

Manzanillo

by Lynne Bairstow

Manzanillo has long been known as a resort town with wide, curving beaches, legendary sportfishing, and a celebrated wealth of dive sites. Golf is also an attraction here, with two popular courses in the area.

One reason for Manzanillo's popularity could be its enticing tropical geography—with vast groves of tall palms, abundant mango trees, and successive coves graced with smooth sand beaches. To the north, mountains blanketed with palms rise alongside the shoreline. And the weather is near perfect, with balmy temperatures and year-round sea breezes. Even the approach by plane into Manzanillo showcases the promise—you fly in over the beach and golf course. Once on the ground, you exit the airport through a palm grove.

Manzanillo is a dichotomous place—it is Mexico's busiest commercial seaport and a tranquil town of multicolor houses cascading down the hillsides to meet the central commercial area of simple seafood restaurants, shell shops, and salsa clubs. The activity in Manzanillo divides neatly into two zones: the downtown commercial port and the luxury Santiago Peninsula resort zone to the north. The busy harbor and rail connections to Mexico's interior dominate the downtown. The town's waterfront *zócalo* provides a glimpse into local life. The exclusive Santiago Peninsula, home to the resorts and golf course, separates Manzanillo's two golden sand bays.

1 Manzanillo Essentials

256km (160 miles) SE of Puerto Vallarta; 267km (167 miles) SW of Guadalajara; 64km (40 miles) SE of Barra de Navidad

ORIENTATION

GETTING THERE & DEPARTING

By Plane **Alaska Airlines** (☎ 800/426-0333 in the U.S., or 314/334-2211) offers service from Los Angeles; **America West** (☎ 800/235-9292 in the U.S.) flies from Phoenix; and **Aero California** (☎ 800/237-6225 in the U.S. and Canada, or 314/334-1414) has

flights from Los Angeles. Ask a travel agent about the numerous **charters** from the States in the winter.

The **Playa de Oro International Airport** is 40km (25 miles; 45 min.) northwest of town. *Colectivo* (minivan) airport service is available from the airport; hotels arrange returns. Make reservations for return trips 1 day in advance. The *colectivo* fare is based on zones and runs \$8 to \$10 for most hotels. Private taxi service between the airport and downtown area is around \$25. **Budget** (☎ 800/527-0700 in the U.S., or 314/333-1445) and **AutoRentas** (☎ 314/333-2580) run airport counters during flight arrivals; they will also deliver a car to your hotel. Daily rates run \$58 to \$78. You need a car only if you plan to explore surrounding cities and the Costa Alegre beaches.

By Car **Coastal Highway 200** leads from Acapulco (south) and Puerto Vallarta (north). From Guadalajara, take Highway 54 through Colima into Manzanillo. Outside Colima you can switch to a toll road, which is faster but less scenic.

By Bus Buses run to Barra de Navidad (1½ hr. north), Puerto Vallarta (5 hr. north), Colima (1½ hr. east), and Guadalajara (4½ hr. north), with deluxe service and numerous daily departures. Manzanillo's **Central Camionera** (bus station) is about 12 long blocks east of town. If you follow Hidalgo east, the station will be on your right.

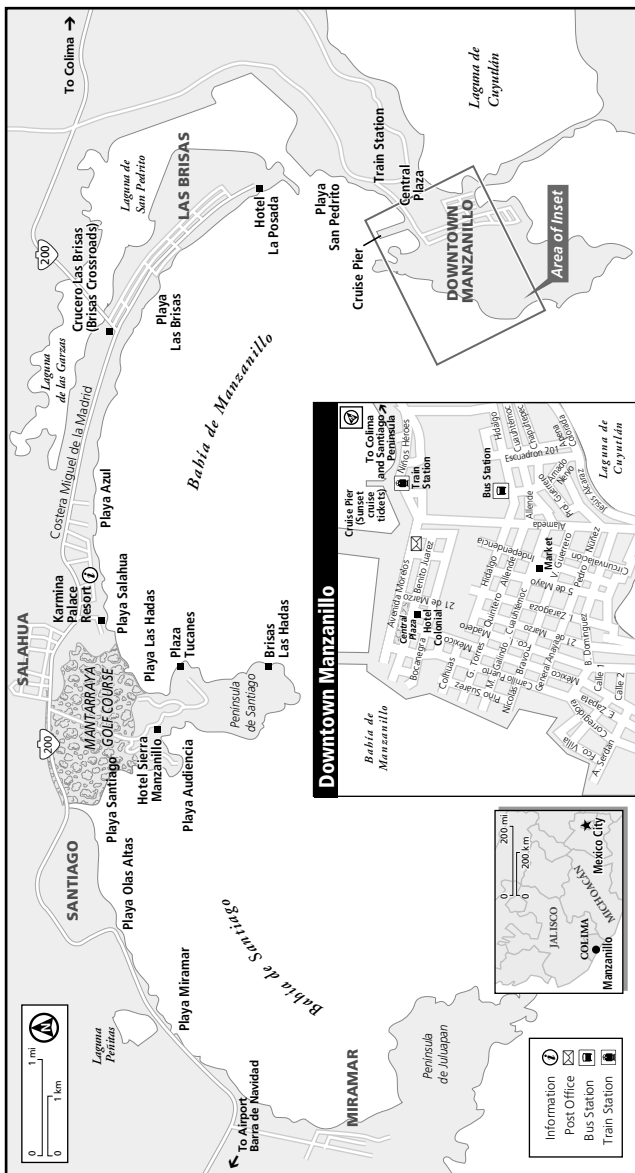
VISITOR INFORMATION

The **tourism office** (☎ 314/333-2277 or 314/333-2264; fax 314/333-2264) is on the Costera Miguel de la Madrid 4960, Km 8.5. It's open Monday through Thursday from 9am to 3pm and 5 to 7pm, Friday from 9am to 3pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm.

CITY LAYOUT

The town lies at one end of an 11km-long (7-mile) beach facing Manzanillo Bay and its commercial harbor. The beach has four sections—**Playa Las Brisas**, **Playa Azul**, **Playa Salahua**, and **Playa Las Hadas**. At the other end of the beaches is the high, rocky **Santiago Peninsula**. Santiago is 11km (7 miles) from downtown; it's the site of many beautiful homes, the best hotel in the area (Las Hadas), and the Mantarraya Golf Course. The peninsula juts out into the bay, separating Manzanillo Bay from Santiago Bay. Playa Las Hadas is on the south side of the peninsula, facing Manzanillo Bay, and **Playa Audiencia** is on the north side, facing Santiago Bay. The inland town of **Santiago** is opposite the turnoff to Las Hadas.

Manzanillo Area



Activity in downtown Manzanillo centers on the **central plaza**, or *zócalo*, officially known as the Jardín Alvaro Obregón. A railroad, shipyards, and a basketball court with constant pickup games separate it from the waterfront. The plaza has flowering trees, a fountain, twin kiosks, and a view of the bay. It is a staple of local life, where people congregate on park benches to swap gossip and throw handfuls of rice to the ever-present *palomas* (doves—really just pigeons). Large ships dock at the pier nearby. **Avenida México**, the street leading out from the plaza's central gazebo, is the town's principal commercial thoroughfare. This area is currently undergoing a government-funded renaissance, so look for new improvements.

Once you leave downtown, the highway (the **Costera Miguel de la Madrid**, or just Costera Madrid) runs through the neighborhoods of Las Brisas, Salahua, and Santiago to the **hotel zones** on the Santiago Peninsula and at Miramar. Shell shops, minimalls, and several restaurants are along the way.

There are two main lagoons and two bays. **Laguna de Cuyutlán**, almost behind the city, stretches south for miles, paralleling the coast. **Laguna de San Pedrito**, north of the city, parallels the Costera Miguel de la Madrid; it's behind Playa Las Brisas beach. (Both are good birding sites.) **Manzanillo Bay** encompasses the harbor, town, and beaches. The Santiago Peninsula separates it from the second bay, **Santiago**. Between downtown and the Santiago Peninsula, **Las Brisas** is a flat peninsula with a long stretch of golden sand, a lineup of inexpensive but run-down hotels, and a few good restaurants.

GETTING AROUND

By Taxi Taxis in Manzanillo are plentiful. Fares are fixed by zones; rates for trips within town and to more distant points should be posted at your hotel. Daily rates can be negotiated for longer drives outside the Manzanillo area.

By Bus Local buses (*camionetas*) run a circuit from downtown in front of the train station, along the Bay of Manzanillo, to the Santiago Peninsula and the Bay of Santiago to the north; the fare is 10¢. The ones marked LAS BRISAS go to the Las Brisas crossroads, to the Las Brisas Peninsula, and back to town; MIRAMAR, SANTIAGO, and SALAHUA buses go to outlying settlements along the bays and to most restaurants mentioned below. Buses marked LAS HADAS go to the Santiago Peninsula and pass the Las Hadas resort and the Sierra Manzanillo and Plaza Las Glorias hotels. This is an inexpensive way to see the coast as far as Santiago and to tour the Santiago Peninsula.

FAST FACTS: Manzanillo

American Express There is no local office for American Express in Manzanillo. However, a highly recommendable agency (and American Express's former representative) is **Bahías Gemelas Travel Agency**, Km 10 Costera Miguel de la Madrid (☎ 314/333-1000; fax 314/333-0649). It's open Monday through Friday from 10am to 2pm and 4 to 6pm, Saturday from 10am to 2pm.

Area Code The telephone area code is 314.

Bank Banamex, just off the plaza on Avenida México, downtown (☎ 314/332-0115), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 4pm.

Hospital Call the **Cruz Roja (Red Cross)** at ☎ 314/336-5770, or **General Hospital** at ☎ 314/332-1903.

Internet Access Digital Center, Blvd. Miguel de la Madrid 96-B (☎ 314/333-9191), is in the hotel zone, near the Hotel Marbella and Fiesta Americana hotel. It's \$2 per hour, with printers and copiers available. It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 8pm, Saturday from 9am to 2pm. They also have computer repair services available.

Police Both the general police and Tourism Police are available by calling ☎ 314/332-1004.

Post Office The *correo*, Dr. Miguel Galindo 30, opposite Farmacia de Guadalajara, downtown (☎ 314/332-0022), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 2pm.

ACTIVITIES ON & OFF THE BEACH

Activities in Manzanillo revolve around its golden sand beaches, which frequently accumulate a film of black mineral residue from nearby rivers. Most of the resort hotels are completely self-contained. Manzanillo's public beaches provide an opportunity to see more local color and scenery. They are the daytime playground for those staying at places off the beach or without pools.

BEACHES **Playa Audiencia**, on the Santiago Peninsula, offers the best swimming as well as snorkeling, but **Playa San Pedrito**, shallow for a long way out, is the most popular beach for its proximity to downtown. **Playa Las Brisas** offers an optimal combination of location and good swimming. **Playa Miramar**, on the Bahía

de Santiago past the Santiago Peninsula, is popular with body-surfers, windsurfers, and boogie boarders. It's accessible by local bus from town. The major part of **Playa Azul** drops off sharply but is noted for its wide stretch of golden sand.

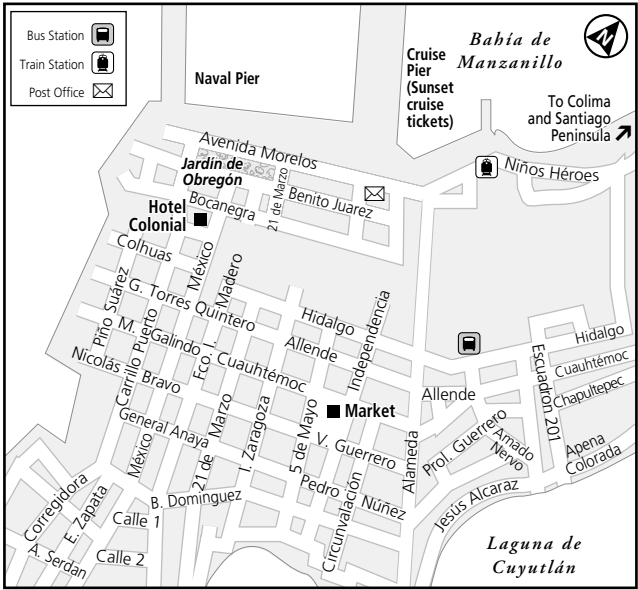
BIRDING Several lagoons along the coast offer good birding. As you go from Manzanillo past Las Brisas to Santiago, you'll pass **Laguna de Las Garzas (Lagoon of the Herons)**, also known as Laguna de San Pedrito, where you can see many white pelicans and huge herons fishing in the water. They nest here in December and January. Directly behind downtown is the **Laguna de Cuyutlán** (follow the signs to Cuyutlán), where you'll usually find birds in abundance; species vary between summer and winter.

DIVING Underworld Scuba ★★ (☎/fax 314/333-0642; cell 314/358-0327; www.gomanzanillo.com), owned by longtime resident and local diving expert Susan Dearing, conducts highly professional scuba expeditions and classes. Susan's warm enthusiasm and intimate knowledge of the area make this one of the top dive outfitters in Mexico. Many locations are so close to shore there's no need for a boat. Close-in dives include the jetty with coral growing on the rocks at 14m (45 ft.), and a nearby sunken frigate downed in 1959 at 8m (28 ft.). Divers can see abundant sea life, including coral reefs, seahorses, giant puffer fish, and moray eels. A dive requiring a boat costs \$60 per person for one tank (with a three-person minimum), or \$70 for two tanks (\$10 discount if you have your own gear). You can also rent weights and a tank for beach dives for \$10. A three-stop snorkel trip is \$35. Guides are certified divemasters, and the shop runs intensive certification classes (PADI, YMCA, and CMAS). The owner offers a 10% discount on your certification when you mention Frommer's. MasterCard and Visa are accepted.

ESCORTED TOURS Because Manzanillo is so spread out, you might consider a city tour. Reputable options include **Hectours** (☎ 314/333-1707) and **Bahías Gemelas Travel Agency** (☎ 314/333-1000; fax 314/333-0649). Schedules are flexible; a half-day tour is around \$25. Other tours include the daylong Colima Colonial Tour (\$67), which stops at a sugar-cane plantation, the Archaeological Museum, and principal colonial buildings, and passes the active volcano. Offerings change regularly, so ask about new tours.

FISHING Manzanillo is famous for its fishing—particularly sailfish, which is abundant year-round, as is marlin. Winter is best for dolphin fish and dorado (mahi-mahi); in summer, wahoo and rooster

Downtown Manzanillo



fish are in greater supply. The international sailfish competition is held around the November 20 Revolution Day holiday, and the national sailfish competition is in February. You can arrange fishing through travel agencies or directly at the fishermen's cooperative (☎ 314/332-1031), located downtown where the fishing boats moor. Call from 7am to 7pm. A fishing boat is approximately \$40 to \$65 per hour, with most trips lasting about 5 hours.

GOLF The 18-hole **La Mantarraya Golf Course** (☎ 314/331-0101) is open to nonguests as well as guests of Las Hadas. At one time, La Mantarraya was among the top 100 courses in the world, but newer entries have passed it. Still, the compact, challenging 18-hole course designed by Roy and Pete Dye is a beauty, with banana trees, blooming bougainvillea, and coconut palms at every turn. A lush and verdant place (12 of the 18 holes are played over water), it remains a favorite among Mexico's 125 courses. When the course was under construction, workers dug up pre-Hispanic ceramic figurines, idols, and beads where the 14th hole is—believed to have been an important ancient burial site. Greens fees are \$122 for 18 holes, \$73 for 9 holes; cart rental costs \$50.

The fabulous 27-hole golf course associated with the **Grand Bay Hotel** in Barra de Navidad, an easy distance from Manzanillo, is also open to the public. The Robert Von Hagge design is long and lovely, with each hole amid rolling, tropical landscapes. It is wide open, with big fairways and big greens, and features plenty of water (2 lagoon holes, 13 lakeside holes, and 8 holes along the Pacific). The greens fees are \$166 for 18 holes, \$192 for 27 holes for hotel guests, \$216 and \$240, respectively, for nonguests, including a motorized cart. Barra is about a 1- to 1½-hour drive north of Manzanillo on Highway 200. (See “Activities On & Off the Beach” under “Barra de Navidad & Melaque,” in chapter 4.)

A MUSEUM The **Museum of Archaeology and History** (☎ 314/332-2256) is a small but impressive structure that houses exhibits depicting the region’s history, plus rotating displays of contemporary Mexican art. It’s on Avenida Niños Héroes at Avenida Teniente Azueta, on the road leading between the downtown and Las Brisas areas. Every Friday evening, the museum hosts free cultural events, which might be a trio playing romantic ballads or a chamber music ensemble. Performances begin at 8pm. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 2pm and 5 to 8pm, Sunday from 10am to 1pm. The museum is undergoing a complete renovation, scheduled to be completed in November 2006.

SHOPPING Various shops carry Mexican crafts and clothing, mainly from nearby Guadalajara. Almost all are downtown on the streets near the central plaza. Shopping downtown is an experience—for example, you won’t want to miss the shop bordering the plaza that sells a combination of shells, religious items (including shell-framed Virgin of Guadalupe nightlights), and orthopedic supplies. The Plaza Manzanillo is an American-style mall on the road to Santiago, and there’s a traditional *tianguis* (outdoor) market in front of the entrance to Club Maeva, with touristy items from around Mexico. Most resort hotels also have boutiques or shopping arcades.

SUNSET CRUISES To participate in this popular tour, buy tickets from a travel agent or your hotel tour desk. Most cost around \$25. Trips last 1½ to 2 hours and vary in terms of drinks, music, and entertainment. Departing from Las Hadas is the **El Explorador** (☎ 314/352-4882) and **Antares** (☎ 314/376-0144).

WHERE TO STAY

Manzanillo’s strip of coastline consists of three areas: **downtown**, with its shops, markets, and commercial activity; **Las Brisas**, the

hotel-lined beach area immediately north of the city; and **Santiago**, the town and peninsula, now virtually a suburb, to the north at the end of Playa Azul. Transportation by bus or taxi makes all three areas fairly convenient to each other. Reservations are recommended during the Easter, Christmas, and New Year's holidays.

DOWNTOWN

Hotel Colonial ★ An old favorite, this three-story colonial-style hotel is in the central downtown district. Popular for its consistent quality, ambience, and service, it has beautiful blue-and-yellow tile, and colonial-style carved doors and windows in the lobby and restaurant. Rooms are decorated with minimal furniture, red-tile floors, and basic comforts. The hotel is 1 block inland from the main plaza at the corner of Juárez and Galindo.

Av. México 100 and González Bocanegra, 28200 Manzanillo, Col. ☎ **314/332-1080**, 314/332-0668, 314/332-1230, or 314/332-1134. 42 units. \$34 double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk. *In room:* A/C, TV.

LAS BRISAS

Some parts of the Las Brisas area look run-down; however, it still lays claim to one of the best beaches in the area and is known for its constant gentle sea breezes—a pleasure in the summer.

Hotel La Posada ★ This small inn has a bright-pink stucco facade with a large arch that leads to a broad tiled patio on the beach. The rooms have exposed brick walls and simple furnishings with Mexican decorative accents. It remains popular with longtime travelers to Manzanillo. The atmosphere is casual and informal—help yourself to beer and soft drinks, and at the end of your stay, owners Juan and Lisa Martinez will count the bottle caps you tossed in a bowl with your room number on it. The restaurant is open daily during high season from 8 to 11am and 1:30 to 8pm; nonguests are welcome. A meal is about \$7. During low season, the restaurant is open from 8am to 3pm. Stop by for a drink at sunset; the bar's open until 9pm year-round. The hotel is at the end of Las Brisas Peninsula, closest to downtown, and is on the local Las Brisas bus route.

Av. Lázaro Cárdenas 201, Las Brisas (Apdo. Postal 135), 28200 Manzanillo, Col. ☎ fax **314/333-1899**. www.hotel-la-posada.info or www.mexonline.com/laposada.htm. 23 units. High season \$78 double; low season \$58 double. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Internet cafe; laundry service; money exchange; safe-deposit boxes.

SANTIAGO

Five kilometers (3 miles) north of Las Brisas is the wide Santiago Peninsula. The settlement of Salahua is on the highway where you

enter the peninsula to reach the hotels Las Hadas, Plaza Las Glorias, and Sierra Manzanillo, as well as the Mantarraya Golf Course. Buses from town marked LAS HADAS pass by these hotels every 20 minutes. Past the Salahua turnoff, at the end of the settlement of Santiago, an obscure road on the left is marked ZONA DE PLAYAS and leads to the hotels on the other side of the peninsula and Playa de Santiago.

Brisas Las Hadas Golf Resort & Marina ★★ Las Hadas—the setting for the movie *10*, with Bo Derek—is the most compelling reason to visit Manzanillo. This elegant, Moorish-style, beachside resort is built into the side of the rocky peninsula. The service is gracious, warm, and unobtrusive. Rooms need some updating, but they spread over landscaped grounds and overlook the bay; cobbled lanes lined with colorful flowers and palms connect them. The resort is large but maintains an air of seclusion. (Motorized carts are on call for transportation within the property.)

Views, room size, and amenities differentiate the six types of accommodations, which can vary greatly. If you're not satisfied with your room, ask to be moved—a few of the rooms are significantly less attractive than others. Understated and spacious, the better units have white-marble floors, sitting areas, and large, comfortably furnished balconies. Nine suites have private pools. The lobby is a popular place for curling up in one of the overstuffed seating areas or, at night, for enjoying a drink and live music. Pete and Roy Dye designed La Mantarraya, the hotel's 18-hole, par-71 golf course.

Av. de los Riscos s/n, Santiago Peninsula, 28200 Manzanillo, Col. ☎ 888/559-4329 in the U.S. and Canada, or 314/331-0101. www.brisas.com.mx. 233 units. High season \$250–\$300 double, \$462–\$557 Fantasy Suite; low season \$190–\$232 double, \$395–\$495 Fantasy Suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Free guarded parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants, including the elegant Legazpi (see “Where to Dine,” below); 3 lounges and bars; 2 pools; small workout room; scuba diving, snorkeling, water-skiing, sailing, and trimaran cruises; concierge; tour desk; travel agency; car rental; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; marina for 70 vessels; shade tents on the beach. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe-deposit box, bathrobes.

Hotel Sierra Manzanillo ★ *Kids* This 21-floor hotel, with all-inclusive package options, overlooks La Audiencia beach. Its full program of sports, dining, entertainment, and kids' activities makes it a top choice for families. Architecturally, it mimics the white Moorish style of Las Hadas, which has become so popular in Manzanillo. Inside, it's palatial in scale and awash in pale-gray marble. Room decor picks up the pale-gray theme with armoires that conceal the TV and minibar. Most standard rooms have two double

beds or a king-size bed, plus a small table, chairs, and desk. Several rooms at the end of most floors are small, with one double bed, small porthole-size windows, no balcony, and no view. Most rooms, however, have balconies and ocean or hillside views. The 10 honeymoon suites have sculpted, shell-shaped headboards, king-size beds, and chaises. Junior suites have a sitting area with couch, and large bathrooms. Scuba-diving lessons take place in the pool, and excellent scuba-diving sites are within swimming distance.

Av. La Audiencia 1, Los Riscos, 28200 Manzanillo, Col. ☎ **800/564-7556** in the U.S., or 314/333-2000. Fax 314/333-2611. 332 units. High season \$342 double, \$392–\$412 suite; low season \$175 double, \$248–\$308 suite. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; grand pool on the beach; children's pool; 4 lighted tennis courts; health club w/exercise equipment, aerobics, hot tub, men's and women's sauna and steam rooms; travel agency; salon w/massage; room service; laundry service; 24-hr. currency exchange. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer.

Karina Palace ★★ Kids The quality of rooms and services at this all-inclusive resort makes the newest of Manzanillo's hotels probably one of the area's best values. It's the best choice for families in Manzanillo. The buildings resemble Maya pyramids, and even though the architecture at first might seem a little overdone, somehow it works. Rooms are all very large suites, with rich wood accents, comfortable recessed seating areas with pull-out couches, and two 27-inch TVs in each room. The extralarge bathrooms have marble floors, twin black marble sinks, separate tubs, and glassed-in showers. Most rooms have terraces or balconies with views of the ocean, overlooking the tropical gardens and swimming pools. Master suites have spacious sun terraces with private splash pools, plus a full wet bar, full refrigerator, and a large living room area with 42-inch TV. Two full-size bedrooms close off from the living/dining area.

The Kid's Club offers a host of activities, while adults have numerous choices for fun—all included in the price. There's also an exceptionally well-equipped gym and European-style spa.

Av. Vista Hermosa 13 Fracc. Península de Santiago, 28200 Manzanillo, Col. ☎ **888/234-6222** in the U.S. and Canada, or 314/334-1300, 314/331-1313, or 01-800/234-6222 in Mexico. Fax 314/334-1108. www.karminapalace.com. Reservations: reservations@karminapalce.com. 324 units. \$364–\$384 double; \$850–\$1,000 2-bedroom suites for quad occupancy. Rates are all-inclusive. Special packages and Web specials available. 2 children under 8 stay free in parent's room. Ask about seasonal specials. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; snack bar; 5 bars; 8 connected swimming pools; tennis courts; health club w/treadmills and Cybex equipment; full spa facilities, including men's and women's sauna and steam rooms; kids' activity

program; 24-hr. concierge; car rental; 24-hr. room service; beach volleyball; wind-surfing; money exchange; safe-deposit box in reception area. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe-deposit box (\$2).

Plaza Tucanes ★ The sunset-colored walls of this pueblo-like hotel ramble over a hillside on the Santiago Peninsula. The restaurant on top and most rooms afford a broad vista of other red-tiled rooftops and either the palm-filled golf course or the bay. It's one of Manzanillo's undiscovered resorts, known more to wealthy Mexicans than to Americans. Conceived as private condominiums, the accommodations were designed for living; each spacious unit is stylishly furnished, and very comfortable. Each has a huge living room; a small kitchen/bar; one, two, or three large bedrooms with tile or brick floors; large Mexican-tiled bathrooms; huge closets; and large furnished private patios with views. Some units have whirlpool tubs, and a few can be partitioned off and rented by the bedroom only. Rooms can be a long walk from the main entrance, through a succession of stairways and paths. If stair climbing bothers you, try to get a room by the restaurant and pool—you'll have a great view, and a hillside rail elevator goes straight from top to bottom.

Av. de Tesoro s/n, Santiago Peninsula, 28200 Manzanillo, Col. ☎ 314/334-1098. Fax 314/334-0090. www.plazatucanes.com. 103 units. \$75–\$95 double. Packages available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Two restaurants, including Argentine steakhouse; pool; kids' club; minigolf, "recreational park," game area; room service; babysitting (w/advance notice); beach club on Las Brisas beach, w/pool and small restaurant; transportation to and from beach club (once daily in each direction). *In room:* A/C, TV, safe-deposit box.

WHERE TO DINE DOWNTOWN

Roca del Mar MEXICAN/INTERNATIONAL Join the locals at this informal cafe facing the plaza. The large menu includes club sandwiches, hamburgers, *carne asada a la tampiqueña* (thin grilled steak served with rice, poblano pepper, an enchilada, and refried beans), fajitas, fish, shrimp, and vegetable salads. A specialty is its *paella* (served on Sun and Tues), and the economical *pibil* tacos are outstanding. This cafe is very clean and offers sidewalk dining.

21 de Marzo 204 (across from the plaza). ☎ 314/332-0302. Main courses \$3–\$12. No credit cards. Daily 7:30am–noon.

LAS BRISAS

The Hotel La Posada (see "Where to Stay," above) offers breakfast to nonguests at its beachside restaurant; it's also a great place to mingle with other tourists and enjoy the sunset and cocktails.

La Toscana ★★☆☆ *(Finds)* SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL You're in for a treat at La Toscana (by the same owner of the now-closed Willy's), one of Manzanillo's most popular restaurants, on the beach in Las Brisas. It's homey, casual, and small (reservations are highly recommended). The modest atmosphere belies the cuisine, with starters that include escargot and salmon carpaccio. Among the grilled specialties are shrimp imperial wrapped in bacon, red snapper tarragon, dorado basil, sea bass with mango and ginger, and tender fresh lobsters (four to a serving). Live music frequently sets the scene.

Bulevar Miguel de la Madris 3177, 100m (300 ft.) from Hotel Fiesta Mexicana. ☎ 314/333-2515. Reservations required. Main courses \$8–\$17. MC, V. Daily 6pm–2am.

SANTIAGO ROAD

The restaurants below are on the Costera Madrid between downtown and the Santiago Peninsula, including the Salahua area.

Benedetti's Pizza PIZZA Benedetti's has several branches in town, so you'll probably find one near your hotel. The variety is extensive, but Benedetti's specializes in seafood pizzas, such as smoked oyster and anchovy. (If you order sesame-crust pizza, add some *chimichurri* sauce to enhance the flavor.) You can also select from pastas, sandwiches, fajitas, salads, Mexican soups, and desserts.

Bulevar Miguel de la Madrid, near the Las Brisas Glorietta on the ocean side (west). ☎ 314/333-1592 or 314/334-0141. Pizza \$9–\$12; main courses \$2–\$5.55. AE, MC, V. Daily 1–11:30pm.

Bigotes II ☆☆☆ *(Finds)* SEAFOOD Locals flock to this large, breezy restaurant by the water for large portions of grilled seafood and a festive atmosphere. Strolling singers serenade patrons as they dine.

Puesta del Sol 3. ☎ 314/333-1236. Main courses \$9.50–\$23. MC, V. Daily noon–10pm. From downtown, follow the Costera Madrid past the Las Brisas turnoff; the restaurant is behind the Penas Coloradas Social Club, across from the beach.

SANTIAGO PENINSULA

Legazpi ★★☆☆ INTERNATIONAL This is a top choice in Manzanillo for sheer elegance, gracious service, and outstanding food. The candlelit tables are set with silver and flowers. Enormous bell-shaped windows on two sides show off the sparkling bay below. The sophisticated menu includes prosciutto with melon marinated in port wine, crayfish bisque, broiled salmon, roast duck, lobster, veal, and flaming desserts from crepes to Irish coffee.

In the Brisas Las Hadas hotel, Santiago Peninsula. ☎ 314/331-0101. Main courses \$8.50–\$16. AE, MC, V. High season daily 7–11:30pm. Closed low season.

MANZANILLO AFTER DARK

Manzanillo is not only a resort town—it's a thriving commercial center, with a much more exuberant nightlife than you might expect. Clubs and bars tend to change from year to year, so check with your concierge for current hot spots. Some area clubs have a dress code prohibiting shorts or sandals, principally applying to men.

El Bar de Félix, between Salahua and Las Brisas by the Avis rental-car office (☎ 314/333-1875), is open Tuesday through Sunday from 2pm to midnight, and has an \$8 minimum consumption charge. With music ranging from salsa and ranchero to rock and house, it's the most consistently lively place in town. **Vog Disco** (☎ 314/333-1875), Bulevar Costera Miguel de la Madrid Km 9.2, features alternative music in a cavernous setting; it's Manzanillo's current late-night hot spot, open until 5am, but only on Friday and Saturday. The cover charge for women is \$10, for men \$15. Also very popular—with a built-in crowd—is the nightclub at the **Club Maeva Hotel & Resort** (☎ 01-800/523-8450), on the inland side of the main highway, north of the Santiago Peninsula. It's open Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 11pm to 2am. Couples are given preferential entrance. Nonguests are welcome but must pay an entrance fee, after which all drinks are included. *Note:* When Club Maeva is full, entrance to nonguests is difficult—or impossible. Ask your hotel front desk if they can secure a pass for you. The fee varies depending on the night of the week and the time of year.

A SIDE TRIP TO COLIMA & ITS VOLCANO

The city of Colima makes an interesting and accessible day trip from Manzanillo. It's about an hour's drive along the well-maintained, four-lane Highway 54 to this charming colonial city, the capital of Colima state. Well-preserved colonial buildings, such as the city's 1527 **cathedral** and the **Palacio de Gobierno**, with its murals depicting Mexican history, are key attractions in the city's center.

Colima has several interesting museums, including the **Museo de las Culturas del Occidente**, which displays an impressive permanent collection of pre-Columbian pottery and artifacts. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 10am to 5pm; admission is free. The **Casa de la Cultura** hosts changing exhibitions of contemporary art and offers free art, music, and dance classes. It's open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:30am to 5:30pm; admission is free.

Two imposing volcanoes (one still active) border the town. The **Volcán de Fuego** is 24km (15 miles) north, next to the taller, extinct **Nevado de Colima**. In 1999, the Volcán de Fuego became active, sometimes blowing smoke and ash up to 5km (3 miles) high, but it has since settled down.