the door lies. You can

carry an alcoholic drink down the main street if you want. And there are no speed limits, stop signs or traffic lights.

Crossing the street is a feat quickly mastered if you don't want to become a hit-and-run taxi fatality.

All roads in downtown Cancun originate from a traffic circle, with offshoots running out at all angles, usually in five different directions. If a taxi driver wants to get to the other side, he floors his vehicle, closes his eyes, and hopes somebody kept their's open.

Harrowing stories aside, many of the bad characteristics attributed to Mexicans are undeserved. They aren't lazy or dishonest.

In fact, not understanding how their currency worked, I handed one cashier a 50,000 peso note, instead of a 20,000. She gave me back the exact change. I wouldn't have

known the difference.

As for laziness, several times I had the same waiter serve me breakfast at 8 a.m., and then later take a snack order at midnight.

Although downtown Cancun is where the night life is, it's the surrounding areas which made the trip complete.

Never before have I witnessed such a blatant display of poverty. In outlying towns the locals live in one-room huts with palm fronds for roofs. Chickens, turkeys and children play in the front yards while obese pigs wander the streets.

Yet for every example of ugliness displayed in Mexico, two more of beauty were compensation.

Isla Mujeres, (pronounced Mu-hair-es), was my first introduction to snorkeling, and the beauty of the underwater world. Immediately upon entering the water, I was sur-

rounded by schools of fish in every color of the rainbow, some the size of our trout.

Chichen Itza was beyond words. Believed to be the original Mayan village in 500 A.D., archeologists have just finished uncovering ruins of breathtaking beauty. A towering pyramid, sacrificial ball court, sacred well, temple of the warriors and eagles stretch as far as the eye can see.

For those fortunate to still remain in the village at 9 p.m., a light and sound show awaited, where lasers and lights illuminated the ruins in pitch-black jungle, accompanied by a documentary of their history.

Then there was Tulum, believed to be a priest's retreat perched precariously on a cliff overlooking the Caribbean.

As is probably evident by now, I could go on and on about the wonders of Mexico. But perhaps it's best to sum up the whole two weeks as an experience I'll never forget.

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