

# Dreaming in Mexican

*A lazy cat napping on the sofa in the galería*

*A stray dog approaching, head down, tail swaying in an anticipated touch*

*The rooster that knows not the hands of the clock*

*The unexpected play of dolphins breaking the skin of the sea*

*This is the melody of Mexican life*

-Wanda St.Hilaire/*Of Love, Life and Journeys*

It begins in September. I love Calgary in the fall, but ever since a stupendous one-month September sojourn to Oaxaca, Mexico, five years ago, as soon as the Labor Day weekend ends, I begin to yearn.

Deeply yearn.

I chose Oaxaca for a writing vacation because of the rich history, the cuisine, the culture and indigenous diversity. My first day was an entrance into a holiday dreamscape and the following month, each day delivered a gift, like a little package tied in a bright bow.

But aside from my fall dreams of colonial, old world Mexico, when winter envelops my life like a grey blanket, I begin to plot, fantasize about, and visualize my beloved Vallarta.

Mexican life is a vast collection of small things that make life worth living. What you value most is what makes life rich and beautiful. Mexico, for me, embodies a sumptuous feast of what I hold dear.

## Freedom ...

Some visitors to Mexico find the lack of structure too disorienting because of what they are used to. I find it liberating. We don't realize the constant stress we live under north of the border because we're too busy to consider the implications and we've essentially mal-adapted to it.

Example: we have multitudes of cameras to catch us speeding and we can be fined if we put lipstick on at a red light or eat a sandwich in our cars. Every week we lose a bit of liberty.



Mexico, for now, is a free country - the way we once were. I can enjoy a drink in a park there without being arrested and I can park a car without worrying about bi-law nincompoops. I could even park a donkey on my doorstep!

## Slow living ...

It always amazes me that wandering about Vallarta can bring all kinds of delicious detours. There is not a lot of rushing or overfilled agendas and rather a lot of impromptu happenstances.

Rather than sprinting through days, weeks and months, life is a slow tapestry of small, unexpected and unplanned pleasures woven together.

## Sensual living ...

While we rummage through the aisles at Safeway trying to find a piece of fruit that doesn't taste like plastic, the harvest is abundant with heaps of sweet mangoes, plump papayas and ruby-red watermelons in the outdoor markets of Mexico. Fresh salsas and juices and handmade food abound everywhere.

Watching stunning sunsets of varying hues sink into the sea, being hypnotized by the lull of crashing waves, and evenings of stargazing are basic pleasures that clear the monkey mind of extraneous noise.

Life is a banquet with meandering mariachis and sand sculptors, cultural events and street concerts, fireworks and artisans. The senses are fed a constant flow of sensual stimuli.

## Simplicity ...

Have you ever tried to simplify your life in the rat race of a typical North American city? I've downsized and simplified and still, I find life too "messy."

Life in Vallarta feels sublimely simple and uncomplicated with neighborhood markets, small indie shops, walking for exercise (instead of packing up, layering up, and warming up the car to go to a gym in -20!), and a light schedule open for spontaneity.

## Real life ...

In all of my adulthood, I've never spent the quality of time with my mum as I did when we both spent winter in Vallarta two years ago—she with her partner and me in the beautiful hilltop Casa Maraya. Two *amigas*, we flogged my books at the Sunday market in La Cruz together, tested out tasty food at new cafés and restaurants and hopped rickety-rack buses to San Sebastian and Rincon de Guayabitos.

Whether you have a lot or a little, you can always find something of value to do in Vallarta. Just walking the Malecón at night is an event.

In Mexico, children play with sticks in the sand, content without an iPhone / iPod / iPad or big screen TV. Families gather to celebrate everything, traditions are upheld in loud, living color, and long lunches are spent with friends. There is a sense of community and it's a place where waiters and café owners remember you after one visit. Sometimes you wanna go where everybody knows your name.

## Nature ...

There's something truly decadent and wildly delightful about living in sunshine and tropical nature in the middle of winter when you're from the frigid prairies. No matter how long I've lived in it, I never acclimatize to snow and ice.

As we begin to bundle up in coats, boots, scarves, and gloves, the humid storms have disappeared and the sun blooms in Vallarta with fresh temperatures and the beginning of a long, blue-sky season.

Walking ocean side day by day is, without a doubt, grounding food for the soul. Spotting a whale glide past with intermittent blows or catching a pair of playful dolphins brings a burst of indescribable joy.

Does life get any better than when your virtual office is a friendly outdoor café overlooking the ocean under a cloudless sky?

Mexico is not a masculine taskmaster who motivates with heavy-handed willpower. She is feminine. She gently inspires. She coaxes you to smile, to dance, to laugh, to play, to create, and to love.

Now, well into the harsh grey of an Albertan winter, I pine. Each day as I awaken, I send a fervent wish that I once again make it back to the place where my heart sings a contented lullaby.

BIO

*Calgary author Wanda St.Hilaire has a penchant and passion for all things Latin and believes life is too short not to do what you love, where you love. She spends time writing in Mexico for inspiration and to escape the frozen landscapes of Alberta.*

*Her first travel memoir, The Cuban Chronicles, is an honest, raw, and sometimes humorous account of the pleasures and perils of a single, untamed woman wandering Cuba alone and unchaperoned. www.wandasthilaire.com Books to Incite Impassioned Odysseys Through Life www.lifebyheart.wandasthilaire.com If You're Not Living on the Edge, You're Taking Up Too Much Space!*