

Living

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A walk along the beach in Mexico's Pacific Coast village of Troncones, a place visited by veteran surfers who enjoy the world-class surfing spots La Saladita, Playa Linda, Rio Nexpa, La Boca and Troncones Point.

BY **RENA LINDSTROM**
Special to The News

The nearly empty late afternoon plane from Mexico City pierced the clouds and slid seamlessly onto the tarmac of the Zihuatanejo-Ixtapa International Airport.

It was Mother's Day. The day before, new suspected cases of swine flu had turned up in Jalisco, Hidalgo, and Guerrero, but there were no "cubrebo-cas" – surgical masks – on the six passengers or the crew.

I was to meet Peter Petersen, who would be wearing a hat, and there he was in a straw pith helmet and a low-riding, dust-covered 1987 Cadillac, handing me a bottle of ice cold water – my generous guide for discovering the reputed beachside paradise of Troncones.

Physically only 35 kilometers north of Ixtapa, one of the government's "integrally planned resorts" that have changed the face of Mexican tourism

in the past 20 years, Troncones is, in spirit, a world away.

For years difficult access kept Troncones undeveloped and the beaches unspoiled. Only veteran surfers knew of world-class surfing spots La Saladita, Playa Linda, The Ranch, Rio Nexpa, La Boca, Troncones Point.

When Mike and Annie Linn who run the ISA (it stands for Instructional Surf Adventures) surf school arrived ten years ago, the beach road to Highway 200 was a 3-kilometer length of potholes, sand ruts, and summer mud.

Now the road is paved. North of the beach, the new road to Morelia makes for a relatively easy drive to Mexico City. With better access, more travelers have arrived.

Peter and I navigate a scorching 35 kilometers up the coast and talk about how he arrived at Troncones from California.

"I wanted to live and work in a tropical seaside location, doing what I love to do. Simple as that," he says.

A surfer, an avid sportsman, massage therapist, meditation leader and

Troncones' essence lies in the rhythms of nature and the warmth of her people.

Gigong instructor, Peter is now a partner in Present Moment, a conscious living retreat center in Troncones which seeks to foster health and sustainability in harmony with the natural world.

They welcome individual guests, small conferences and retreats, and

special events. Soon they will open a second location on Lake Zirahuen near Morelia.

A TRUE RETREAT

We turn left off highway 200 at the Troncones sign and follow the paved road into town, then the sandy beach road that takes us over a little bridge and north to Present Moment.

The carved wooden gate and architectural details of Present Moment are the work of Karina and Gustavo Jasso, architects and builders whose refined

Discovering the essence of **Troncones**

organic design and natural materials define the character of many of the small hotels and private rentals along the beach.

Present Moment is truly a retreat. Green and lush gardens, stone, wood, everything polished to a warm glow; even the ornamental English grass is hand clipped to pillow softness. Peter leads me to a bungalow named Tranquility, a refreshing footbath at the bottom of the steps. Passing through the swinging doors, I peel off my clothes, the old world, the sweltering world of heat and dust, and step into the cool stone shower. The water pressure is incredible. Imagine standing under a waterfall.

I met Peter Petersen, my generous guide for discovering a reputed beachside paradise.

I sleep sweetly. During a Gignong-rooted meditation early the next morning, my mind keeps slipping toward the word "essence." What is the essence of Troncones?

The high season on the beach is November to the end of April. May is slow, then the rains come and the surfers return. Big rain means big surf. Between seasons it's slow, and this year the flu scare has doused the transition season even more. People who had reservations have canceled and new reservations aren't coming in. I also wonder if there is a lingering effect of a fatal shark attack that occurred at Troncones just over a year ago.

"The town definitely felt it," Peter says. "But every surfer knows there's risk in the sport. It's very rare that a shark would come in so close to shore. It was a freak thing. A plume of cold water drew in the shark bait."

In fact, until 25-year-old surfer Adrian Ruiz was killed on April 28, 2008, no one had died from a shark attack on Mexico's Pacific Coast in more than 30 years. The town received tremendous support from the world surfing community following the incident.

OK WITH THE ISOLATION

At Hacienda Eden, Chris Schirmer, owner/chef of the house restaurant La Cocina Del Sol, is pulling golden loaves out of the wood-fired oven behind the kitchen. While he and Peter critique last night's hockey game beamed into Café Sol, the community hot spot near the bridge, Eden's owner Jim Garrity-Robbins shows me the grounds. The fact that 80 percent of Eden's clients are returning guests says it all.

A little further north, we pull the caddy into Casa Viva, a private rental with a unique arrangement of social and private space that makes for easy movement and acute awareness of surrounding nature. I am beginning to recognize how much care is invested in maintaining closeness with nature on Troncones. Casa Viva's owners are now creating Playa Viva, an eco-resort further south.

We could keep going around Manzanillo Bay and on to Majahua where there are exquisite and exclusive



A sunset at the isolated beach of Troncones, near Zihuatanejo, state of Guerrero.

Getting there

Troncones is 40 minutes away from Ixtapa Airport. A bus from downtown Zihuatanejo going to La Union takes you to the Troncones' junction, where a van service takes you to your hotel.

SURFERS ROUTE
Mexican waters attract surfers from all over the world to its great waves

SALINA CRUZ

Oaxaca
Regarded as the best area to surf in Mexico, this beach has an abundance of hand points with sand bottoms, rock reefs and jetties.

PUNTA DE MITA

Nayarit
Located a block away from some of the most beautiful beaches in the Vallarta area, this quaint fishing village offers surf camps to all ages.

ABREOJOS

Baja California
This small bay located on the U.S. surfers route has excellent hand point breaks throughout the area.

SAN BLAS

Nayarit
This uncrowded beach suits all levels of surfers. Playa El Borrego is home to Stoners Surf Camp and resident champ 'Pompis' Cano.

private rentals to see, but we're hungry. At a little log cabin in the concentrated strip of tiendas on the main road, I enjoy the biggest, best quesadilla I've ever had in my life and an ice cold bottle of Coca-Cola.

Quinta D'Liz offers pared-down, comfortable bungalows, open to the sea breezes, at a reasonable price. Owner Luis Aguilar and I sit out on the patio and watch the pelicans skim

the crests of the waves. What is here is all there is, Luis says.

"There's no escape. Being here triggers awareness of your relationship with yourself," he says. "There's a resonance with the peace and power of nature."

I ask about the isolation. "If I'm OK with myself, I'm not lonely," he answers.

In the office, I notice his weighted bookshelves; Hermann Hesse catches my eye. I retire to my bungalow, crawl into the mosquito net, and fall asleep to the rhythmic rush of the waves.

The next morning, Alejandro Rodríguez, a young oceanographer and wilderness guide, drops by. Troncones is a great place to lay back and chill, he says, but at some point, you want to do something different. His Costa Nativa Ecotours engages visitors in supporting programs for sustainable economic alternatives for the local inhabitants' way of life. He is intent on educating the local children about their obligation and the rewards of managing their natural resources.

High season is from November to April. May is slow. Then rains and surfers return.

Room 3 at the small hotel Los Sueños was the perfect end to my sojourn. A great place for families, it has everything one could want for a long, comfortable stay. In the middle of a steamy, close, the-rains-are-coming afternoon, I made use of the air-conditioner, and took a siesta on the royal bed. Then a long shell-hunting walk on the beach and a cooling swim with the house puppy in the infinity pool. The water is warm and the swimming is transporting. It's hard to know where the body ends and the water begins.

As I float from one end of the pool to the other, thinking of nothing—feeling nothing but comfort, the clouds slipping by above, the terns calling over the waves, it comes to me that the essence of Troncones lies in the rhythms of nature by the sea and the unpretentious warmth and welcome of her people.

Vampires rule in pop culture

BY RUTH LA FERLA
New York Times News Service

TV Sookie Stackhouse, the feisty young heroine of "True Blood" on HBO, risks doom whenever she visits with her otherworldly beau. And Oskar, the adolescent misfit of the Swedish art film "Let the Right One In," a favorite in fashion circles, courts extinction each time he ventures out with Eli, the eerily ageless shape-shifter he befriends.

Sookie and Oskar are in the throes of vampire lust, a pop-culture contagion being spread via television, films and fiction. What began with the Twilight Saga, the luridly romantic young-adult series by Stephenie Meyer, followed by "Twilight," the movie, has become a pandemic of unholy proportions.

Rarely have monsters looked so sultry or so camera-ready. No small part of this vampire mania seems to stem from the ethereal cool and youthful sexiness with which the demons are portrayed.

"The vampire is the new James Dean," said Julie Plec, the writer and executive producer of "The Vampire Diaries," a forthcoming series on the CW network based on the popular L.J. Smith novels.

The June premiere of the second season of "True Blood," drew 3.4 million viewers, making it HBO's most-

watched program.

The style world, too, has come under the vampire's spell, in the shape of the gorgeous leather- and lace-clad night crawlers who have crept into the pages of fashion glossies.

Vampires, of course, are part of a hoary tradition that harks back to Nosferatu and Bram Stoker's "Dracula" at least. Anne Rice updated the genre, introducing the aristocratic Lestat. But the undead are returning with a vengeance, in part because they "personify real-world anxieties," said Michael Dylan Foster, a professor at Indiana University in Bloomington.

"Vampire's attraction is about the titillation of imagining the monsters we could be if we just let ourselves go," suggested Rick Owens, a fashion bellwether.

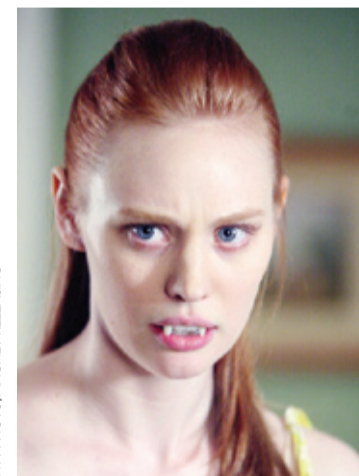
Emily Rose, a performance poet in Chicago, is a devotee of "the wantonness, the gorgeousness that is the vampire." She catalogs its exquisite charms: "eternal youth, invulnerability and, of course, the night life—staying up way past your bedtime."

Surely there are worse things. "There are monsters so much bigger and more realistic in our day-to-day lives," Rose said. "Having somebody clamp onto your neck and drain you doesn't seem so scary anymore."

It wouldn't be on my top 10 list of ways not to die," she added, "especially if that vampire is at all attractive."



Lina Leandersson plays a young out-cast in the film "Let the Right One In."



Undead style of Deborah Ann Woll in the HBO series "True Blood."



Japanese actress Koyuki as Onigen in the film "Blood: The Last Vampire."