

COPPER CANYON TRIP SUMMARY

From Chuck and Linda on svJACARANDA

What: Copper Canyon is a must see! Located in the state of Chihuahua, Barranca del Cobre actually refers to a mountainous area of the Sierra Madres (Sierra Tarahumara region) that is 4 times the size of our Grand Canyon (25,000 sq. miles) with six major canyons, several of which are deeper than the Grand Canyon.

Here's what's so great about Copper Canyon:

- Spectacular scenery and breathtaking vistas
- Great hiking and horseback tours
- Raramuri Indian culture
- El Chepe scenic train ride
- Hair-raising trip to the bottom of the canyon at Batopilas
- Pueblos Magicos (Magic Towns) of El Fuerte and Creel
- Experiencing a wide cross section of eco-systems

When: Oct. 27- Dec. 5, 2010

Length: 10 days

Strategy: We left the boat in Topolobampo, took the train (El Chepe) from El Fuerte to Creel, and used Creel as a base to travel to other parts of Copper Canyon.

Weather: Topo and El Fuerte were warm; it was quite chilly in Creel where the poplar trees sported their golden fall colors and in the mountains (7500' + elevation) at night; the bottoms of the canyons (Batopilas and Urique - 1600' elevation) are hot and subtropical.

Prices: Although it was tourist season, there was hardly anyone around. Most hotels were nearly empty. We were able to bargain on many prices which are given below in pesos.

To Begin: We docked the boat in Marina Palmira in Topolobampo. The Marina is new - clean but still under construction - and had lots of space. Rates: \$163 pesos/day (US \$13/day) or US \$216 for 16 days (Jacaranda is 39').

In a country that we consider very friendly, the people of Los Mochis are over the top friendly!!! If you spend any time in Los Mochis, eat some great seafood at Mariscos El Gordo on Zapata Street, or bullfrog legs at El Farallon. We also took a short bus ride to Playa Maviri, walked the beautiful beach and had great seafood at palapa restaurants. (Note: Many friends took a 6 hour bus from Mazatlan to Los Mochis and stayed overnight to begin their journey).

Itinerary:

Day 1: Topo - Los Mochis - El Fuerte

- Transportation: Taxi from Topo to Los Mochis (\$150) to catch an early bus to El Fuerte. Two bus choices: green Norte de Sinaloa bus - \$65/person; the blue bus Azules del Noroeste is comparable; they leave from two different station locations.
- Accommodation: Rio Vista Hotel (\$500/nite) - Chal or Nacho is at the front desk. Upscale alternatives: Torres El Fuerte, El Fuerte Hotel, or Posada del Hidalgo Hotel** See Note at end of Itinerary.
- Eating: Breakfast: El Mexicano, Juarez St. west of the market (\$40/person)
Lunch: La Canastilla (Lobina Flameada) (\$90/person with drinks)
Dinner: El Meson de General (Lobina or Cauque - Crayfish, Tortilla Soup) (\$420/ two persons)
- Orientation: Stop in to Three Amigos office at 100 Reforma on the Riverfront (Ivan and Yolanda) and get a local map as well as other info on the Copper Canyon area.
- Activities: Explore this Pueblo Magico (Magic Town) on foot to see its colonial architecture and pretty zocalo; Visit the Museum (\$10 admission)

Day 2: El Fuerte

- Activities: River birdwatching trip (early morning by boat with guide) which includes a short hike to see petroglyphs (\$250/person without breakfast)
Walk along the short "malecon" along the river
Every Friday morning there was a band playing in the zocalo bandstand

Day 3: El Fuerte - Creel

- Breakfast: Hotel La Choza (chilaquiles) - (\$70/person)
- Transportation: The famously scenic El Chepe train ride. (The train station is a 20 minute \$50 - 80/person taxi ride from the town.) We went second class (\$417/person). Sit on the right hand side of the train. Bring a sandwich and snacks with you. It is about 8 hours to Creel. The train stops for 15 minutes at Divisadero - the only time you will see the actual Copper Canyon from the train. ** See Note at end of itinerary
- Activities: take photos from the platform between the train cars; buy baskets from the Raramuri women either from the train windows when it stops or at Divisadero when you get out to walk from the train to the overlook; marvel at the beauty of the canyons at the overlook in Divisadero
- Eating: get a delicious snack from the food vendors at Divisadero (Lucy's is one of the first stalls you'll see). We loved the chile rellenos and the blue corn tortillas filled with carne asada. Buy some of the delicious locally grown apples for snacks.

Day 4: Creel

- Accommodations: Casa Margarita - \$300/room includes breakfast and dinner. (Upscale alternative: Best Western - The Lodge at Creel)
- Activities: Half-day Tour (\$250/person not including tip and \$40/person entrance fee for the Falls) to Cusarare Falls, San Ignacio, Arereko lake, Valley of the Frogs, Valley of the Mushrooms, Tarahumara cave
- Eating: Veronica's (comida corrida) (\$67/person)

Day 5: Creel

- **Activities:** Tour to Divisadero (\$200/person not including \$20/person admission fee to Barancas del Cobre Park)) - spend more time at the overlook, eating (see Day 3); walk out on the Volada (Balancing) Rock; take the new Teleferico (cable car) if you think it is worth the expense; buy baskets and crafts from the Raramuri; look around in the Posada Divisadero Hotel

Day 6: Creel - Batopilas

- **Transportation:** We took the white-knuckle 5 hour ride on the public bus from Creel to the old mining town of Batopilas at the bottom of the canyon (\$220/person); the narrow, steep switchback road is exciting! (Upscale alternative: hire a van and a guide to drive you - Three Amigos has a great reputation)

Day 7: Batopilas

- **Accommodations:** Casa Monse (\$125/person) which was a little too basic for us but Señora Monse is very sweet); instead stay next door at Juanita's. Upscale alternative: Minas de Real.

- **Activities:** See The Lost Cathedral of Satevo; take a tour of a mine; explore the ruins of

- **Eating:** Cafe Doña Mica, a house on the small plaza (comida casera or homemade food) - \$60-70/person

Day 8: Batopilas - Bauhachivo - Cerachai - (and Urique)

- **Transportation:** We took the early morning bus (departs at 5 a.m.) from Batopilas to Creel (\$220/person) and caught the first class train to the train station in Bauhachivo (\$364/person); there is a bus from the train station to Cerachai but instead we paid \$50/person to take the van from El Mision Hotel to town.

- **Accommodations:** Hotel Plaza (\$250/room); Maria is the owner of the hotel and the tienda. (Upscale alternative: El Mision Hotel or Hotel Diego del Oso)

- **Activities:** We arranged for a guide (Alberto - good english) from the Hotel Jade to take us to Gallegos Overlook - the best view of Copper Canyon and the town of Urique at the bottom; if you have time, go all the way to the bottom and walk around the charming town of Urique on the river with its "main street" air strip and purple church; buy some locally grown citrus fruit (especially the local limas - sweet lemons) and Mennonite cheese. Tour to Gallegos only - \$150/person; tour to Gallegos and Urique - \$300/person.

- Visit the beautiful Mission Church and the Tarahumara Girls Boarding School.

- **Eating:** Arranged with Hotel Plaza to make us breakfast (\$40/person) and dinner (\$60/person)

Day 9: Cerachai -Batachivo - El Fuerte

- **Transportation:** Our guide from Cerachai drove us to the train station at Bauachivo and we took the second class El Chepe back to El Fuerte (\$382/person)

- Accommodations: Torres El Fuerte - Jesus is the owner (\$800-1200/room). Mention Jacaranda and if he remembers us, you could get a discount. (Upscale alternatives: El Fuerte Hotel or Hotel Posada Hidalgo)

Day 10: El Fuerte - Los Mochis- Topo

- Transportation: We took the green bus from El Fuerte to Los Mochis (once again to the Independencia Market) and then the local bus to Topo. Next time we will take the blue bus since this bus station is closer to the local bus stop to Topo (at the Sugar factory).

WE RECOMMEND:

- Before you go: Download the Lonely Planet chapter from their website for US \$4.95
- Eat good seafood (the crabs were great) at Mariscos El Gordo in Los Mochis
- Don't miss El Fuerte - spend at least 2 days here. Upscale suggestion: Stay at Torres El Fuerte - tell Jesus that Jacaranda sent you and you may get a discount. Eat the Lobina Flameada (freshwater bass) at La Canastilla.
 - Stop in at Three Amigos in either El Fuerte or Creel - check out their website before you go; they are a wealth of information and give it freely to boot; get free local town maps as well as Copper Canyon maps; Upscale suggestion: Sign up for a private tour with excellent english-speaking guides in a 4 wheel drive vehicle the tour price is fixed and accommodates up to 6 people so you can reduce the price for yourself if you find 2 other couples to share the expense.
- Go to the bottom of at least one canyon - Stay overnight in Batopilas or Urique
- Make the waterfalls a higher priority if you go during the wet season
- Sit on the right side of the El Chepe train
- Say hello to the Raramuri in their own language - Kuira-va (Qweeba) (Thank you is "chiriqueraba"; goodbye is "adyóchiba")
- Stop at Divisadero and eat at Lucy's food stand (blue corn tortillas with carne asada)
- Buy baskets directly from the Tarahumaras
- Don't miss the Gallego Overlook (get there from Cerachau)

**** NOTES**

Raramuri or Tarahumara Indians

Raramuri is the name that the indigenous people of this remote region gave themselves - it means "people of the swiftly running feet". Tarahumara was the spanish name for these people. These indians (there are about 50,000) are small, shy, and reclusive, retain their traditional ways (including colorful dress and living in caves and log cabins) and have a most interesting value system. They are world renowned for their long distance running ability and often outrun and exhaust the deer they are hunting. "Born to Run" by Christopher McDougall is an interesting read about the grueling 100+ mile non-stop foot-races they run in their formidable topography. Their affordable crafts are made from natural materials they find around them - pine needle

baskets, handmade violins, belts, pine bark carvings. The modern world is now beginning to impact their heretofore isolation and they are under pressure from drug traffickers.

Interesting websites:

About the Tarahumaras - [*http://www.questconnect.org/tara_cc_ethnic.htm](http://www.questconnect.org/tara_cc_ethnic.htm)

Tarahumara Folk Art and Culture - <http://www.festivalofmexico.com/tarahumara.html>

Tarahumara Mission in Creel -

<http://www.companymagazine.org/v193/loveofapeople.htm>

Tarahumara Running - <http://www.lehigh.edu/~dmd1/art.html>

The Tarahumaras: An Endangered Species -

<http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1924-the-tarahumaras-an-endangered-species>

The Land of the Tarahumaras - <http://www.tarahumara.com.mx/english.asp>

What's the difference between the First and Second Class El Chepe train?

Price: The first class costs about twice as much as the second

Schedule: The First class train ran every day; the second class ran only certain days of the week. The first class departed at different times of the day than the second. With a first class ticket, it is possible get off at 3 intermediary stops if you specify where and when at the time of purchase. There is no such option for the Second Class ticket.

Length of trip: The first class takes shorter because the second makes more stops along the way from El Fuerte to Creel.

Comfort: There is no real difference - the second class uses the same cars except they have vinyl floors instead of carpeting. The first class has "porters" and you get a colored tourist magazine.

Food: No food allowed on First Class because they expect you to buy from the restaurant car; there is no restaurant car on the second although they do have a snack bar.

Ridership: Tourists and gringos are on the First Class trains - too expensive for the locals; Budget minded tourists, backpackers, Mexican school groups, Raramuris, and locals take the Second Class train - we didn't see any livestock though!!

Hotels

There is quite a variety of accommodations - from hostels, family run cabins, small hotels, to expensive hotels and haciendas. The Baldarrama family of hotels can be relied on for comfortable upscale accommodations - they are the Santa Anita Hotel in Los Mochis, Posada del Hildago Hotel in El Fuerte (\$1365/room), Hotel Mision in Cerocahui (\$2572/room), and Posada Mirador Hotel at Posada Barrancas (\$2985/room includes 3 meals).

Left for Next Time

There is so much to do and we wished we could have gone to Basaseachi Falls, Arepo/Posada Barrancas, Sinfrosa Canyon, Recohuata Hot Springs near Creel, and by horseback to Bisabirachi (Valley of the Erect Penises). We had also wanted to take

side trips to the city of Chihuahua and town of Alamos. Too much to do and not enough time!! Next time!