

# family getaways

*Kicking Back in Nuevo Vallarta*

## Diamond Resort Shines in Mexico

Sometimes our family vacations have provided way too many Maalox moments—like when our sightseeing goals are overly ambitious or we realize that the credit card is precariously close to its limit. But lounging by the pool, steps from the sand, a “Banana Mama” rum concoction in hand, stress was the farthest thing from my mind. At the Diamond Resort Nuevo Vallarta we experienced the ultimate in relaxation: all-inclusive food, drinks (with open bar), wind surfing, sailing, snorkeling and nightly entertainment; a supervised children’s program; and a tranquil tropical beach setting. All for a reasonable price—the best stress-reducer of all!

Located just a 20-minute drive from Puerto Vallarta, the 293-room resort is on the Pacific’s Bay of Banderas and has a casual and airy ambiance. The rooms are simple but not spartan—all with an ocean view—the halls of the multi-level structure are open air. The grounds are not overly large, making it easy to keep track of our 5- and 7-year-old boys by the one main pool and kiddie wading pool.

Although before the trip our school-weary sons declared, “We’re not going to the kids’ club,” they ran each day to the Little Village Club, a supervised children’s program open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The loosely structured agenda offered them the freedom to visit with us by the pool and then go back for beach and pool games, crafts, Nintendo and afternoon Disney movies like *El Rey León*, (that’s *Lion King* for you gringos).

Food was plentiful and generally very good. The main restaurant offers three buffet meals a day in a variety of cuisines. In addition, at lunch hamburgers, pizza and hot dogs are served poolside. For dinner

you can choose from the buffet or make reservations for the resort’s Italian or Mexican sit-down restaurants. Every Wednesday night, a festive Mexican fiesta takes over with a spectacular south of the border buffet, music and vendor booths offering everything from silver jewelry to handpainted pottery to embroidered clothing. Bring spending money—your dollars are bolstered by a favorable exchange rate.

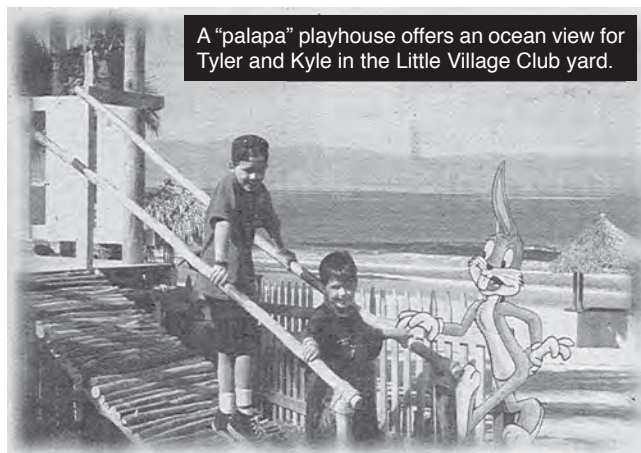
By our third day there, we felt rested and ready for adventure: a scuba (for my husband) and snorkel (for the rest of us) day trip aboard a katamaran to the tiny uninhabited island of Marietas fit the bill. Inquire at the concierge for a variety of tours, cruises, horseback riding and jeep rentals.

What impressed us most of all was the warmth of the people at the resort. We never felt as though our children were a bother; instead they were truly welcomed. And carefree enthusiasm is everywhere. Guests are encouraged to kick up their heels on stage with the recreation staff, after the nightly entertainment, for a Club-Med style group dance to the Diamond resort theme songs *Tiburón* and *Hasta la Vista*. Yes it was

kind of corny, but it was also fun—something we knew we’d miss the moment we checked out.

Diamond Resorts (there are four) is the upscale brand of parent company Allegro Resorts, which operates 18 all-inclusive properties in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Mexico. With their new Kid-die Kraze program children 12 and under stay free (meals included); adults each pay \$100 per night, based on double occupancy. Airfare for the less than three-hour flight is approximately in the mid \$300s.

— Vivien Santana Hughes



A “palapa” playhouse offers an ocean view for Tyler and Kyle in the Little Village Club yard.

# flash facts...

## Take the L.A. Parent Cruise and Your Kids Sail Free

Forget the formal, adults-only *Love Boat* stuff: Cruise lines are wooing families. In a big way. So if you're ready to be courted (and frankly, who isn't?) join L.A. Parent on an affordable family friendly cruise we've selected just for our readers.

On Friday, Jan. 12, we'll cast off for Ensenada on Carnival's newly remodeled *Holiday*, a luxurious 1,452-passenger SuperLiner with spacious staterooms perfectly suited for your family's mini-vacation. Best of all we've secured a special rate for L.A. Parent readers sailing with us: \$249 per person for an inside cabin, \$299 per person for an ocean view room (prices are based on double occupancy). And kids sail (and eat and play) absolutely free (except port taxes; some restrictions apply)! Your rate includes all meals and snacks, nightly entertainment, children's activities and a special parenting seminar exclusively for L.A. Parent Cruise participants.

Camp Carnival, the supervised children's program for ages 2 (yes, they change diapers!) to 17, runs from morning to evening daily. (Babysitting is available at an extra cost.) Kids are divided into four age-appropriate groups and trained counselors lead them in everything from splash-pool games and fingerpainting for toddlers to lip-sync contests and pool parties for teens. All this while you relax at sea, shop in Ensenada and take-part in adult activities like watching the Las Vegas-style shows or trying your luck in the casino.

Don't miss this special getaway over the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend, Jan. 12 to 15. Call soon- a limited number of cabins are available for our group! For more information, call Travel Store Inc. at (800) 826-3119 or (310) 826-3113 and ask Lynette or Jane for details about the L.A. Parent Cruise.

—Vivien Santana Hughes



Weekends are made for families... especially by the three pools on Carnival Cruise Lines' *Holiday*.

