

## Las Villas at Estrella del Mar - Mazatlan, Mexico

*Next to the best golf course in Mazatlan and looking out an empty, pristine beach, this small hotel in a grand residential project is a private-feeling haven at a great price.*



Estrella del Mar means two things to most people in Mazatlan: a great golf course and the mansions that surround it. With the opening of Las Villas hotel, however, now you can get a taste of this prime spot without owning a house or condo there. It only has 71 rooms, but here's a sampling of what's around: 816 acres of land, 3.5 uninterrupted miles of beach, a \$3 million water treatment plant on site, grounds maintained by 80 gardeners, and a PGA championship course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

This resort is a long way from the Golden Zone of Mazatlan, but ironically it's the closest major hotel to the airport. Naturally the biggest draws are the golf course and beach, but there is also a good-sized pool complex adjoining the hotel, a volleyball net, tennis courts, a good spa with reasonable prices, and a beauty salon. The fitness center is stocked with new equipment. It has a nice ocean view and its locker rooms have a steam room and sauna. A library reading room is a nice touch if you who want a quiet place to curl up with a book.



Staffers can set up horseback riding on the beach and you'll probably have it all to yourself. Because this is a protected zone, no jet skis, ATVs, or vendors are allowed on the beach, making this as close to a private beach as you can get in Mexico. Kids will love the sea turtle center, which raises baby sea turtles from the egg stage to keep them from away from predators and releases them into the water when they're old enough to fend for themselves.

There are a few quirks to deal with here, the main one being the food and beverage situation. In the hotel itself on weekdays, only breakfast and lunch are served: the former inside in the courtyard, the latter either there

or at the casual poolside cafe with indoor and outdoor seating. The main dinner restaurant and bar are only open on weekends though, which means schlepping over to the golf course restaurant for dinner or even a cocktail. Since the clubhouse is at the opposite end of the grounds, that means riding a sizable distance in a hotel van.



Fortunately it's worth the trip. La Paloma Restaurant is an expansive indoor and outdoor space under a grand palapa, with direct views to the sea. The menu spans a wide variety, from burgers and bar snacks to Mexican dinners and local seafood. A separate bar area is continually showing current sporting events. Bilingual service is prompt and friendly.

Rooms are not as large as those at **Pueblo Bonito** or as stylish as the ones at **Casa Lucila**, but they're a terrific value. All have marble floors, beds with quality mattresses and linens, Kohler fixtures, Hunter ceiling fans, and frosty remote-controlled air conditioning. Attractive baths feature granite double vanities, separate shower stalls, and WCs with a door. There's a good array of Teva toiletries and a smoky glass panel with decorative metal elements between the tub and bedroom allows some



natural light into the bath in rooms that aren't shower-only. There are a few elements putting Las Villas below 5-star level, like older TVs instead of flat-screens, shallow bathtubs, and theft-proof hangars that can't be removed and hung elsewhere. Plus apart from a single Talavera tissue box, there are no reminders you are in Mexico—a common issue in Mazatlan it seems. All the other touches make up for these shortfalls—including complimentary Wi-Fi, a wet bar with fridge, and a coffee maker.

All rooms have a balcony, but the Garden View rooms don't face the ocean and should be booked only if all others are full. The two presidential suites are a real bargain, coming in under \$300 a night.



This is not the best bet for those who want to stroll the historic center of Mazatlan or be close to nightlife in the Golden Zone, but for golfers and those who love to have a beautiful beach to themselves, Las Villas at Estrella del Mar will be a delight.

Web Address: <http://www.mazatlanhotellasvillas.com/>

Total Number of Rooms: 71

Published rates: \$117 to \$295

Review and photos by **Timothy Scott**