



## Caravanas de Mexico Newsletter Oct 2018 Issue #2

### Last issue:

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**The last few paragraphs of this newsletter are a recap of our caravan information. This will be found in each edition.**

The purpose of this newsletter is not to sell you a caravan, although we are more than happy if you do join one. We are here to promote the idea of taking your RV into Mexico. It is a very good idea to use a caravan for your first trip for a variety of reasons.

In this issue we will present four trips for the 2018/2019 season, we will discuss costs, communication & the monarch Reserve. Starting with the next issue we will feature a Mexican town. In the next issue, we feature San Carlos/Guyamos.

### Facebook Groups:

We operate 2 Facebook groups. We invite you to join both

RV Mexico <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mexicotravelbuddies/>

Mexico RV Caravans <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mexicocaravans/>

## Costs, Is Mexico Cheap?

This is a complex question with no simple answer. The short answer is no, it is not cheap.

We have people comment on caravan prices with an image of Mexico being a 3rd world country where everything is cheap. It is true that many Mexicans get by on very little income, but they are not living in as style that most visitors want to. You can rent a house in a small village for very little money. I know a Canadian couple who rent a nice apartment in a relatively remote area for about \$800 US a year. However, if you want to be near the ocean, that is more like a monthly rate. So let's examine some costs involved when you drive your RV down to Mexico.

**RV Parks:** Full hook-up parks range from \$15 to \$50 a night, US. Beachfront parks average around \$25 US a night, many with monthly rates around \$500-\$600. To the irritation of most of us, many price in US dollars. This meant an effective doubling of prices in 2017 when the Mexican Pesos exchange went from 12 to a dollar to around 20. This hit Canadians harder, as the Canadian dollar kept pace with the Peso for the most part. This is one reason Caravanas de Mexico bases its prices on Canadian dollars, rather than US, although it has resulted in increased overhead on some RV parks. Many parks will price in US dollars, look up the exchange rate when you check out, then charge you that amount in pesos, since it is technically illegal for them to collect US dollars. For this reason, I advise avoiding parks that do this, but it is not always possible. Many other parks continue to set prices in pesos. Roca Azul & Chimulco near Guadalajara, Hotel Mirador in Huatabampito and many others. You are more likely to find parks price in US dollars in resort areas like Mazatlan & Paamul.

Many parks in Arizona are cheaper on a monthly basis than Mexico. The key word here is Arizona, so you comparing apples to oranges. Try to find an oceanfront park in California that charges \$600 a month, most are more like \$60 a day. Also winter hot weather is by no means guaranteed anywhere in the US, except maybe Florida. In summary, I would have to say that RV Parks are still cheaper in Mexico when you use a fair comparison. Regardless, when pricing out a caravan, keep in mind that the overhead RV park costs incurred, can be considerable.

Keep in mind that every RV park in Mexico is more or less empty from May through September. This makes operating one down there an expensive proposition for many. RV park design can sometimes be bit awkward, with services on the wrong side or the sewer out of reach of your sewer hose. It is a good idea to bring an extra sewer hose & joiner, extension cord, and an extra fresh water hose.

**Boondocking:** This is possible, but there are inherent risks in it, unless you know the spot ahead of time. You also have the issues of power, water & sewer. There are skills involved with dealing with those that not everyone is up to. You may also find cheap camping on some private land.

**Driving:** This one is no contest, Mexico is far more expensive than either the US or Canada. Fuel costs are higher than the US, they are more in line with those in Canada, IE \$4.20 a gallon US or \$1.40 a litre Canadian. There is some expectation prices will come down as competition to the state owned Pemex is now appearing. On top of that Mexico has the worlds most expensive toll highways and you have to purchase Mexican insurance, as your US or Canadian insurance is invalid. It is far cheaper to fly to Mexico & use hotels on the whole. Unless you are staying fancy, a hotel costs little more than an RV Park may cost in some areas. The advantage of driving, is that you will see the real Mexico & its culture, not the packaged all inclusive version. Chances are you will find that small beachfront town with inexpensive hotels you can fly into & use in later years.

One trick most seem to forget about, is to put storage insurance on any vehicles left at home. This can offset your Mexican insurance cost considerably.

**Auto Repairs & Bodywork:** Much cheaper, I had a complete 4 wheel brake job done on my truck for around \$200. I had bodywork done on my truck that would have cost 10 times the amount in Canada or the US. A lot of auto parts come from Mexico to start with. There is a huge mark-up on those at home that does not exist in Mexico. However, having work done on RV's that involve RV specific aspects may not be possible.

**Food:** With food, you get away with it being cheaper. Mexico does have modern supermarkets and prices at those are only marginally cheaper than the US or Canada on packaged items. Produce is much cheaper, and so is meat. You can save a lot by using markets instead of supermarket chains. A good restaurant meal in Mexico is considerably cheaper than the equivalent in the US & Canada, by any measure. On our caravans we seek out the best, which is also part of our pricing, as they are usually the most expensive, but you expect to be pampered a bit on a tour. Even so, its hard to spend more than \$25 a person for a really high class meal with drinks. For the cheapskates, Taco stands are still exceptionally inexpensive.

**Electricity:** You need to make an investment in power protection. This will be discussed in detail in issue #3 next time.

You may want to use a caravan for your first trip as it will take you to locations difficult to access on your own and give you the overall picture of costs involved with RVing in Mexico. Attractions in Mexico do not come with large RV parking lots and larger spaces are usually reserved for buses. A caravan will give you an idea of whether you want to make RVing down there an annual practice, or simply stick with the US southwest or Florida. You may even conclude it's best to fly in and use hotels. I have seen many who have RVed in Mexico for 10 years, do precisely that as hey get older. Some decide to leave an aging RV down there as a private condo. If the fly/hotel combo appeals, you will likely find a location to do this on a caravan, that you may not discover easily on your own.

All in all, speaking for myself, I can snowbird for 5 months in Mexico cheaper than I can in the US when all factors are taken into account. That is using one or two longer term

destinations. RVing in Mexico is addictive and the US SW seems boring in comparison. Like many others, I consider the extra driving costs irrelevant and somehow I always seem to be better off financially when I finally get back home.

### **Entertainment TV & Radio:**

US TV satellite services only work a short way south into Mexico, maybe around Mazatlan as a limit. The Canadian Shaw service covers all of Mexico. You may be able to go grey market with a Canadian friend. Shaw carries most US channels as well as Canadian. All over-the-air channels are in Spanish (except one in Mazatlan I know of)

Black market DVD's are easily available in Mexico for about \$1 apiece. You will see tables of them in markets. Consider taking a DVD player with you. Attempting to stream services like Netflix will cause issues for others in the Park, so please avoid doing that. Chances are it will drive you crazy with buffering anyway. Most RV park internet is 15 mbps. Cable or DSL. A few may have fibre high speed.

As far as radio is concerned, both Sirius & XM work in Mexico. Sirius works better, as its satellites are in a higher orbit. Trees can be an issue, and on that subject try not to park where coconuts can come down on your rig, I have seen it happen. Ask the park to remove them if they appear a threat.

### **The Monarch Butterfly Reserve:**



For many, this is a bucket list item. It is a spectacular site covering a couple hundred square miles. Over the last few years the numbers have declined somewhat, but it is well worth seeing. Numbers can be affected by many factors including late Fall Hurricanes in Mexico itself. Generally it is best to see them from mid January to early March. The big issue is the high latitude and the Monarchs are largely inactive on either cloudy days or in the mornings before the sun heats things up. There are 3 or 4 locations in both Michoacan and Mexico State where you can travel to observe them. On our caravans we visit one of the ones located in Michoacan, SE of Morelia, where we can get close to them on horseback. This is one attraction you really need to be part of a caravan to enjoy.

Accessibility is tough on your own. Dogs are not permitted. We stay at San Juan del Lago RV park north of Morelia and bus our clients to the reserve. Despite some issues with accessibility (a steepish hill), this is one of the best equipped RV parks in Mexico and Arturo Barrerra, the owner, is one of the most personable people you will ever meet. We will do a feature on his park in a future issue.

### **Did you know?**

Caravanas de Mexico is currently the only company offering English language caravans in Mainland Mexico, except for a short trip to Rocky Point offered by Fantasy. Caravanas de Mexico provided services for both Adventure & Fantasy Caravans for many years as a tour contractor, and will likely do so in future if & when they decide to operate in Mexico again. We are the only caravan company officially registered and licensed by the Mexican Government to operate caravans & tours anywhere in Mexico.

<https://www.mexicorvbuddies.com/certification.pdf>

### **Magazine articles:**

Some of our staff have written magazine articles over the years. We will feature some of them in this issue and future ones

**1)** The first one is an article by our customer co-ordinator, Paul Beddows, on Melaque, a town near Manzanillo: <http://rvlife.com/a-quiet-haven-on-mexico-s-coast/>

*(Note: There is one new RV park, Melaque Paradise, since that was written)*



**2)** Here is another article. This time by Michel Bourassa, one of the organizers of our Airstream caravans. While it is aimed at Air-Streamers, it contains information all should find interesting, and introduces you to the company owner, Gabriel Romero

You may be interested in knowing the person who is organizing our (Airstream) Caravan to Mexico in 2019 so let me introduce you.



Don Gabriel Romero has for many years organized and operated tourist excursions and programs in his home country of Mexico – mostly for the Mexican market. Through his extensive work and travel in that field he developed an expert knowledge of what interests tourists, what destinations are most interesting and who are reliable sub contractors be it for special meals, tours, or events. He developed innumerable contacts in the tour industry and is a well travelled extensively in Mexican. He knows his country, from small remote towns with unique fiestas to major cities, he knows what the occasional tourists couldn't imagine.

About 8 years ago, Don Gabriel became indirectly involved with the *Vagabundos* organization based in *Baja* in offering tours to their clients from USA and Canada.

*(Editors note: Vagabundos is actually a California based club that specializes in Baja)*

With his energy and knowledge, this side-line quickly became a major part of his business especially when Adventure Caravans and Fantasy Caravans essentially withdrew from the Mexican market. Today *Caravans de Mexico* operates 4-6 caravans yearly across Mexico with clients coming from all over Canada, the USA and Europe.

He is particularly enthusiastic about this Airstream caravan and is very focussed on our needs. He remembers Wally Byam's Mexico caravans from the 50s and is eager to add a new modern chapter to the Airstream history book and Wally Byam's dream of adventuring.

**"Yes, in fact I am very interested in Wally Byam's life and his great work as a visionary of RV'ing and inventor of the RV caravans having the "Old Mexico" as his main destination because of his love for this country and its people."**

**"I remember that the Airstream caravans that used to come to Mexico at the end of the 20th century, they appreciated these hard-working teams of Mexican mechanics very much, (Green Angels) we want to reproduce this model, too, being accompanied**

by the Green Angels, also linguists English-Spanish serving our caravans is a unique feature that no other caravan company offers nowadays, and this really makes a difference... “

Let me give you an example of his knowledge of Mexico:

On the homeward leg from a 3-month caravan to Mexico, Don Gabriel had organized a three day stop in a small town called *Los Alamos*. Looking the map, I noticed that there was only one road there and back so, why we were going there? What could it offer? Beat me! Oh well, follow the crowd!

We turned off the major North/ South highway and drove 40 or 50 km to this small town, camping in the courtyard of a local hotel. It was a short walk from there to the main part of town. This is a Mexican town and not saturated with *Norte Americanos*. The ambiance is Mexican, life is Mexican and the people we met were very friendly as they went about their daily business. There was some unique shopping and sights: Walking visits to the local museum; an upscale residential area; a remarkable cemetery (yes, a cemetery!) and other sights were enjoyable and interesting not to mention a fabulous meal that had been arranged for us at an upscale restaurant. We were called together in the evening and strolled into town to be introduced to a group of about 12 Troubadours.

Troubadours were a class of lyric poets and poet-musicians often of knightly rank who flourished from the 11th to the end of the 13th century whose major theme was courtly love and folk songs. Some Mexican towns have renewed the culture of troubadour entertainment from Spain and developed professional groups that compete in Mexico and in Europe.



So, this was not an assembly of local buskers, but a talented group of professionals, dressed in period costume who sing, with musical accompaniment, and stroll about the town while doing so. We happily followed them enjoying their music, the narrow roads and alleys and the wine that was laid out for us in two baskets astride a burro who followed us. This being Mexico, no one will let such a happening pass them by so, within minutes as we meandered through town, we had dozens of local folks spontaneously joining us to dance, enjoy the music, and to laugh and talk. The group following the

troubadours swelled when we encountered two dozen teachers who were in town for a conference, they dropped everything and joined us! The energy and good will was palatable.

The procession made its way through town over a period of about 1.5 hours ending in the town square. By then, the burro had been relieved of his burden of wine and headed home, but we wished it would never end. In a way it didn't because the good will, the happy feelings and elation of experiencing that event remain.

This small, out of the way town, hardly on the map was in some ways, a highlight of the trip. Who could have known about this? Don Gabriel did.

*(Editors note: We also do this in Guanajuato on both our Airstream & colonial city caravans this January)*

I have no doubt that Don Gabriel will similarly have an outstanding and an adventurous caravan for us in January 2019. He has already worked out plans to photograph all the Airstreams rigs lined up as was done 50 years ago as well as cooking lessons, a stay in Mexico City, joining the Mazatlan Carnivale and many other activities.... The route is in place, the planning is in progress and will all soon be "riveted" in place, so please plan to join us now – there are only 12 rivet holes open!

Michel Bourassa

*(Editors note: The 2019 Airstream caravan is full. We are taking names for 2020 and you can fill out the form at <http://www.airstreammexico.com>. The length of this caravan has not yet been set, it may, or may not, also include Copper Canyon. We will have it consolidated before taking any deposits. If there is enough interest we may consider running 2 of them maybe a week apart)*

### **Hwy 15D damage:**

The latest info I have indicates 15D from Nogales to Mazatlan is now passable.

## **Who are we?**

We are a Mexican registered RV Tour company running RV Caravan and bus tours exclusively in Mainland Mexico. We also run caravans for the Airstream club. For those, you have to be a member of the WBCCI.

We run caravans in both English and French. Our English website is [www.mexicocaravans.com](http://www.mexicocaravans.com). Our French site is [www.caravanemexique.com](http://www.caravanemexique.com)

## **Bus Tours:**

We have actually been running bus tours longer than caravans. Mainly we do them through our travel clubs inside Mexico. These usually are made up of ex-pats, seasonal RVers in Mexico and some Mexicans themselves. We have these based in locations like Puerto Vallarta and Oaxaca and hopefully soon, Guadalajara. We will be posting information on these later.

## **Drop in Tours:**

We do occasionally get requests from those already RVing in Mexico about joining a tour as drop-ins. We are open to this.

## **Our 2018/2019 season trips**

*Nov 14, 2018* - 24 day trip to Copper Canyon and Mazatlan

*Jan 22, 2019* - 30 day trip to Copper Canyon and Mazatlan

*Jan 22, 2019* - 37 day extension to above trip through Colonial Mexico and up the west coast

*Jan 12th, 2019* - Airstream Caravan - FULL

Descriptions of this seasons trips may be found at <https://www.mexicorvbuddies.com/2018-2019season.php>

Next season we will running most of the same trips, plus an 85 day Yucatan loop, and a possible LGBT trip, if we can get enough to run it.

All of the 2018/2019season trips start and end in Nogales, Arizona.

## **2024 total solar eclipse:**

There is a total solar eclipse on April 8th, 2024 around noon in Mazatlan. The path of totality will include Teacapan to the south and Celestino to the north, both of which have RV Parks. It will also cover Durango, which is dry camping. The serious astronomer may prefer it, as it is at high altitude. We plan to run several caravans for this event, including running normal loops like Yucatan and Airstream later than usual to take this in. Since this occurs after the season normally ends, we hope to run a few trips, some including Copper Canyon and some more basic and shorter. It really depends on wagon masters. You may express interest in one of these trips by filling out the form at <https://www.mexicorvbuddies.com/eclipse1.php> . No deposit required right now, we will contact you in 2022.

## **Have questions & more?**

Email Paul at [beddows1@telus.net](mailto:beddows1@telus.net). I will try to answer them and put some of them in future issues.

If you wish to submit articles send them to the email above

If you run a Mexican RV park and want to write something up about your park, also email me.