

## The Travel Guider

I read all the time how great this town is and that resort is. When I get there, it is obvious the reviewer didn't go to any of the places, restaurants, hotels or scenic spots I went to. So, while I am not an expert on travel, I've done a lot of it. It's kind of like art: I don't know much about it, but I know what I like.

Have you ever been to Sayula? On the basis of extensive research, we decided to go there for a few days. The web site said this was a small village on the way to the beach in the midst of a charming forest surrounded by picturesque mountains. The attractive looking inn we made reservations for looked as if it might qualify for a "quaint of the year" award. So we hustled down the Quota fully expecting a relaxing weekend, fine meals, evening entertainment, world class restaurants on the main plaza and amiable village people who live there.

Here's what we found. To begin with, Sayua is living proof that Photoshop is an amazing tool. The "small village" turned out to be a large, industrial wasteland with lots of traffic. We checked into a hotel Holiday Inn would sneer at. Then, after a fruitless walk for a couple of hours, we wandered back without finding any restaurant. NOT ONE. Back at the hotel, starving, our last ditch meal barely edible, maybe a C-, we resolved to get serious the next day in desperate pursuit of a real restaurant.

Where do you go in any Mexican city for good food? The plaza, of course. On the way we saw many people, vacant looks on their faces, seemingly wandering aimlessly but not a single restaurant or bar did we encounter. The plaza was nondescript, virtually deserted except for a couple of old scruffy guys snoozing under their enormous sombreros, no church and not a single restaurant or bar.

So we widened our search. Still no restaurants, but I noticed that virtually every block had a pharmacy and a bank branch. Odd, but nothing to be alarmed about. Finally, exhausted and famished, we returned to our shack, had a D+ meal and went to bed.

The next day, desperate, wandering aimlessly like the natives, full of resolve to find even an acceptable restaurant in this large city, heavy traffic thundering past us in all directions, we finally came back to the plaza. Sure enough, the two scruffy old guys were still hanging out on a bench. In my best Spanish I asked them where their favorite restaurant was. They looked at each other, eyebrows dancing and gave us explicit directions, approximately seven blocks from the plaza. Thanking them profusely, we headed to our new, highly

anticipated destination, mouths watering, passing bank branches and pharmacies on every block. There we were in front of a small door. We looked around. No tables, no line of clients. No menu.

I knocked tentatively. The door opened to the backside of a woman scrubbing a kitchen floor. I guess it was the home of one of the scruffy guys on the bench, probably laughing their *traceros* off at the gullible gringos. That explained all the facial ticks the guys had when I asked for their favorite restaurant.

So it was back to the Holiday Hovel, wolfing down a bowl of F- slop and home early the next morning, stomachs rumbling in protest, zombie-like expressions on our faces.

Here is my bottom line for Sayula. There are no bars or restaurants. Very wealthy people wander aimlessly, like zombies, in fruitless search of food. Not finding any, they are all starving, thus ill from malnutrition, explaining the need for so much medication from the pharmacy on every block. Medicine is expensive in Mexico, so that explains the astounding number of bank branches along side the pharmacies. The traffic has nothing to do with stopping to eat in the teeming metropolis of Sayula. Apparently, confirmed by later looking at the map, you must go through Sayula to virtually anywhere else. No one has ever stopped in Sayula more than once.

So, better to go to Mazamitla, a quaint, Swiss looking mountain village on the way to Colima. There is not space enough in this article to do Mazamitla justice, so I will focus on the amazing history of the church in the plaza.

It looks out of place in Mexico. It has minaret style towers as if it came from some place in the orient. Curious, I began asking various village people about the origins of the church, who built it, did it come from somewhere else, how old etc.

Several vendors and locals recounted a preposterous story that it was built in the 1940s. That was obviously fictitious.

Fortunately, I encountered an old man sitting on a bench in the plaza, who gave me the real history. He said it was ancient. He swore he heard the church's origin from his great grandfather who said it was told to him by his great grandfather and so on. The man was very sincere. He said the church came from Tibet. It had been dismantled in the fourteenth century by

adventurous monks, the old man said, and placed on rafts stone by stone. Then the rafts were floated across the ocean, carted inland by Aztec slaves to the mountains near the volcano gods of Colima and reassembled exactly as it was build in ancient oriental times.

I present this factual account as a public service to the lakeside community. And by the way, there are many good restaurants surrounding the plaza and not a single zombie could be seen. Evidently nobody from Sayula ever gets to Mazamitla.