

# Beat those Winter Doldrums!

*Make a virtual escape to sunshine in Mexico*

Story & photos by Tracy Beard

The Pacific Northwest is a fantastic place to live. The abundance of rain nurtures a lush green backdrop for hiking and adventuring throughout the region. However, that same H<sub>2</sub>O can also cause depression if you cannot explore the great outdoors and are perpetually destined to remain inside. My solution to the potential doldrums is a winter escape each year. Whether you can travel in the literal sense or enjoy a virtual trip, I'd like you to join me on my recent venture to Mexico.

My husband Steve works outdoors on massive construction projects, so when he gets the opportunity to join me on vacation, he wants to go where the weather is temperate or raises the mercury higher on the thermometer. Our recent trip to Mexico provided the perfect temperature: 65 degrees in the morning and a balmy 78-82 degrees in the afternoon and evening.

## A Grand Place to Rest Your Head

We stayed at Vidanta's Grand Mayan Resort in Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit, Mexico. Our one-bedroom suite, located on the sixth floor, overlooking the lazy river and several pools, featured a king-sized bed, living room, dining room, kitchen, spacious bathroom, private terrace with a plunge pool, and two TVs. The optimal temperatures provided an excellent environment for strolling the resort, alfresco dining, fishing in the bay, walking the beach, and lounging by the pool.

In the past our trips to Mexico included a great deal of car travel. We enjoy visiting smaller villages, eating local cuisine, and getting to know the people there. However, the last three years, including 2022, have been tough, so we decided to spend most of our time at the resort with the exception of a fishing trip. We also spent one afternoon enjoying lunch with my cousin and his wife who live in the area.

## A Half Day on the Bay

Steve and I booked a private, half-day fishing trip with J.J. and the captain of *Flipper IV*. We had a wonderful morning and caught six fish—mackerels and skipjacks. Even though Steve's ultimate goal was to hook a mahi-mahi, we considered the day a success. It began with a gorgeous sunrise and continued with numerous whale sightings, calm seas, relaxation, and laughter.



At the resort, we dined at many upscale restaurants. There are plenty of places to enjoy poolside snacks, tacos, pizza, and other casual fares, but I like to have dinner at the higher-end spots.

## A Daily Indulgence in Fine Dining

Gong specializes in Asian cuisine. Whether you are interested in lobster rolls, sushi, or incredibly prepared sea bass, there are numerous choices. We enjoyed dinner two times at Gong. The first time we booked the teppanyaki dinner, something similar to a trip to Benihanas. It is a set dinner menu and a show. The chef cooks on a hot surface at the table. Throughout the dinner, the chef juggles knives, flips food, and keeps guests amused while they dine. We sat outside by the lake the second night and watched the light and water show. The program was enchanting with lights and spouting water set to music. Our dinner was a la carte and quite delicious.



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Other delightful dinners included fresh pasta at Tramonto, the Italian restaurant, apple tartar at the French-inspired Bistro Bleu restaurant, and a 1.7-pound Caribbean lobster tail at the luxury seafood restaurant on the beach.

### A Space for Entertainment

Vidanta Resorts provide excellent onsite entertainment. The Sanctuary, located at the Nuevo Vallarta Grand Mayan, is a large pavilion just under 7,000 square meters that hosts evening programs for the entire family. We watched several exciting performances, including Mayan dancers, mariachi music, sand sculptors, and a talented violinist. Sanctuary boasts comfy couches, tasty drinks, and small bites in an exquisite setting.

We enjoyed the entertainment at the Sanctuary, the light show on the lake, and the volcano light and fire show at the entrance to the soon-to-open onsite amusement park, but sometimes just meandering the grounds and looking at the wildlife was entertaining enough. The resort, located in a tropical setting, is home to numerous melodious birds and colorful iguanas.



other developments, you can choose to be busy all day and all night or to spend your time relaxing, reading a book, or sipping on a cocktail at the swim-up bars. I took relaxation a step further and spent a couple of hours at the Brio Spa. A staff member at the spa told me that immersing myself back and forth between the cold water tub and the Jacuzzi was good for my circulation, promoted deep sleep, and helped to build my immune system. After two plunges into the ice-cold tub and back into the Jacuzzi, I was ready for my 50-minute deep tissue massage. I don't know if the cold/hot immersion session was helpful, but the massage was excellent.

Vacations are about taking a moment to stop, reset, and rejoice. Steve and I relished our break from real life, and although an additional week of restoration would have been welcome, it was nice to return to the Pacific Northwest for the holidays.



Tracy Beard, pictured here with her husband Steve, dining out at Nuevo Vallarta, Mexico, writes about luxury and adventure travel, traditional and trendy fine dining and libations for regional, national and international magazines. She is in her eighth year as CRR's "Out & About" columnist. She lives in Longview, Wash.

### An Exercise in Pampering

When vacationing at Vidanta's Grand Mayan or any of their



Back in Washington we were welcomed with freezing temperatures, snow, and rain. During this frigid time of year, I suggest you warm yourself by the fire with one of my favorite winter drinks.

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By Tracy Beard

## PROVISIONS

### ALONG THE TRAIL

#### Tracy's Ultimate Spanish Coffee

8 oz hot coffee  
1 ½ oz Bacardi 151 rum  
1 oz Kahlúa  
½ oz Triple Sec  
1 lemon wedge  
1 Bordeaux cherry  
1 Tbl. sugar  
Whipped cream

Make your favorite hot coffee. Put the sugar on a plate. Rub lemon wedge around the rim of the heatproof glass, and dip the edge in the sugar. Pour the rum into the glass, add the Kahlúa, and top it with the Triple Sec. Light the liquor on fire with a match. Let it burn for a minute while you tip the glass a bit to caramelize the sugar on the rim, then pour the coffee over the top to put out the fire. Top the hot cocktail with whipped cream and a Bordeaux cherry.



I never seem to get enough vegetables when I travel. Tempura veggies are one of my new go-to appetizers.

#### Tracy's Easy Tempura

1 cup McCormick Tempura Seafood Batter Mix  
¾ cups ice-cold water  
1 pound of raw vegetables (I like cauliflower, carrots, sweet potato, and green beans.)  
1 bottle of sweet chili sauce (I prefer the Panda Express brand.)  
2 Tbl. chopped chives  
1 Tbl. dried coconut  
Vegetable oil  
Salt to taste

Cut the vegetables into 1 ½ to 2-inch pieces. Stir the batter and water together in a medium bowl. Pour the oil into a deep fryer, large skillet, or saucepan no more than 1/3 full. Heat oil to 375 degrees on medium heat. Dip the vegetables into the batter and shake off the excess. Add a few vegetables to the hot oil and cook for 3 to 5 minutes or until golden brown. Drain on paper towels and salt while they are hot. Top the vegetables with chives and coconut, then serve with the sweet chili sauce.