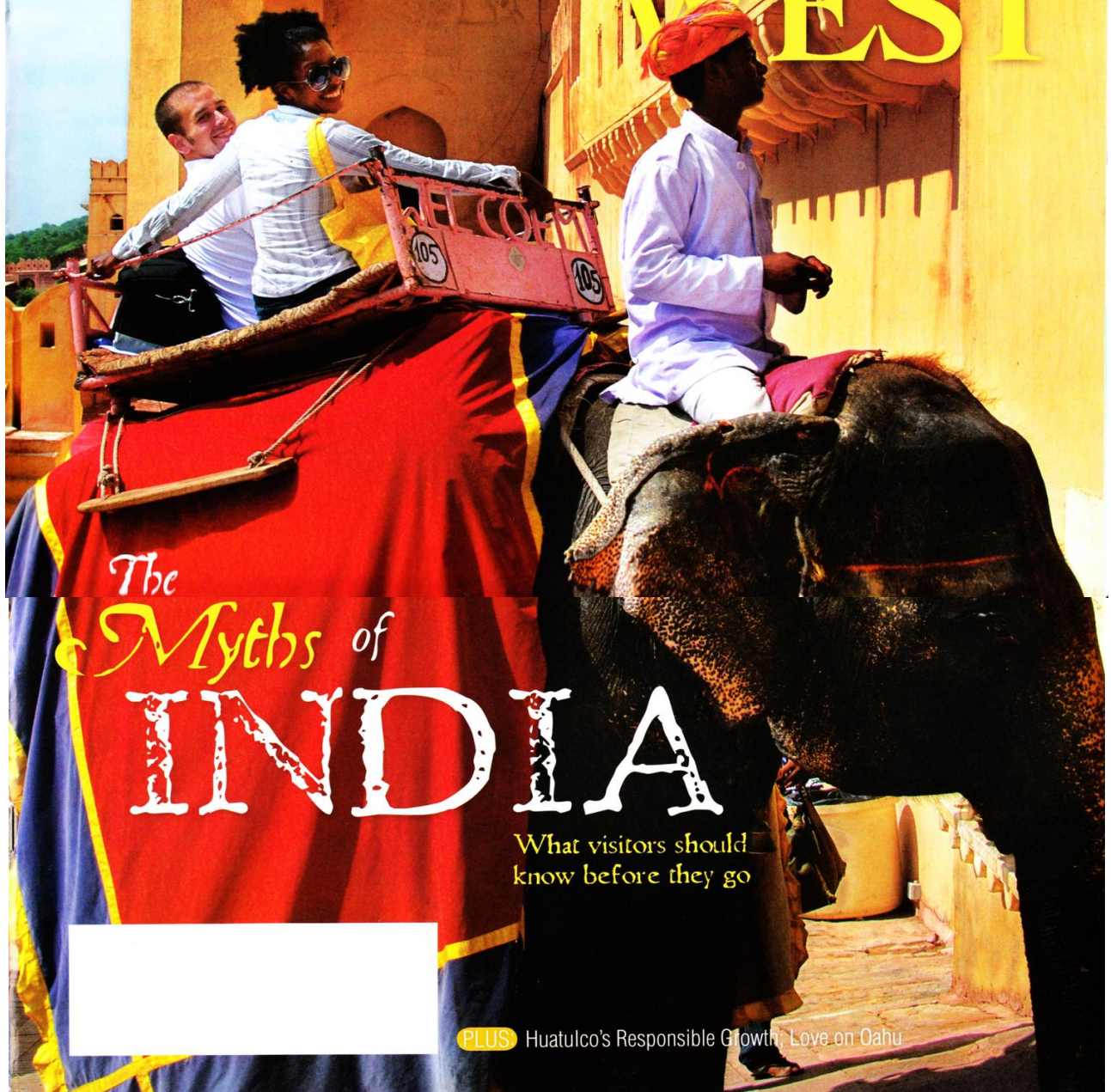


EXPLORING TRAVEL FAVORITES AND FRONTIERS

40 YEARS  
1969-2009

# TRAVEL AGE WEST

PUBLISHED BIWEEKLY ♦ JULY 20, 2009



The  
*Myths of*  
**INDIA**

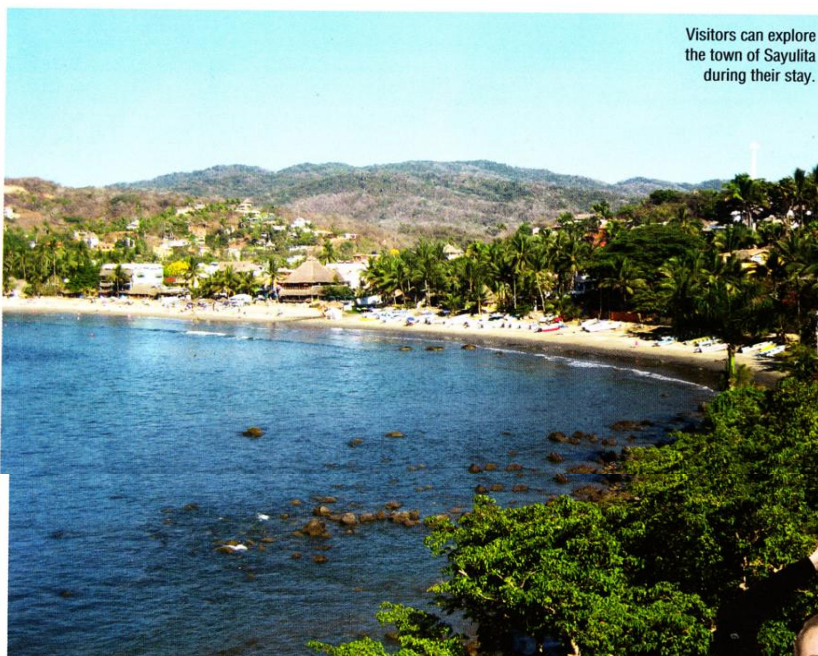
What visitors should  
know before they go

**PLUS** Huatulco's Responsible Growth; Love on Oahu

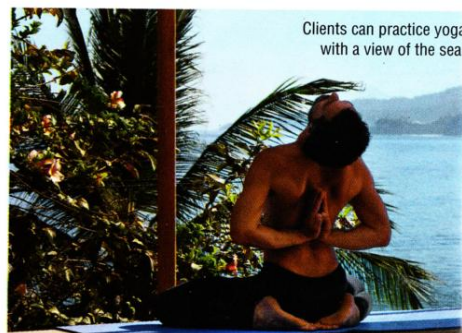
# Sun Salutation

In Sayulita, weeklong surf and yoga retreats offer relaxation

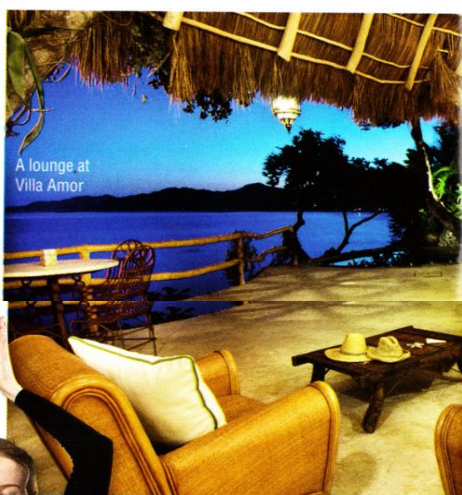
By Liz Brown



Visitors can explore the town of Sayulita during their stay.



Clients can practice yoga with a view of the sea.



A lounge at Villa Amor

Of all the yoga instructions I've heard uttered, my favorite has to be "Look toward the sea." Gazing out at the surfer-dotted, azure waters of the Pacific, with the sun high overhead and tropical birdsongs emanating from the surrounding palms, my fellow yogis and I seemed to have, indeed, found nirvana.

It was the start of another idyllic day at a weeklong yoga and surfing retreat in Sayulita, Mexico, one of several offered each spring and fall by Seattle-based Via Yoga. Business partners Michelle Gantz and Kelly Kemp began hosting the trips in 2004, and they have got it down to a science — from garnering top-notch instructors and directing guests to the best fish tacos in town to coordinating airport transfers and scheduling a perfect mix of scheduled group activities and free time.

Each day began with optional morning meditation and a 90-minute yoga class at an open-air, palapa-roofed studio perched on a hill just a two-minute walk from Villa Amor, the enchanting oceanfront hotel that serves as our home base. Following a healthy, tasty breakfast buffet enjoyed at water's edge after morning yoga each day, our group dispersed, then met up on the beach by early afternoon for small-group, hour-long surf lessons. Two expert local instructors proved adept at helping even the most unskilled among us (read: me) catch a gentle wave and ride it, gleefully, toward the shore.

Less exhilarating but equally pleasurable activities

abound along this popular stretch of sandy beach. Each day, our gracious host Michelle laid claim to a block of beach chairs with umbrellas, and we were free to lounge, swim, roam about town and return at will. Early on, she led us up the beach to a fresh fruit stand where a couple dollars bought a coconut with a straw. Once we had drunk the juice, the vendor proceeded to hack out the meat and serve it back to us in the shell, sprinkled with a tangy blend of chili sauce, fresh lime juice and salt. Rich in water and electrolytes, it was the perfect nourishment for our second yoga class of the day.

By day three of intensive yoga — including countless, upper-body strengthening *chaturangas* — my muscles were feeling the hurt, but in a good way. I was enjoying the physical challenge and mental focus, and a soothing massage at Villa Amor's outdoor spa treatment area provided relief the day before. Midweek, our outstanding instructor, Matt Pesendian — who specializes in Shadow Yoga, which incorporates common principles of yoga asana, martial arts, dance and Ayurvedic/Siddha medicine — took us through a gentle Qigong sequence, offering a respite from the more rigorous poses.



The group dynamic was so effortless and positive that it was hard to believe most of us just met a few days before. At orientation, we all sat on blankets in a circle at the studio and introduced ourselves. Most of us were in our 30s and 40s, with a few older and younger students. Two pairs of female friends were celebrating 40th birthdays. Others were here on their own or as couples. Experience levels ranged from beginner to advanced, and all of us were looking forward to deepening our yoga practice while relaxing and exploring this lively Mexican town. Most were looking forward to surfing, too.

Some participants took advantage of leisure time throughout the week for quiet contemplation, while the more social among us talked yoga, natural medicine, travel and life over margaritas and the best chile rellenos in town. Some evenings, we'd gather on an expansive patio to relax and reflect on yet another dreamy day.

Descending the stairs at Villa Amor on day six to bid farewell to Sayulita and my newfound friends, I paused to glance one last time at the handpainted tile bearing the words I'd adopted as my mantra: "Live the life you love."

Smiling and sun-kissed, I continued down the path, knowing I'd be back. ❖

## THE DETAILS

**Via Yoga** retreats offer clients an ideal mix of scheduled yoga classes, group activities and free time in beautiful Sayulita, Mexico.

Rates range from \$1,995 to \$4,095 per person (not including airfare).

800-603-9642  
www.viayoga.com  
www.villaamor.com



Commission: 10 percent

Retreats include:

- Two 90-minute yoga classes each day
- Six nights' accommodations at Villa Amor, in an open-aided oceanfront villa
- Daily maid service
- Daily breakfast and three group dinners at Villa Amor and local restaurants
- A one-hour massage
- A day trip to Punta Mita for surfing or snorkeling, weather permitting (lunch included)
- Roundtrip airport transfers from Puerto Vallarta International Airport

Fall 2009/Spring 2010  
Retreats:

Pilates, yoga and surf:  
Nov. 22–28

Yoga and surf:  
Nov. 28–Dec. 4