

The Washington Post

Where is everybody?

My wife and I had the cabbie drop us in downtown Isla Mujeres so we could polish off some croissants and a plate of chilaquiles, that Mexican breakfast staple, before wandering over to Playa del Norte, the island's most popular beach. As we sat at the outdoor cafe, the early-morning sun still formulating its plan of attack on our cubicle-pale bodies, we couldn't help noticing that aside from the wait staff and the steroidal lobster lolling in a nearby tank, we were about the only creatures around.

Our sense of being the last tourists on the island only intensified as we walked those few quiet blocks to the beach. The narrow streets, crowded with shops and restaurants and hotels, were almost deserted, too. The browned, weather-beaten men and women who stood vigil outside their stores viewed us, I felt, less as tourists than as sheep that must be trapped, and not released, until sheared of our wool.

Even if the "swine flu discounts," as my wife and I started referring to them, aren't as generous as they were earlier this year, Americans still have a built-in discount these days. The dollar's exchange rate against the peso is approaching all-time highs. At current rates, each dollar exchanged will return you about 13 pesos, far better than the nine- or 10-peso rate you got during the late '90s.

Isla Mujeres Palace, a luxury property, is already open there, and more fancy-looking properties are under construction on the south end of the island, not far from Garrafon. And just as worrisome to someone like me: Taco Campos, the island's best taqueria, has vanished from the baseball field where it was once located. So said the taxi driver when we asked him to take us there.