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Sunday Dec. 16

Leave a little after 6. Dark until almost 7:30. Light rain, light traffic. Nap and lunch at rest area between Salem and Eugene at milepost 239. You can drive down to the river. Left there about 12:15. Pouring rain, 50°.

Rain mercifully lets up. Southern Oregon is rolling hills, grass farms, sheep, cows, lichen-crusting oak trees giving way to pines as you rise up into the foothills.

Arrived in Medford about 4 pm. Cute downtown is decorated with lights but all closed up for Sunday. Lots of homeless people wandering around. I went for a nice walk and it felt great to stretch my legs.

We had seen a michoacan restaurant that looked perfect but when we drove back at 5 to check it out it was nothing special, more like a fast food place. We ended up at Black Bear Diner. Although it only gets three stars on yelp it was perfect for us. Cozy booths, kitschy bear decor, light rock music. I had a delicious hot turkey dinner with mashed potatoes, gravy, cranberry, and vegetables, all very homemade and real. Grant had a reuben. \$24 total + tip. Enough "to go" for lunch tomorrow.

Parked for the night at Suncrest rest area, just south of medford. Lots of

people sleeping in cars. 7 pm. Guitar, journal, Netflix, crash!

Mon Dec 17

Didn't wake up until 7:30! We always crash hard after a driving day. 38° and blue sky! Siskiyou Summit 4300', clear and dry, fog at the top. Lots of fire scarred oak trees.

Lots of homeless people spending the night in their vehicles at the rest areas. Seems to work well because there are restrooms and garbage cans so there are no sanitation issues, and no tents are allowed. Made me realize that the key to eliminating tent cities is to provide pod type housing for people.

The west end of the Florida panhandle is often called Floribama; we christened southern Oregon Orefornia. Its scenery and mountains blend seamlessly into Northern California.

We did some mental math & figured that day length increases by about 8 minutes per degree of latitude as you head south.

Nightclub name idea: Rhythm & Booze
Dense fog in Northern CA, cold wind at the Weed rest area.

There was a big fire north of Redding this year, and huge swaths of black sticks are visible from 1-5. Crews are doing erosion control & planting, and are cutting the trees close to the road, maybe so they aren't at risk of falling onto the road.

Lake Shasta is very low and there isn't a lot of snow on the mountain, though rainy season is probably just beginning.

It rained off and on to Redding. Stopped for bread and saw many homeless folks wandering around the Gateway parking lot.

Went for a nice walk on the Sundial Bridge trail. 52° with light rain & some sun. Turkey, cranberry, & cream cheese sandwiches for lunch - delicious!

Sixth Street Cafe in Los Banos for dinner. So-so atmosphere (loud TV) and the beef tip burgundy was OK but not great.

Rest Area south of Los Banos. Brightly lit, so glad we have curtains.

Tues. Dec. 18

On the road at 7:20. 43°, light clouds & wind. Slept well. Semis made deep rumbling noises all night. Arrived in Burbank about 1:30. Tour of David's studio, walk on trail, arrive at David's house about 3:30. Nice warm sunny day, light cooling breeze.

4

Phoenix

Wed. Dec. 19

Walk in the morning, 65° + blue sky.
One hour in gnarly LA traffic to Long Beach.
Picnic lunch at Wardlow Park before heading
to Dan + Kelle's at 1. Long drive to Julia's
school (Mater Dei Catholic high school) to
watch her water polo match. Felafels for
dinner. Parking in front of their house
tonight. They texted their cop neighbor so
she wouldn't turn us in as vagrants.
Lots of homeless people sleeping in vans
around here.

Thurs Dec. 20

Woke up just before 6 and on the
road to beat traffic. Already getting light
at 6:20. Traffic not too bad, plus we're
a carpool. Nice to get out of LA. Stop
in Corona for gas. Flags honoring military
guys line the street. I'm so sick of the
way we honor and perpetuate war. Why
not flags for teachers!

Whitewater rest area on I-10. A
couple in a camper with seven dogs!
Not picking up their poop.

Arrive in Phoenix at my parents'
condo at 7pm. (forgot about the time
change).

Fri Dec 21

The day flew by with helping my dad run some errands, going for a long walk, organizing the van. Everyone came over for pizza dinner and cookie baking (except Kelly & Rob & Casey). Cool & overcast.

Sat Dec 22

More hanging out, went for two walks, went to the library with my dad. Warm, sunny day. Kylie, Brandon, Ava came over for dinner & spent the evening while their parents were out with friends. Brandon is very sweet (except with his mom). Kylie is very shy. Ava is too happy playing to need grownup interaction.

Sun Dec 23

Grant and I went to the musical Instrument Museum, which was wonderful but exhausting, because there is so much to see and our backs were killing us. Next time I'm asking for a wheelchair! What makes this museum great are the videos with music examples from every country. We stayed 4 1/2 hours, a museum record for us! It's like herding cats to figure out where my siblings are going to be. We had planned to hang out at the Marriott

pool this afternoon but most people weren't going to be there after all, so we just came back to my folks' to have some down time.

Went to what I thought was the hotel sports bar to watch the Seahawks game (Grant would watch with some people and I could hang in the lobby area with those who weren't watching the game). But it turned out to not be at the hotel and it was unbelievably loud. I took Ava over to Target to look at toys, which was a blast. She never asked to buy anything. We left at halftime.

Mon Dec. 24 xmas eve

Xmas eve dinner at Mark's with karaoke, and a puzzle. Fun.

Tues. Dec. 25 xmas

Gift frenzy, brunch, dinner at Mark's. Grant stayed at condo with diarrhea. Some went to Zoo Lights but I was too tired and also stopped at store to buy loperamide for Grant. And I had a headache, probably from the two-day barrage of noise.

Wed. Dec. 26

Laundry, packing, walk with mom. Dad has been too weak and out of breath to walk other than short distances. Drove up to Marriott Canyon Villas for a quick visit with everyone by the pool.

Saw David's unit. Everything is very nice, and it's out in the desert on the north edge of town.

Parents left about 3:30 to go to the Princess Hotel Christmas event. We finished packing and left at 4:30.

Light traffic. Took hiway 347 south to Maricopa and 248 east through the Sonoran Desert Natl. Monument to Gila Bend. Grant doesn't like this route because there are traffic lights, but it was 20 minutes faster than hiway 85. Beautiful desert sunset.

Subway dinner in Gila Bend. Grant is still having mild intestinal distress.

Sleeping at Sentinel Rest Area 30 minutes west of Gila Bend. It's nice to be on the road again. It's a nice rest area.

Thursday Dec 27

42° at 7 am. Lovely sunrise and a half moon. The air stinks of giant feedlots.

Arrived at the dentist in Algodones at 9:00 California time, only to be told that the clinics are on Arizona time to make it easier

for their patients, most of whom are from Arizona. So we were late.

Grant got his abutment and we both got xrays (\$50). Dr. Salinas cautioned against using an electric toothbrush more than a couple times a week. He said they can be too aggressive.

Got my haircut at Sylvia Dios. \$8 + \$2 tip. She straightened my hair and Grant said it looked like silk afterward. (I didn't ask her to do it, and didn't even realize what she was doing; I suspect it's just the usual here.)

40 minute line to walk back across at about 1 pm. US Gov't is shut down and we're told that cars are waiting up to 4 hours to get through.

Wifi break at the main branch Yuma library on the south edge of town. Weak wifi.

Groceries & gas at Fry's, then west to Sand Hills Rest Area, about 10 miles into Arizona. Outhouses only. Too windy to cook, and no picnic area, so made egg salad sandwiches for dinner (my mom had thoughtfully made us some for the road).

Half the rest area is closed for power pole replacement, and cars are crammed in every which way to park. Lots of flashing lights & work truck lights but no bright overhead lights. With curtains, ear plugs, and eye shades we are able to sleep great.

We've come to realize that even if a rest area says "8 hour maximum stay," no one is tracking. They just want to prevent longterm homeless stays.

Friday Dec 28

45° at 8 am. Clear blue sky, light wind. The surrounding sand dunes were pink this morning. Last night there were illuminated dune buggies zooming around in the dark, like phosphorescent blue beetles.

Bought BRAT stuff for Grant at the market we like in Yuma, Del Sol (rice pudding, applesauce, bananas). Remembered that we had Pepto Bismol tabs for diarrhea. Walked into Algodones about noon. Found glasses I liked but they would be \$200 and take 24 hours to make. Went for a short walk around town - not very pedestrian friendly. Grant bought a straw hat, made in Guanajuato (\$16).

Got to the dentist at 12:45 and the crown was ready. The border line was shorter today but took longer as only two agents were working - an hour today vs. 40 min. yesterday. Back to the car at 2:30 and on the road for Tucson.

Chilly wind today. The desert is a lush green and the saguaro are fat. They throw long shadows in the golden afternoon light.

Lots of purple flowers blooming on the desert floor.

Our plan had been to visit Mike and Sam in Bisbee and cross the border there. But Mike emailed to say it is cold and snowy there! Supposed to get down to 16° tonight! We couldn't sleep in the van in that temp so we canceled our visit I forgot that Bisbee is at 5500' elevation.

After a cold dinner of crackers, cheese, carrot, & orange for me (BRAT for Grant) in a McDonald's parking lot next to I-8 in Tucson, we drove another hour to the Pilot Truck Stop at exit 12 north of Nogales. Signs on the way said "Rain & wet pavement, slow down," but it didn't rain. Arrived about 8pm and it's 34 degrees.

Sat Dec 29

I slept in long underwear, socks, & a hat, with three extra blankets. I stayed warm until about 6:30 am, then started the car, waited for some heat, and got up. 24° and the ground sparkly with frost.

Leave Pilot at 7:15, stop at Safeway for a few staples, and crossed the border.

This time it was light so we were able to find the immigration parking at KM21 without a hitch (it had been dark three

years ago when we crossed at Nogales and we missed the turn and got quite stressed and confused).

Inside the immigration office it was a little bit warm, but then we had to go pay at the bank window (for our tourist visa) which meant standing outside for about 15 minutes. We got so cold! Then back to immigration to get our stamps. On the road about 9:00. So glad we get our car permit and insurance online before we leave home, as that would have meant probably another hour standing around at various outdoor windows.

The roads are in good shape - so much nicer than three years ago. Many new sections. The striping and marking and signage are not always current though, which can be confusing.

Stopped at a sparkling clean Pemex for a restroom break - put California rest areas to shame. Grant still not fully recovered from his gastroenteritis so I did most of the driving. Arrived at Totonaka RV Park about 2:30. It's \$20 without ~~the~~ hookups, but has many amenities, including laundry, hot showers, brand new bathrooms, and hot tub.

Lots of friendly people here, mostly Canadians in big RVs, mostly younger retirees, lots of happy hour happiness. Almost everyone has a small dog.

Spent the afternoon organizing stuff, doing laundry & showers, and enjoying the sun.
64°!

Soup & crackers for dinner. Too chilly to be outside. Someone playing bongos. We're packed in pretty tight but it's fine for a couple of nights.

Sun Dec 30

47° at 7 am. Grant is feeling much better today, yay! Walked along the water and then on a decent sidewalk toward town. Decided to stay another night as it's quite cold up in Alamos. The sun here is lovely and warm. We'd move to the wild camp and save \$20, but it will be quite crowded for New Year's weekend, and it's easier to just stay here. Everyone is friendly, though our immediate neighbors all appear to be lushes. Donna next store is so pretty, but seems to not be all there. Her sentences drift off into hand wavings, as if she forgets what she was saying.

After lunch drove to Algodones Beach, supposedly the prettiest in northern Mexico, but it's been developed & privatized. Drove up to the mirador but it was mobbed on a holiday weekend Sunday. We pulled to the side for great views of the coast and turquoise water. Playa Piedras Pintas looks like a good place to boondock. Got a few groceries at Ley, a big supermarket with just about everything. Cold wind today, especially at Mirador.

Then to Bahia Delfin wild camp, which wasn't crowded at all, and didn't seem as dirty as last time we were here. Not as much wind here, and quite warm on the beach. Parked on the right side of the Bahia Delfin hotel complex then walked south to the estuary. By then Grant was too wore out to walk the estuary trail so we headed back on the road. Next time park in the lot to the left, next to the estuary. Not many birds at 2 pm.

Back at camp I walked to the nearby Oxxo for ice cream bars and Canelitos cookies (the Habanera integrales I bought at the Ley turned out to be crackers).

A veggie truck set up at the campground. Most of the boxes say "California" on them, which seems ironic. Now waiting for the hot tub to get hot. Grant is watching football using high speed dsl at the club house by the office.

I brought out my guitar and almost caused a divorce. Donna's husband, Brian, is a real flirt, a guy with a wandering eye. He grabbed my guitar and started playing songs. Donna said, "He never does that for me," and "If you flip him the bird maybe he'll leave you alone," and "He treats other women better than he treats me." After that I played inside the van. Awkward, and sad, other peoples' relationship problems.

(I wrote a song called "A Guy with a Wandering Eye.")

The hot tub was a nice temperature. I'm so spoiled that I don't have to use chlorine in mine.

Huevos Rancheros for dinner - yum!

Mon Dec 31

37° at 7:30. Walked along the "malecon" (the sidewalk above the beach) enjoying the sound of the waves and the warmth of the sun. On the road at 9:30. Was fun asking staff people about their New Year's plans. Mostly home with family feasting on menudo, barbacoa, or sopa fria.

Excellent roads today, including a new bypass that completely avoids Ciudad Obregon. \$155, about \$8. Most toll booths are closed however, I'm guessing because of the holiday. ~~Red Cross~~ volunteers ask for donations when tolls are free.

Turns out that Dec is the coldest month in Mexico. Today is the last day of Dec, so hopefully it will start getting warmer!

The sky was murky grey-brown for a while after we left San Carlos, a strange, gloomy fog.

Mexico is privatizing oil & gas so there are now other brands of gas stations besides Pemex.

We got stuck behind a Policia Municipal car for a while and were afraid

to pass, not knowing if he had jurisdiction on the highway.

Stopped to ogle the enormous deer dancer statue north of Ciudad Obregon. A white hawk perched on one shoulder, but we couldn't identify it.

Lots of organ pipe (pitaya) cactus growing in this area and the desert is green.

Lunch at Tacos Mayo in Navojoa. Delicious carne asada and pork adobado tacos. Lots of corn for sale along the road.

Arrived in Alamos about 2 pm. Delightfully warm in the sun. Met Kevin and Sandra from Boise. Only two other campers here besides them. Walked into town and it was pretty quiet. A few vendors in the plaza selling chiltapin peppers, honey, guava jam, naranjita marmelade, and dulce de leche. They said there are no public festivities for New Year's. There were quite a few tourist "trains" doing tours of town. All clients appeared to be Mexican.

Huevos Rancheros back at camp and sitting in Jan grateful for our little electric heater.

A flurry of fire crackers at midnight, otherwise a quiet night.

Kevin and Sandra said they had a wonderful time at Charisma restaurant for a gringo New Year's dinner and music.

Tues Jan 1, 2019

38° at 7:30. Light overcast. Walked through the large & crowded cemetery, with above-ground crypts of all sizes & ages. Most seemed a bit neglected, and there was a fair amount of trash & weeds, but it is still picturesque.

Walked into town where things were quiet & mostly closed. Walked a loop beyond the Plaza de Armas and saw some beautiful homes. and streetscapes.

~~The~~ Delicious shrimp & fish tacos on the Alameda. They had two sauces with no peppers, so I could eat them. Tasty.

Back to camp for showers, wifi, guitar, reading. It's very quiet here people-wise. One unoccupied trailer, and another trailer with a guy inside who rarely comes out. A gardener is watering the trees. Music is drifting over from the arroyo. 73° and breezy.

The gardener told me the live music is coming from the cemetery, where people are visiting their dead. I walked over and listened to several bands. It appears that families hire musicians to play graveside. People are drinking beer and singing along. I felt a bit like a voyeur. I took a few very surreptitious photos.

Next year, come to Alamos on the way back, not the way down. Kind of lonely with no other campers here.

Walked into town about 5. The place is hoppin', streets around main plaza blocked off, snack & toy vendors. But no restaurants open. Lovely sunset & view of Christmas lights on the mirador. Back to camp for chicken tacos. Music drifting our way from loud cars or from houses. On our walk, saw a family doing a piñata. Still occasional bangs of fireworks.

Saw a small flock of magpie jays in camp today! Long tails and noisy chatter.

Wed Jan 2

42° at 7 am. Paid our \$20 for two nights to the woman sweeping the patio. I asked her if she'd had a good end of the year and she said no, that her 80-year-old mother is quite ill with pneumonia.

Stopped for milk at the corner store and a flock of bright green parrots or parrakeets flew by.

Went to Cilantro restaurant for banana pancakes but they weren't as good as last year - no bananas inside, only on top. And we missed the camaraderie of last year. Talked briefly to one of the owners, who lives in Tucson. He said they're too far from the town center to get a lot of customers. Most of their business comes from bringing

\$10 with tip -
a bit high
for Mexico

lunches to workers in the nine 20 miles away. Note: lots of food vendors along the arroyo.

On the road at 9 am. Cross into Sinaloa state. Lusher and greener, dense shrubs, green fields, trees with white blossoms that look like cotton and no leaves. Overcast and windy. The roads are older and in worse condition. Bumpy, with lots of patches. Layers of volcano-shaped mountains covered in green.

Paid cash for gas and realized I was almost out of pesos. Worried we wouldn't have enough for tolls. One toll booth was free today. Easily found an ATM in a grocery store en route to our campground south of Culiacan - La Rinconada. It's quiet in the winter - we're the only ones here. It's a swimming park with bungalows for rent, restaurant, and event spaces. A little run down. We're parked next to a river and lake. Lots of birds (glossy ibis by the dozens, scamp, teal, osprey, kirkadee, flycatcher, grebes, stiff-tailed ducks, etc.). A scrawny, flea-plagued dog begging for scraps. 75° and breezy, still overcast. Feels like rain but none is forecast. Arrived about 3:30. Another mangy dog arrives, and a mewling cat. Had to guard the food and keep the van doors closed. We feel bad for the animals, but if we give them anything they'll bother

us even more. I don't want to get near those fleas. A few mosquitoes at sunset. Spaghetti for dinner. Very quiet & dark here. Booming herons sounded like drums in the night. Came upon motorcycle accident in road. Two motos down, pieces everywhere. No one badly hurt thank goodness. (En route to campground.)
Thurs Jan 3

46° at 7:30, but it feels warmer. Sliver moon and Venus nestled in the top of a coconut palm when I woke up earlier. Our two dog guardians started barking about 7. So many birds here! Watched a cormorant catch & eat a small fish with many fins. It's truly magical here and I would definitely come back. The facilities are pretty run down but we don't need much. The keening of the osprey sets the dogs to barking. New species for me: fulvous whistling duck! Also a green kingfisher and a giant orange iguana sleeping in a tree!! He appears to be at least two feet long.

Sat & read and enjoyed paradise for a while. One of the workers said the place is packed in the summer and especially during Easter week. He said there are many iguanas here and they are not dangerous. I think he said they hang out on the lawn and eat everything (clean it all up).

Reluctantly tore ourselves away about 11:30. Groceries in Costa Rica, arrived at Villa Celeste about 2:30. Nice rest area on 150

south of the Costa Rica exit (north and south of the toll booth). Mexico has a thriving middle class that looks just like our middle class. Same teenagers clutching cell phones, same stops for junk food, same paunchy dads and plump moms, Chihuahuas and new cars.

Nice toll road today, in good condition, light traffic, beautiful scenery. Lush green fields of corn and sugarcane.

Villa ~~at~~ Celeste is quiet now, just two other campers here. Both were here last year. We're next to Murf and Linda again. Warm in the sun with a pleasant breeze. The place is nicer than last year. They ~~had~~ tore down an old palapa that was blocking the view of the ocean. Sat up on the viewing deck for sunset, chatting with the other campers. Kevin and Sandra from the Alamos campground rolled in. Dark and quiet night, just the sound of the waves.

Fri Jan 4

55° at 7 am, overcast, no wind, perfect. Nice walk on the firm and almost flat beach. Lunch with Kevin and Sandra at La Fortaleza. Tacos 25 pesos each. The marlin are better than the shrimp,

as they are cooked with tomatoes and seasonings. The shrimp are dry, and I can't eat any of the spicy sauces.

On the road about 1:00, grabbed ice in the little town of Celestina from the nice shop owner who speaks English and sells cinnamon rolls.

Lovely one-hour drive to north Mazatlan on a good road with beautiful scenery. Our former coworker Paul^{shaffer} and his wife Trish live here full-time in an art deco condo building on the seventh floor^{cerritos} overlooking the beach. North Mazatlan[^] is quiet and far from the "Golden Zone" with its denser hotels and party scene. They bought the place on a leap of faith 14 years ago before it was even built. \$245 k + HOA dues of almost \$400 a month.

Quick backtrack to Celestina. Oyster harvesters go out in wetsuits with a big net wrapped around a tire (so it floats) and a short machete. Kevin bought oysters from two guys who had just come in from 5 hours of harvesting. They had each collected about 200 pounds, which they can sell for about \$60 (300 pesos for 20 kilos). Kevin paid 50 pesos for a dozen, or about 20 cents each. The guys said it was hard work and they were exhausted.

[Back to Mazatlan] Paul and Trish's complex has pools, hot tub, and many other amenities. 26 staff. P & T are the only people here full time. They know the other owners and have a sense of community. They say it gets unbearably hot & humid in the summer.

We went to Taqueria San Pablo for dinner, a cheery open-air place with pork on a spit and a condiment bar that included guacamole and a tomato puree that I could eat! I had a Vampiro (tostada with cheese and meat) not realizing it would have a spicy topping (duh - a vampiro has a bite), but luckily I was able to scrape it off. Only Mexicans here. Grant had a baked potato with meat and cheese. Our meal was about \$10.

Paul, Trish, and I sat in the hot tub for a while. He is a talker, Trish is the quiet one (though she does get frustrated when he doesn't let her get a word in edgewise). We like him a lot; she's a little prickly. They insisted we sleep in their guestroom. The bed and pillows weren't super comfy, but it was fine. I'm up before everyone, sitting on the veranda listening to the ocean. It's really beautiful here. 56° at 7 am.

Sat Jan 5

See previous page for temp and such. Drove to Holi Frijole restaurant for a late breakfast. Delicious spinach omelettes with cream cheese inside, fried potatoes + beans + queso fresco on the side. 100 pesos each with a big glass of fresh oj. (\$5)

Drove to the central market. Nothing special, but great food selection. Paul and Trish drove us around Ice Box Hill, with views of the port and Stone Island (really a peninsula). Then they dropped us off at the south end of the malecon. We walked for a while but it was 86° with no breeze and little shade!

Took the bus back to the condo about 3. I went for a walk on the beach, which is very clean and nice for walking.

Grant wanted to watch football so Paul, Trish, and I went to a Venezuelan restaurant across the street called Latinos. I had stuffed eggplant which was charred & not very flavorful and a small portion.

Saw a school of fish "running" across the water to escape from something, like a dancing cloud of ripples.

At the market today Paul & Trish bought locally roasted marino coffee from a vendor they've been patronizing for 11 years. They've

San Blas

watched the hearing + disabled daughter grow into a beautiful young woman.

She was wearing a shirt but didn't know what it said. I translated it for her: "The prettiest thing you can put on is a smile." Her face broke into a beautiful grin. Also bought marshmallows rolled in

Spent the evening reading on the deck while the others watched the game. Paul + I swapped favorite songs in Spanish.

coconut, a local specialty.
Yum!

Sunday Jan 6

6:1° at 7 am. We're now in the tropics. It's humid too. Tried to walk on the beach but the tide was too high. Grant and Paul found much to talk about and it was hard to tear ourselves away. On the road at 10:30.

Stopped for lunch at a taqueria adjacent to a Pemex about an hour south of Mazatlan: "Servicio las Salvias" in Villa Union. Grant had chorreadas, a thick tortilla with beans and melted cheese and I had marlin tacos - delicious! The place was clean and pleasing.

They had "guisos", or stews, in clay pots and you choose what kind you want on your tortilla. 90 pesos + tip (\$5) The adjacent Subway cost 42 pesos for a brinch.

and everything looked identical to the US Subways. Subways are popping up all over the place down here.

We hear there is a gas shortage in some parts of Mexico - due to pipeline theft they are shutting down the pipeline and switching to trucks?

We also learned that the Sinaloa toll booths are now free because the people protested that there were no free roads and they couldn't afford the tolls.

We were glad to have seen Mazatlan, but ready to leave. Cerritos is peaceful but most of the city is too chaotic for us. We didn't see anything there that really wow'd us.

We saw many schools of fish roiling near shore, and Paul & Trish told us that other times of year they see whales, jellyfish, phosphorescence, and other marine life.

It's about 3.5 hours to San Blas from Mazatlan. It's a very scenic drive on a good road. Everything is lush and green. Crops sprouting in fields. Organ pipe cactus mixed with thick stands of shrubs and trees. Paul called this area the bread basket of Mexico. Toll booth workers are friendly.

There are often rest areas of some kind after toll booths. High tolls today: \$33.

Lots of vendors by the road selling bags of dried shrimp, and shrimp tamales. Cute young women wave flags and dance around

to entice drivers to stop. Grant thought it was very cute.

Soon we saw coastal estuaries and many wood storks! Overcast.

We turned off the highway onto the road to San Blas and saw jaguar crossing signs! Google maps sent us down a road that was paved in one direction but dirt on our side. It

began to skirt a steep drop onto the beach and soon got too narrow to pass, so we had to back up about a quarter of a mile. A car came up behind us and got stuck in the sand trying to turn around.

They got free and we kept backing up. I was driving and a little freaked out. Finally we found a place to turn around but I forgot about the rebar sticking out of the paved lane and almost popped a tire! Luckily I remembered where the campground was from last year so I could ignore Google maps and feel our way there.

This year we're staying at Playa Amor and it's great! Right on the ocean. Old but useable infrastructure. A big family group with multiple tents and cars was packing up to leave - today is the last day of the Christmas holidays. There are two Canadian couples here and one Mexican couple.

They all know each other from years here. Everyone speaks Spanish together. The Mexican couple's daughter works at Walmart as a manager. She said it's hard work but pays better than other stores and she's been able to work her way up. She works 6 days a week and gets one weekend a month off.

Trish gave us some mahi mahi they caught and we had it for dinner fried, with green beans and cous cous.

91° here at 7 pm with a lovely breeze. A few insects at sunset but not many.

Mon Jan 7

Quiet night. 64° at 7 am, very humid - table wet. The big group is gone but they left behind a bit of trash and heavily used bathrooms. (Cleared up by afternoon.) Neighborhood dogs leave poop so you have to watch where you walk. We're actually in Aticama, 11 kms south of San Blas. Nice walking beach when the tide is out, and clean.

Drove to San Blas to find a boat trip and got very confused. It's a bigger town than we realized. We found the boats that go to the islands and they told us where to find boats to La Tovará. It's a little

place at the entrance to town next to the river. A boat had just left and they said another one wouldn't leave for three hours, so they sent us back toward Aticama to a place called La Tovará.

Since there was no one else to share a boat with we paid 800 pesos (\$40) for a private boat (normally it's 200 per person). It would have been 600 to skip the crocodile hatchery (adds 30 min to the trip). Then you pay 20 each to visit the hatchery. I wouldn't recommend it. There are some big crocs in depressing enclosures, a lot of baby crocs in a hard-to-see-into building, some parrots, and jaguars in horrible conditions. All are supposedly for breeding.

But the boat ride itself was wonderful! It's a protected area, part tunnels of mangos and part thick ferns in open swamp or marsh. Bromeliads blooming - huge plants with red flowers. Enormous fig trees. It's fresh water, a very serpentine river. It would be easy to get lost. We saw: boat-billed herons, tri-colored heron, tropical kingbird and nest, yellow-crowned night herons, tiger heron (bare-throated) and nest, tropical kingbirds, lesser nighthawk (parraque), anhinga, green heron, chachalacas, turtles, coatis, and

crocodiles. Lovely breeze, no bugs. Oh, and lots of iguanas! One smallish orange male and multiple green females.

Drove up to see the lovely old stone fort and great view of San Blas.

I loved the "Coco" mural on the cemetery wall.* Groceries, then banana bread, and back to camp. Sandra + Kevin are here! Quite warm + muggy but nice breeze.

The tide is out so I went for a walk on the flat, firm beach. 84° at 5 pm.

* I asked two Mexican people what they thought of the movie Coco, and they said "It had a wonderful message."

Grilled cheese sandwiches and soup for dinner.

Tues Jan 8

64° at 7 am. Everything is wet from the humidity. The table has standing water on it.

On the road at 8 am. No gas at the first station we stopped at, but all stations after that seemed to have it. It's a windy, narrow road with lots of potholes and patches, towns with topes galore, and speed averages about 25 mph so it's slow and tiring going. Glad I took my motion sickness pill! But the scenery is gorgeous.

Banana & coconut trees and green tunnels of road with overhanging trees.

We liked the town of Lo de Marcos despite the huge number of gringos. The gringos here seemed about our age and we saw a lot of young travelers, the first we've seen down here. It feels like an old hippie town.

There's a great car sculpture in the playground, a fanciful mosaic VW-Ford mashup with Washington plates that kids can climb in. Saw white ibis, spoonbill, and tri-colored heron in a pond. Checked out a couple of RV parks that looked cramped and narrow - no sites on the water - but the beach is very nice, clean sand. We each got a half liter of fresh-squeezed orange juice.

As we continued on it got overcast and didn't feel as hot. Drove through Bucarias which was crowded due to market day. Didn't feel like anything special so we continued on. Picnic lunch in a hot Pemex parking lot. I think it got up to about 84° in the shade today.

We had tried to get in touch with Grant's friend Claresse in Puerto Vallarta but no luck, so we slogged through on the busy and slow

bypass road. Traffic is heavy for a long way before and after this large town. There appears to be a nice botanical garden a ways south of town.

At one point we climbed way up onto a headland and into pine trees at about 2500 feet elevation. So strange to see pine trees ~~after~~ in the tropics.

Stopped at a quiet roadside restaurant with a "baños" sign. They didn't charge me anything. They had an adorable orange kitten.

Saw trees with yellow flowers and others with purple flowers.

Arrived in Punta Péruca at 4pm, although it was actually 5pm because we're now on Central time. 84°. We're staying at Punta Péruca RV Park. It's right on a fantastic beach - the best walking beach in Mexico so far. Paul told us that all beaches in Mexico are public property - no one can own below the high tide line - yay!

The park is mostly Canadians in big rigs who are staying for a while. 300 pesos a night without ~~the~~ electricity. Shady covered area, hot showers, easy beach access. The beach has restaurants, fishing boats, and Mexican beachgoers at one end. Looks like great swimming in a shallow bay. Half a dozen sailboats moored offshore. Pelicans diving in the shallow

water catch fish almost every time. Terns hover hopefully near them. Lovely breeze, no bugs, hot showers, clean bathrooms. Ian called to tell me he wants to run for mayor of Seattle someday! Spaghetti and green beans for dinner.

They turned off all the bright lights by 10 pm. Fairly dark & quiet night with just crickets and surf.

Wed Jan 9

70° at 7:30 am. Overcast, humid. The tide was too high to walk on the beach so we walked into town. It's a perfect little Mexican town. Small and peaceful and clean with nice little shops and restaurants. There are LOTS of gringos here. A big group was playing pickleball near the square. Another group were heading to our campground on bicycles, yoga mats strapped on the back, for a yoga class in the common area. Saw many shop owners sweeping the street and washing the sidewalk in front of their stores. Saw young travelers suiting up at a snorkel shop.

Stopped for ice and asked the shop owner how people feel about all

the gringos in their town. He said it was mostly ok. They help the local economy and they haven't changed the culture too much. They've been coming for about 20 years and the place is still tranquil.

On the road at 9:15. Little turtle bravely crossing the road. Lots of topes and small towns. I call it "Bump city," like the Tower of Power song.

Staying such a short time in each place doesn't give us time to get to know anyone or the place. Sometimes we can tell that the ^{campgrounds} denizens aren't really kindred spirits, but you never really know until you get to know people. We're hoping to find more "small rig" kinds of places.

Lots of purple trees blooming - jacaranda?

Playa Arroyo Seco looked intriguing. Apparently it's a surfing place, and the coast in this part of Mexico is great surfing.

Saw a mower trimming the sides of the road. A guy was running ahead of the mower waving a flag to warn oncoming traffic. Another guy ran behind.

Serious exercise and it's hot & muggy.

We blew past La Manzanilla and Barras de Navedad, worried we would run out of time to get to our chosen campground tonight (there aren't too many choices on this stretch of the coast). We didn't realize that Grant's friend Kimberley lives

in La Manzanilla. We thought it was Manzanillo. We tried to find the restaurant (there is a Palapa Joe's in both towns) and finally realized we had the wrong town. We stumbled on a fish restaurant on the beach - not a tourist place - and had amazing fish lunches. Grant had fried fish fingers and I had fish grilled with butter. The meals came with buttery, flavorful rice. We turned our leftover fish into super delicious fish tacos for dinner.

Today was a mix of good and medium quality roads, and not too winding. Just before arriving at Rancho Buganvillas campground we stopped at a viewpoint for a breathtaking view of the Michoacan coast - wow! miles of undeveloped sandy beach backed by coconut palms and rocky green headlands. No one on the beach and only one clump of palapas at one end.

The campground is wonderful. A little above the beach, but a short walk to it. you can see and hear the waves. The owner, Sandy, has been living in Mexico for years - he's an old surfer guy. He had to close from 2009-2016 due to gang violence - they were fighting over territory. He says the locals have armed themselves and stopped the gangs.

It's only 100 pesos a night. Everything is new and clean. Hot showers, nice hangout area. He uses sheep to keep the place mowed. Lovely breeze and no bugs.

Two other campers here: a guy from Australia, Matt, and a couple from Anacortes, Luna and Lee. They are a retired couple who are studying Chinese ~~Chi~~ Chi Gong (?) medicine. Everyone has dogs except us.

Tried to buy cabbage for our fish tacos but the heads were enormous - almost 3 kilos!

Thurs Jan 10

67° at 8 am, blue sky. Sat and enjoyed the ocean view for a while before packing up. On the way out we stopped to see Lee + Luna's van for possible ideas. We like our setup better.

Gassed up in La Placita and hit the road about 10. Stopped in La Ticla, a tiny town about 7 miles south, to check out the surf scene. Dozens of '20-somethings, including gorgeous --- babes, riding the waves and hanging out under the palapas. Looks like heaven for young surfers. The Nahuatl people live here and tourism helps their economy. The estuary here was teeming with white ibis, stilts, tri-colored herons, and egrets.

Earlier on this trip we saw banana trees with large blue plastic bags over the banana bunches. Google says this protects the fruit from certain pests and from cool nights, and the fruit ripens faster.

The next stop was Maruata, a stunningly beautiful cluster of beaches and rock formations, including a fingerlike one called the finger of God. We had coconut shrimp in a tiny restaurant under a palapa. It was amazing! Huge shrimp thickly coated with coconut shreds and fried. Came with a small pile of fried potatoes and some vegetables. We barely ate half and took the rest for dinner. 170 pesos each (almost \$10) but so worth it.

I drove all day because I thought the road might be scary, but it never got too narrow or exposed. I enjoyed going slowly - we probably averaged 30-35 mph - and even the frequent stops give a chance to really look at the little towns. So many enticing roads going off toward the beach, most of them paved w/ cobbles or cement.

The coast along here is absolutely stunning. Miles of golden sand, little or no development, and rocky headlands and outcroppings like in Oregon or California. Turquoise water.

Playa El Aguila, near Playa Azul 37

Saw an iguana about a foot long walking down the side of the road, and another one dead on the road. Saw at least three dead dogs, hit by cars. Many people really fly on these narrow, windy roads!

Arrived at Playa El Aguila about 4 pm. It's a nice place run by a well-to-do Mexican couple who live in Lazaro Cardenas, about 30 min SE. There's a pool, fancy bathrooms, a big palapa with comfy chairs, and a nice beach. Eduardo & Cintia speak good English. It was interesting talking to them about Mexico's new president. They didn't vote for him because he's too "left" (i.e., socialist).

An American woman, 8 months' pregnant by her Guatemalan husband, was driving to Guatemala with her brother to be with said husband (who doesn't yet have a US visa). She is covered in tattoos. She is 30 and he is 25. He doesn't speak any English. I wonder what his family thinks of her... She's planning to have the baby in Guatemala. She speaks perfect Spanish and it was fun to have a conversation in Spanish with all four of us.

77° at 8 pm, only a few mosquitoes. Saw the southern cross constellation in the middle of the night! Cricket serenade. No dogs at this campground is a nice break from begging and poop and fleas.

Friday Jan 11

67° at 7:30 am. The humidity makes everything feel sticky, including sheets and pillowcases. I haven't really minded it. Said goodbye to Tobin and Sarah (the brother and sister from LA).

Chatted briefly with one of the workers who wanted to practice his English. He told me the storms here are in the spring. On the road at 10 am. The road out is very overgrown and our van barely fit without being scraped by branches.

Many papaya groves again today. Stopped at Walmart in Lazaro Cardenas to buy Grant a new camp chair to replace the one that broke, and get a few groceries. Prices seemed high. \$25 for the chair! Lots of bumpy roads.

Sometimes we can't decide whether to take a toll road or a free road, so we coined a motto: "When in doubt, pay out." Some free roads are fine, but if you don't know, it's better not to chance it.

Roadside stands here sell papaya, coconut, pineapple, bags of sea salt, and lobsters! Vendors hold the lobsters by their tails as people drive by.

Clouds of blue flowers on dense patches of morning glory smothering trees and shrubs.

Saw a truck with a dozen policemen in it pull over two young guys on a motorcycle. They weren't speeding, so who knows why. Looked intimidating.

Drove into the little town of Troncones, north of Ixtapa, to see the supposedly beautiful beach, but it didn't wow us. Picnic lunch in the shade of a building with the doors open for a breeze.

Highway zoovaries - from wide & smooth to narrow and bumpy. Yesterday we saw two girls collecting donations along a quiet stretch of road. They had a string with flags tied to it, stretched across the road, and were lifting it up and down to get people to stop. It gave us a bit of a scare before we figured out what they were doing.

Arrived in Zihuatenejo about 1 pm. En route we stopped at a viewpoint to see Ixtapa, an all-inclusive resort area of many tall hotels on the beach. Zihua is nearby and much quieter but still touristy. We found free parking right by the main beach. Walked through the little downtown. Quaint, shady cobbled streets, fishermen selling their

catch, lots of trinket vendors and restaurant touts. Also walked the nice little malecon to another beach but it was very hot - 86° in the shade and sweltering in the sun.

Drove 11 km off highway 200 to check out Barra de Potosí, about 15 miles south of Zihua. Supposed to have an estuary with great birds. It was too gringified for us, too many restaurants blocking all the beach views and vying for our business. When we did get a view of the river mouth we didn't see too many birds.

Went to "Our House," the campground on overlander, but they wanted \$20 U.S. to park in a back corner away from the beach, plus it was very windy. Google tried to take us out on a dirt road, but it didn't feel right so we turned around and found another road that was paved.

We continued along the coast to Casa Rayo del Sol in La Barrita, north of El Cayacal, and about an hour SE of Zihua. Along the way we saw a lot of armed checkpoints, but none of them stopped anyone.

We LOVE this place. The owner, Mark, is Canadian. His wife isn't here right now, but his mom, Sue, spends

the winters here and helps out. Our site is right on the beach with a shade palapa, table and chairs, hammock, clothesline, electricity. There's a nice bathroom and access to a washing machine. 250 pesos. The grounds are impeccable, with cobbled paths and lots of trees.

I walked down the beach to the tiny fishing town with rows of palapa restaurants. Lots of locals swimming and fishing. Talked to two guys who were catching bait fish for fishing tonight. Everyone seemed friendly and happy.

Nice wind all afternoon kept us cool, and has died down to a perfect breeze after a glowing red sunset. Bean and cheese quesadillas for dinner. 78° at 9 pm. Nice & dark here, crescent moon. No dogs at this campground!

I love this place so much that I want to stay an extra night.

Saturday Jan. 12

73° at 7:30 am. Saw the southern cross early this morning, a beautiful constellation. Sat and drank coffee and watched the rising sun gild the wavetops gold. A light breeze made it feel almost cool.

Felix, who works at the restaurant

next door is a "sobadero," which literally means a kneader, but is a form of deep tissue massage. He learned it from his father. He found a lot of knots, and it was often painful, but afterward all my kinks were gone except one spot on the right side of my neck that he just couldn't break up. It would probably take another session or two. 200 pesos for an hour, about \$10.

Felix is super nice, and introduced me to his beautiful children, Osvaldo (12) and Evelin (8). He was happy that I spoke Spanish because he says he loves to talk.

The caretaker here is Dimas. I gave him Grant's broken chair, which he says he can fix.

Cold shower, more laundry, lots of van chores, lunch. It got hot in the sun, 88°, but is quite pleasant in the shade.

People fishing and families swimming all day long. The bright light hurts my eyes even with sunglasses in the shade. Can't imagine how they can be out in the sun on the bright water with no hat or sunglasses for hours. They look like they are having so much fun.

I tried going in the water but I'm not much of a water person. The temperature is perfect but the waves are dense with sand. There's a reef offshore that breaks the big waves.

(La Barrita means the little bar or reef.) Mark says the storms took a lot of the sand off the beach this year and his beach stairs are now a few feet in the air, supplemented by a ladder.

The breeze picks up as the day gets hotter.

About 5 pm Matt, the Australian guy from Rancho Bugawillas, pulled in. He joined us for dinner at the restaurant next door. Grant and I had breaded fish with rice. It was very good but took an hour to prepare.

83° at 7:30 pm. The beach here is beautiful but short, so you can't walk far.

Sunday Jan 13

72° at 7:30, on the road 8:30. More mosquitoes last night, warmer, and the table was very wet this morning.

The Mexican government is training village "auto defense" units to fight against organized crime that was preying on them. We saw one unit today behind sandbags, no uniforms. A sign said "Fighting for your security." Apparently this program

is making Mexico safer.

Today's roadside vendors were selling jars filled with multi-colored round & square sweets of some kind, wicker cha chkas, and many kinds of fruit, including mango, papaya, and a durian-like fruit called guanabano.

We ate a papaya today and it was good. I always forget that they aren't a sweet fruit.

A speed limit sign said 110 kph (about 70 mph). We sped up and suddenly there was an unmarked tope in the middle of the highway! Grant had to slam on the brakes to avoid breaking an axle.

Today's roads were good, though often quite narrow with no shoulder, and dense vegetation on either side. It's nerve wracking to pass busses and big trucks. I have no idea how they pass each other. Many topes today, and many of them unmarked.

Overcast for a while this morning and clear blue sky this afternoon.

We took the bypass road around Acapulco and never saw even a glimpse of it.

Arrived at La Tortugueta campground at 3 pm. Google maps'

driving time estimate was surprisingly accurate. El Coral campground down the road was cheaper but was basically just the parking lot of a restaurant. La Tortugueta is 150 pesos per person. The Swiss owner is on vacation after the busy holiday rush, and young, tattooed, Spanish-speaking Carlos is in charge. We're the only campers here. The parking area is in a compound with a pool, big palapa, and picnic tables. The beach is just outside the gate. Saw gray(?) whales swimming by in the distance. Carlos says sea turtles come up to lay their eggs every night. This place is a registered hatchery. They collect the eggs and bury them in a fenced area where local dogs, pigs, and people can't dig them up.

We are just south of Copala, and about two ^{hours} south (SE) of Acapulco. ¹⁰⁰ miles

There's a large black and white great dane-like dog here but he's mellow. The beach here is a long stretch of empty sand, but too steep to walk on. We sat in chairs under a quarter moon for about an hour, but no turtles. We'll look for tracks in the morning. Lovely cool breeze on the beach, but it does not reach the campground, alas.

Soaked in the cool pool before going to bed and it felt great. Plugged our van into shore power, put up a couple mosquito nets, and we slept great.

Monday Jan 14

... Lots of orioles squawking in the coconut palm trees. Carlos was just coming back from the beach, where he had dug up the eggs from three turtle nests, laid sometime in the night or early this morning. They are pliable, and look like small ping pong balls. He said these were Galapagos turtle eggs. We watched him bury the eggs in holes about armpit deep, then label each with the date, number of eggs, and estimated hatch date. The nests contained 51, 108, & 116 eggs. Carlos is from Mexicali, has a degree in biology from Mexico City, and has worked at several other turtle hatcheries. He says a big part of their work is education - teaching people not only about turtles, but about protecting the environment.

Parque Ntl.
La Chacahua

Cerro Hermoso, Oaxaca

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We parked just down the road and walked to the edge of a lake where we saw many Jacana, a new species for us. Mostly immatures, with brown bodies, yellow beaks, and long toes for walking on soft ground and lily pads. The adults look like black and white shorebirds but have golden wing undersides.

Also saw a green heron and ^{acompan} _{meothes.} Also some kind of rail or crane. The red face of a crested caracara looked rose pink in the morning sun.

On the road at 8:40. New roadside items for sale today included coconut oil.

Men working in the hot sun clearing fence lines with machetes and no gloves.

The other day Grant saw a very tan gringo who looked like he'd lived down here for a while, and said he looked like gringo jerky.

Today he said, what do you call a mirador (viewpoint) where they serve beer?
A birador.

We often come up with new names for topes, the ubiquitous speed bumps that vary in size, shape, how unmarked they are, and how easily they could break an axle or give you whiplash. There are "fopes," which are markings on the road without an actual bump (faux topes);

"ropes", which are actual ropes laid across the road; "stopes," a tope with a stop sign; "wopes," (whoa, that was a big one!), and the list goes on.

87° at noon. We pulled under a tree by the road to make lunch in the shade and I got bitten by tiny ants. Their bites really hurt but don't last.

We stopped in a town that had cell signal to check email. The women in the stall in front of us had nappy hair and I remembered that there are black Mexicans who live on this part of the coast, descendants of slaves.

Today's roads were narrow, windy, a bumpy. We climbed as high as 1600 feet or so, up into flat, grassy, agricultural land, through several good-size towns. Large, spreading trees reminded us of photos we've seen of the Serengeti.

Arrived in Parque Nacional La Chacahua about 3 pm. In the little town of El Zapotalito we were flagged down by a guy wearing an official park hat and shirt who wanted to give us information about the park. He showed us a map with prices. 800 pesos (\$40) for two hours.

Cerro Hermoso, Parque Atl. La Chacahua 49

He seemed very nice, and knowledgeable. Then we drove to El Tacuate de Luz in Cerro Hermoso, on the nearby beach.

Luz, with long fingernails adorned with little jewels, greeted me with a hug - a first for Mexico. You park your car under a palapa. If you eat at her restaurant camping is free. Bathrooms are bucket flush and they are clean.

It's another gorgeous stretch of golden sandy beach with palapas. The sea breeze is the perfect antidote to the heat.

A fisherman caught a sea turtle in a net and instead of releasing it he gave it to Luz, who has it in a bucket and says she is going to keep it as a pet. I believe this is illegal, and it makes me sad.

Luz is a retired preschool teacher with four kids. She says the government put in the rock breakwater along the river mouth and it changed the lagoon here and many restaurants closed.

Basically the river changed course and is no longer near the town.

I told Luz we wanted a boat trip and she invited a local guy over to give us prices. He didn't seem as knowledgeable so we said we'd go with the other guy. This was all very awkward...

This place is like being in a Mexico from an older time. It feels very remote and simple. Luz says very few foreigners come here.

Our dinners of shrimp soup and fish fillets were underwhelming, but if you buy dinner you camp for free. (Oops, I already said that.) It's quite warm under the palapa where we parked, with mosquitoes, so we sat on the beach with the nice breeze. So lovely. I will miss the sound of the surf.

Warm in the van but we don't see a place to plug in our fan. We've decided not to go on a boat ride in the morning after all. We're eager to get on our way to San Cristobal. The smell of a wood fire nearby, people sleeping in hammocks.

It was stifling hot in the van but we eventually fell asleep. You don't think you can stand it but you don't have a choice and you tell yourself to tough it out. It finally cooled off and felt great. No internet or wifi here.

Tues Jan 15

We got up at 6:30, at first light. Delightfully cool, soft air. On the road at 6:50. 73° at 7:30.