

**XCARET PARK  
IN MEXICO'S RIVIERA MAYA**

# The mighty beat of drums



By Merrilyn McDonald

The Maya are a passionate people, especially when it comes to their traditions and culture. It seems like any other rehearsal. Twelve drummers stand in a row strumming the beat on their rustic, hand-crafted drums. Brows are bent in concentration for the right rhythm, the right accent, the right sound. The directors scrutinize closely, stopping the group to demand nothing less than perfection. Here, precision is a must, for they are the newest members of the Tabasco Drummers (Tamborileros) who perform regularly in Xcaret's spectacular Xcaret at Night. Each performance is commanding, as forty drummers accompany, in exacting unison, the trill of a solitary flute.

The rehearsals are grueling, they have only three weeks to learn nine songs. For some, it is their first rehearsal. For some, it is the first time to hold a drum in their hands. But their directors, members of the Park's El Grupo Akary, are patient, nonetheless, demanding no previous musical experience, only the passion to play. Dressed casually in shorts and t-shirts, rehearsals occur daily in the Park around 4 p.m., and are dramatically set in a complex of ruins which echo the Maya heritage, the rhythmic pulse of this land.

The concept for the drum-

mers was born in Tabasco, a state which produces some of the purest pre-Hispanic music in Mexico. Here, small villages such as Tucta and Tujita continue to create drums in the rudimentary style of their ancestors. Calf and sheep skins are dried in the sun, then stretched over hollowed trunk sections of zapote, salam and mango trees. Traditionally, the various pitches created (alto, tenor and bass) were combined with the soprano from a medley of reed flutes. In fact, the small village of Nacajuca in Tabasco, is well-known for its musical scores which elicit the melodious/percussionistic phrases and sounds that were so popular so long ago.

The Tamborileros at Xcaret perform in traditional Tabasco dress. Customarily, the workers in the fields pressed seeds into the softened ground with their left foot. Since their leg often entered the soil as well, their left pant leg was always rolled securely to the knee. A small bag rested on their right hip, and a bule (jug) of water hung from the left. After a hard day's work, they very often partied before returning home, singing and dancing to the traditional flutes and drums.

Xcaret's Tamborileros began with only 28 drummers, on June 23, 1997. As their accomplishments and prestige grew within the Park, so did their size and respect. They purchased 55 original drums

from Tucta, and managed to capture the sounds from Nacajuca's original scores. In addition to the traditional drums, music and dress, the pride of this group is the joy with which they play, it's a virtue truly born of the heart. The ear nurtures the talent, as the heart does the power, a power which is only budding in the fresh recruits standing before me in rehearsal.

Some don't have the feel yet: some are slightly offbeat. "The secret is in the wrist," they're told. Another challenge is to get both hands to follow the same beat. They rehearse over and over, oftentimes playing the difficult phrases one-at-a-time until they get it right. They even break into small groups of two or three to receive individualized instruction. As the session draws to a close, one can notice a discernible difference. The sound is crisper, more precise, and their eyes are aglow with the satisfaction that always accompanies progress and growth.

The full-blown power, however, is more easily seen in their experienced counterparts on stage. During the nightly performances in Xcaret's sky-domed theater, the 40 accomplished Tamborileros, left pant leg rolled to the knee, march and strum to the beat of their own Pied Piper. Aged 12 to 57, they are comprised of 32 men and eight women, and each performs with precision and clarity and heart. Although the players themselves are not from Tabasco, most of them are of Maya descent. They play music written by and for the Maya, and they exude the pride that is their birthright. For theirs is the power of a people born of tradition, whose sole existence is part of a whole. They have a statement to make, and they make it loud and clear. The Maya are here to stay.

## What's Going On!

# "Hear my voice where you are..."

We have been boasting a lot lately about the very welcome increase in tourist flow to the Mexican Caribbean this year and last. In fact, we are being visited in record numbers and it looks like that trend will be continuing from all reports from travel agencies, world tourism organizations and the like. The increase is particularly impressive because it usually is reported in terms of both arrivals by air and percentages of hotel room occupancy. The reason why it is impressive is be-

cause millions of folks each year, in particular domestic travelers from other regions of Mexico, arrive by car and are somewhat underreported. And, in terms of hotel room occupancy, the percentages do not reflect the fact that there has been an almost exponential increase in the number of hotel rooms available here in the Mexican Caribbean since the benchmark year used for comparison as the previous high in tourist flow, 2008.

Of course, our future success depends not just on first or one time visitors but rather on repeat visitors. In other words, we want all of you to make plans to return to visit us over and over again. That is why we have chosen this song, written by Burton Lane (music) and Alan Jay Lerner (lyrics) in 1965 for their Broadway musical (Lerner wrote the book), *On a Clear Day*, as our guide to what to see, do and hear throughout the course of the coming week or so here in the Mexican Caribbean. It tells you how much we really want you to come back to us. The song turned out to be a bigger hit than the musical which closed on Broadway in less than a year, although the movie version did somewhat better. It has been sung by a wide range of performers.

"Hear my voice where you are; take a train, steal a car. Hop a freight, grab a star. Come back to me." That is our fondest hope. We are doing all we can to make your stay here with us this time the best vacation you have experienced in your life, specifically because we want you to come back to us. We continue to come up with exciting things for you to do by day or night, such as the new Planetarium in downtown Cancun, the also new Mayan Museum in the Cancun hotel zone, the unique Underwater Art Gallery off the coast of Cancun with hundreds of sculptures anchored below the surface of the sea which makes for a very unique picture taking opportunity.

"Catch a flame, catch a breeze, on your hands, on your knees; swim up high only please, come back to me." In other words, no matter how you have to do it, we want you to come back to visit us. We promise we will continue to come up with new and exciting things for you. For instance, you are unlikely to find the wide range of venues that will be showing live telecasts of every game of the FIFA World

Cup Brazil 2014, the most widely watched sporting event in the world every four years. Well this week and for most of the coming month we have a myriad number of venues for you to enjoy the matches, especially those involving your country's national team if it made it to the tournament. One great place for watching those games which will take place mainly during the day is the Outback Steakhouse and Sports Bar, overlooking the lagoon in the

Cancun hotel zone.

"On a mule or a jet, with your hair in a net, in a shower all wet; I don't care, this is where you should be." That's another thing. We really don't care all that much how you are dressed, whether your hair is in a net or not. We even have some clothing optional or partially optional beaches if you don't care to dress all that much, for you to enjoy. In fact, we upgraded our 80-mile stretch of Caribbean beaches just a few years ago, correcting the beach erosion damage done by the ravages of weather like hurricanes just to encourage you to lie down in the sun and soak up its rays while you are here. In other words, this is where you should be when choosing a beach location for your vacation.

"From the hills to the shore, by the wind to my door..." Many of you do come from the hills to our beautiful shores. And when you do, as you, no doubt are aware, we have all manner of spiffy things for you to do. For instance, we offer some really great, world-class theme parks like Xcaret, Xel-Há, Xplor Adventure, the new Xoximilco with its great daytime and night time sail through its canals on long boats with food, drink and music to accompany you. And, of course, the three Delphinus dolphinariums with a chance to swim with those fun-loving sea mammals and have a visual record made of the experience to take home with you. By the way, Experiencias Xcaret, the owner-operators of those venues also offer some great tours that allow you to get a first-hand look and experience such things as the Mayan ruins, our unique underground waterways and even a visit to old Spanish colonial cities like Valladolid in the neighboring state of Yucatan.

"Raise the highway dust, break the law if you must, throw the world only just come back to me." Well, we really don't want you to break the law. We would be charged with aiding and abetting by urging you to do so. However, we do just want you to come back to us. Come back to see super stars performing here as they have during the past couple of years; stars like Usher, Shakira, Enrique Iglesias, Luis Miguel, Ricky Martin and a host of others. Meanwhile, now that you are here, what you really should do is get out there and...

Enjoy!

## Novel grocery shopping idea in Cancun and Riviera Maya



La Voz de Mexico

Some local Cancun entrepreneurs have come up with a novel idea to make vacation life easier for visitor snowbirds (some who spend more than just five days) in the Mexican Caribbean. It's called We Deliver, a new online grocery shopping service where all the vacationer has to do is to put in an order.

While on vacation in Cancun and the Riviera Maya, you can let We Deliver do the grocery shopping for you. For those whose Spanish isn't up-to-par, shopping can be confus-

ing. The unfamiliar aisles and items in a foreign language, the exchange rates and costs, and dealing with taxi drivers, they all take time away from the beach.

Now tourists and locals alike can enjoy more time doing what they love most, while someone else does the grocery shopping and delivers it right to your door.

How does it work? It's just a phone call or a few computer key strokes away. The best way is to let them do the shopping before you arrive and have it delivered when you get here.

It's easy with their organized website in English, where visitors choose items from the wide selection of food and necessities, as well as any party needs you might have. The idea of one-stop shopping has gone to a whole new level.

Everything from fruits and vegetables (bought fresh daily) and dairy products to meat and poultry, beverages and bakery items, their shopping list is complete. And for those who are here more permanently, cleaning and laundry products, household items and more are included in the list.

They are more than happy to do special orders.

For more information, visit: [www.wedeliver-cancun.com](http://www.wedeliver-cancun.com), or e-mail: [info@wedeliver-cancun.com](mailto:info@wedeliver-cancun.com).

By phone: (998) 884-2293 in Mexico or toll-free from North America 1-855-229-8687.



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