

An aerial photograph of a hot air balloon festival. Numerous colorful balloons in various shapes and patterns (including stripes, solids, and logos) are floating over a city and a large green forest. The scene is captured from a high angle, looking down on the landscape.

**JULY/AUGUST 2017**

# travelworld

**INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE**

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# *Loreto: Mexico's Hidden Gem*

*By Kaila Yu*



*Kayaking in Loreto*

*Life is tranquil in Loreto*



Even our speedy boat ride to our snorkeling destination is somehow unhurried. Our guide and captain stops several times along the way to point out exotic birds such as the Blue-footed Booby birds and pelicans diving for their lunch. Midway through the trip, we stop at a private beach to picnic and to explore the sea life teeming in the rocks and to eat guacamole while feeling the sand between our toes.

The gentle lapping of the waves interrupted by the noisy calls of birds dancing in the sky, the baking heat of the Baja sun and the laughter of friends. This is truly Island life.

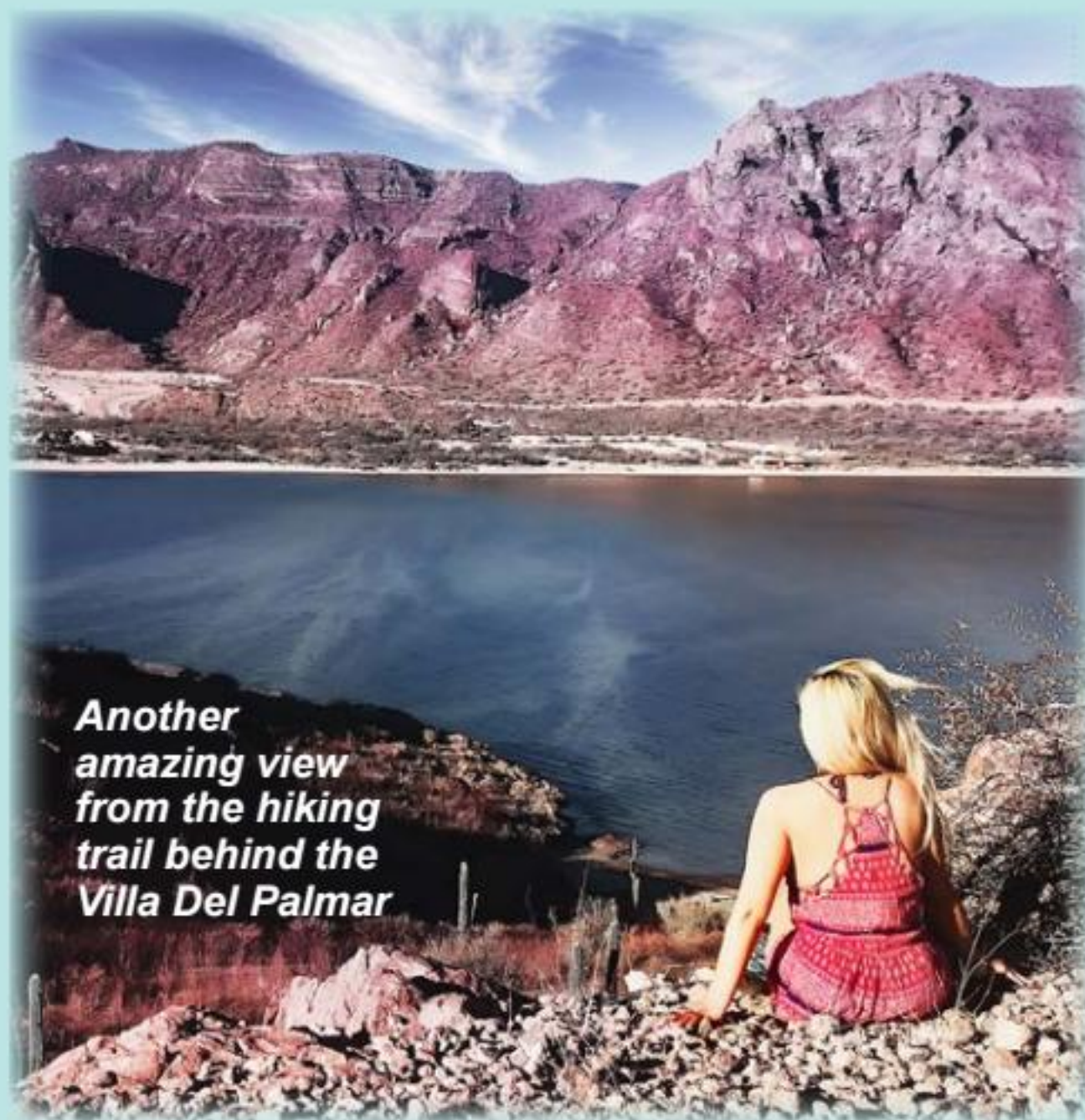
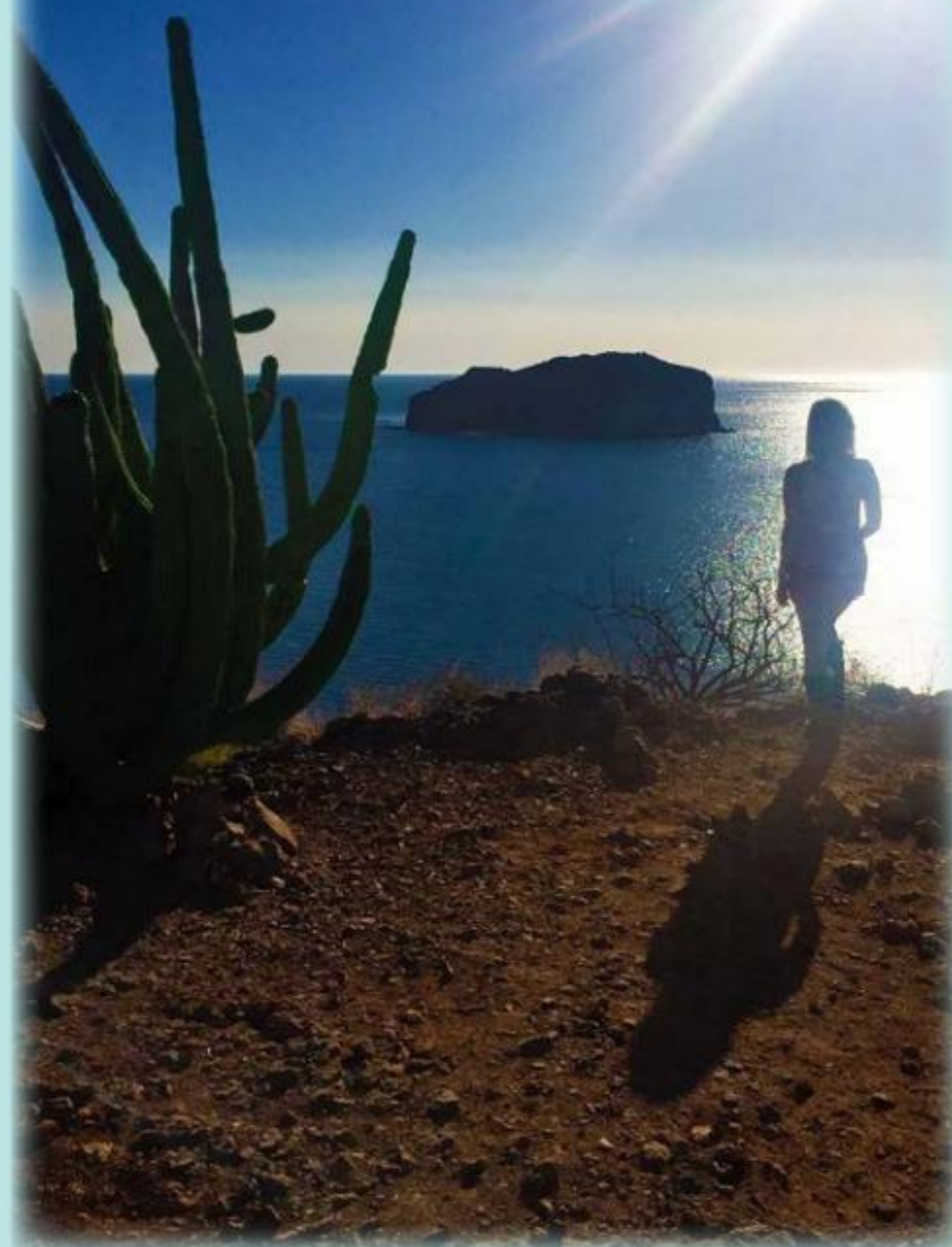
Loreto is also known as the Galapagos of North America. Jacques Cousteau called it the "Aquarium of the World." I'm surprised that Loreto is still mostly undiscovered by tourists it should be a mecca for any active wildlife enthusiast.

When we finally arrive at our snorkeling destination our party is completely free to explore the ocean life to our heart's desire without any interruption from other sightseers. We see thousands of colored fish, sea urchins, adorable puffer fish and more. We are more than satisfied.

After snorkeling, we explore the tiny city center of Loreto. The streets are mostly deserted save for the few shops that seem as if they are open just for us. Life here is relaxed, happy-go-lucky and unrestrained. We have an hour to explore the area but we finish early, there's not too much to see. Loreto is not meant for a city girl, it's a haven for the active adventurer. Its highlights are its wildlife, the ocean and the surrounding mountain range of Sierra de la Giganta.

Things are quickly changing in Loreto. We stayed at the Villa del Palmar, a lush all-inclusive resort. The Villa del Palmar is not only a hotel, it's also a time share and it boasts a world class golf course, Danzante Bay Golf Course, with some of the most stunning views in golf anywhere in the world. The golf course is currently open for business with 11 holes completed. Once all 18 holes are completed the resort expects an influx of golfing enthusiasts. In fact the resort group is so confident about the popularity of the course that they are developing an entire community of homes right next to the course. Loreto has the ambitions of becoming a major tourism destination.

*Amazing view from the hiking trail behind the Villa Del Palmar*



*Another amazing view from the hiking trail behind the Villa Del Palmar*



***Loreto is an ideal  
destination for bird  
watchers***



***Pelican catching it's  
morning breakfast***





**C**urrently the population of Loreto is approximately 15,000 people but it's expected to balloon to 100,000 in the next 20 years. This will undoubtedly transform the entire ambiance of the island as a quiet and secluded getaway. I'm glad that I've had the opportunity to visit the city in advance of all these changes.

We visited Loreto in June. It's a popular destination at this time for sports fishers and expert scuba divers. Here experienced and novice fisherman alike can look forward to catching Striped Marlin, Sailfish, Whale sharks, Dorado, Yellowtail and more. The local hotels welcome you to bring back your daily catch and will happily prepare your fish for your next meal.

Scuba divers have more than 50 diving sites from which to choose their next adventure. They can select from the 5 islands nearby: Coronado, Carmen, Danzantes, Montserrat and Catalana. Over 900 types of fish and 2000 species of marine life abound in these 206 acres of ocean and ready for viewing if you've got your scuba license.

We talk about returning in the winter months of January or February during whale watching season. During this time, various species of whales travel over 5,500 kilometers to the Sea of Cortez in the protected Marine Island of Loreto Bay to give birth to their baby calves. We are told that the whales often swim so close to the boats that wildlife lovers are able to gently pet them as they frolic in the salty water.

The next day, we start the morning with a hike behind the resort, before the afternoon heat penetrates the earth. It's a workout walking up the hills of the Sierra de la Giganta and our passionate guide Carlos excitedly stops to teach us about the unique flora and fauna of the region. He later quizzes us on which plants would be our saviors if we were lost in the unforgiving desert-like environment. We learn which cacti will provide the most hydration and which plants act as effective insect repellants.

At the top of the well-worn hiking trail we are rewarded with gorgeous views of the Sea of Cortez. We stop to catch our breath and pull out our cameras.

After the hike, we are treated to a kayaking trip around the shoreline, discovering secluded coves and ancient cave paintings along the way. Our trip is delayed when two of the less coordinated members of our party have to be towed away by a boat. Despite all their best efforts, they've only been able to kayak around in circles. It's a great moment of levity and even though our trip has been delayed quite a bit, no one minds.

Life in Loreto is tranquil and easy. We have absorbed the happy go lucky attitude of the locals and feel like we have all the time in the world.

**For more hotels and tours in this area contact the tourism board: Discover Baja California**  
**[www.discoverbajacalifornia.com](http://www.discoverbajacalifornia.com) Phone. (664) 682-3367**

**View from the  
Danzante Bay  
Golf Course**

