

TRAVEL


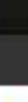
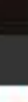

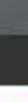
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Dispatches from a multigenerational Exclusive Resorts Mexican villa vacation

NP AMANDA BLAKLEY, SPECIAL TO NATIONAL POST | February 25, 2014 11:45 PM ET  Republish Reprint
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Amanda Blakley

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As I stare out over the Pacific from my comfortable balcony perch, I am jarred out of a reverie by my father, urgently yelling my name. Nervous, I run to investigate, and find him waving his arms frantically outside what appears to be a media room.

“What’s the matter?” I ask. “Are you all right?” “I’m fine, everything’s great,” he replies. “I have just discovered another room!”

It’s the third day of a group Mexican villa vacation, and the villa, as it turns out, just keeps on giving.

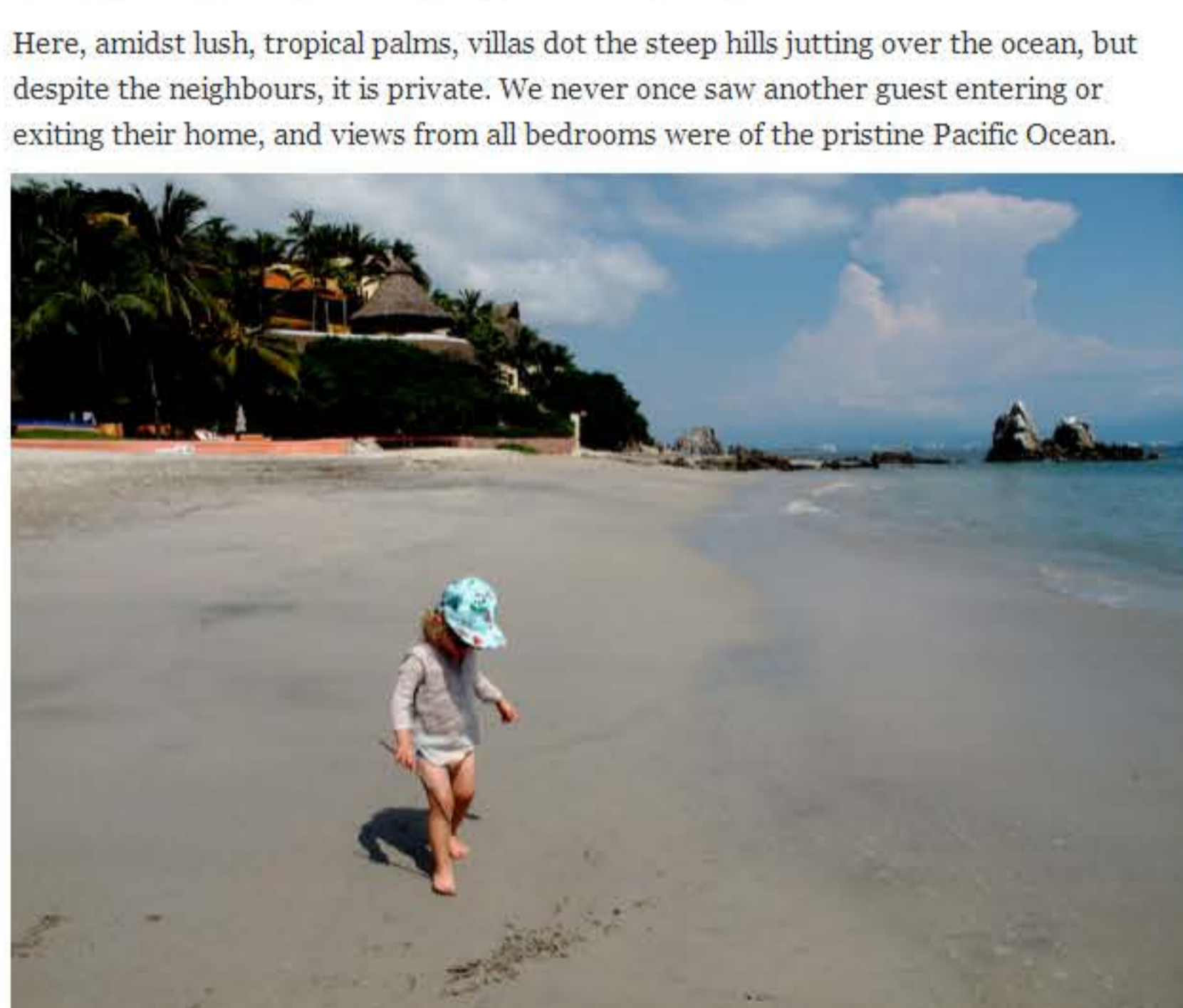
Our home for five days in October is a 9,000 square foot villa in Real Del Mar, an exclusive community 25 minutes outside of Puerto Vallarta. Perched on a cliff above the Pacific, our motley crew of seven adults and two toddlers are here as guests of Exclusive Resorts, a high-end private club that offers members access to 350 properties around the world, accompanied by their luxurious concierge services.

Villa, home, condo and chalet rentals are becoming increasingly popular, particularly for group and multigenerational travel, and we have chosen to rock the trend in style.

Piled into this villa were my husband and son, my best friend and business partner with her toddler son (our littles are days apart in age so these guys were pretty jazzed to be spending time together in paradise), another bestie, my father, brother and a family friend.

Had we chosen to stay at a hotel or a resort, we would have required five rooms, and an untold quantity of emails and phone calls back and forth to organize ourselves for meals, excursions and trips down to the beach. More importantly, there would have been no private pool, kitchen or den for the group to hang out in.

Here, amidst lush, tropical palms, villas dot the steep hills jutting over the ocean, but despite the neighbours, it is private. We never once saw another guest entering or exiting their home, and views from all bedrooms were of the pristine Pacific Ocean.



Our personal concierge, Raquel, expertly toured us through the space on our arrival, pointing out the well-equipped kitchen and bathroom full of luxury products. (We all missed the media room, clearly.) This concierge service really takes the pressure off so there isn’t one traveller who needs to play the roll of camp counsellor or event planner. (A relief, since that’s usually me.)

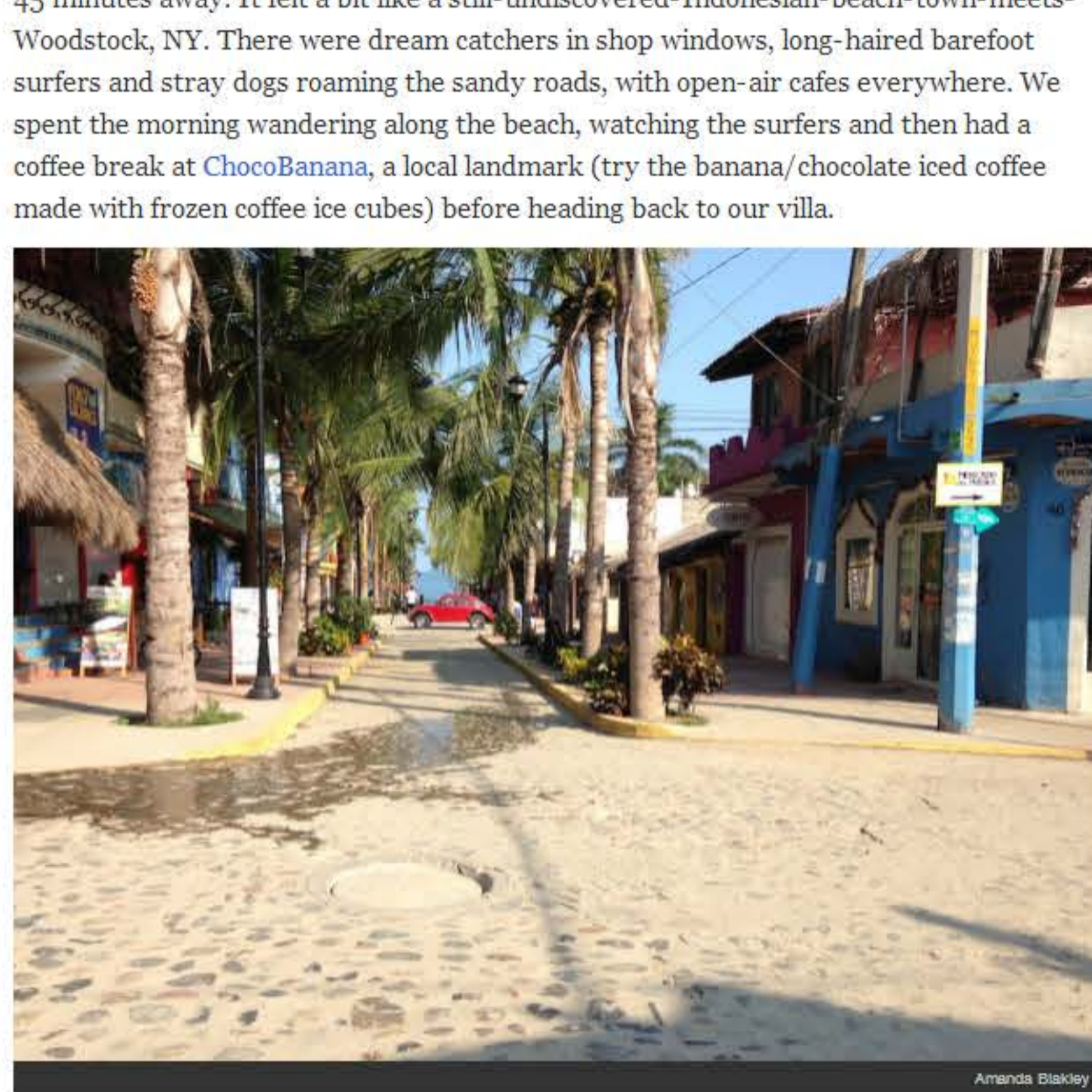
Once settled into the nerve center of our home (the pool and deck) we indulged in some margaritas (adults), mango smoothies (toddlers) and snacks (all) that had been prepared for us by the Exclusive Resorts team. As if by magic, the refrigerator and pantry were also fully stocked with all our favorites as well as necessities for the children.

Unsurprisingly, villa life suited our little group well. Thanks to the individual rooms (each with separate entry and en suites)

all guests were able to retreat when or if they needed some private time, or lounge out in-the-mix by the stunning aqua infinity pool just off the large open concept dining and living palapa.

Exclusive Resorts also offers daily housekeeping and breakfast preparation. Waking up in paradise is good enough, but having someone set out fresh tea and coffee for you while they whip together a gourmet breakfast might be one of the best luxuries in the world.

Over the course of our stay, mostly we relaxed, lounging by the pool or beach, but our concierge did arrange one outing for us, to a small hippie surf town called Sayulita, about 45 minutes away. It felt a bit like a still-undiscovered-Indonesian-beach-town-meets-Woodstock, NY. There were dream catchers in shop windows, long-haired barefoot surfers and stray dogs roaming the sandy roads, with open-air cafes everywhere. We spent the morning wandering along the beach, watching the surfers and then had a coffee break at **ChocoBanana**, a local landmark (try the banana/chocolate iced coffee made with frozen coffee ice cubes) before heading back to our villa.



Amanda Blakley

We loved having the large well-equipped kitchen to prepare casual lunches or larger elaborate dinners, but despite many a foodie in our midst, a highlight for all was the meal prepared for us on our final night by an outstanding local chef.

The food was beyond delicious and each ingredient was fresh and local, and the dishes inventive. A highlight was the dessert — pears simmered in brown sugar, butter, spices and wine, served over vanilla ice cream on a parmesan cracker and garnished with blue cheese. The crunchy cracker and the unexpected blue cheese really made the dish memorable. Too bad the kids slept right through it.

If You Go

Exclusive Resorts offers 350 homes in 75 destinations worldwide. There are numerous membership options, but the new Gateway by Exclusive Resorts card is just for Canadians. It costs \$40,000 for 21 nights accommodation to be used within three years.

exclusiveresorts.com/canada.