

worthy alternative

Pie de la Cuesta, Mexico

It once served as the backdrop for a Rambo movie, but the vibe of this under-the-radar village is thoroughly mellow. By Julia Cooke

YOU WON'T FIND much in the way of glamour in the Mexican town of Pie de la Cuesta, a 20- to 30-minute drive from perpetually buzzy Acapulco. But the sense of escape is precisely what's been drawing an increasing number of travelers to this peaceful, six-mile stretch of coast. "It's rare to find a place that still has that slightly wild look," says Parwin Kojani, a fashion designer from Los Angeles. In 1996, Kojani opened the now-26-room **Hacienda Vayma**, decorated with mosquito nets and colorful Mexican blankets (vayma.com.mx, from \$73). On any given day, Kojani's guests sprawl out under palapas and lounge in hammocks near the swimming pool, which looks out over the Pacific Ocean.

The rest of the village is made up of a handful of seafood shacks, family-run quintas (small hotels), and half-finished, vine-covered houses scattered among mangroves and palm trees. On one side of the main road lies the town's beach (it's not ideal for swimming in the summer months because the undertow is strong). Opposite, the roughly 28-square-mile

Coyuca Lagoon provides a waveless expanse perfect for waterskiing and wakeboarding; the lagoon-side **Tres Marias Ski Club** rents out motorboats and equipment (tresmariasacapulco.com, boat, driver, and wakeboard or water skis \$60 per hour).

At the town pier, captains linger, ready to shuttle customers on a 15- to 30-minute ride upriver (about \$12) to see **Doña Polita**, whose Barra de Coyuca spa consists of a single thatched hut. Inside, she offers one treatment: a cleansing mud mask, applied to just the face or the whole body (no phone, facial mud masks \$4, full-body \$10). Visitors can wait 15 minutes for the clay to dry and rinse it off there, or ride back to Pie de la Cuesta looking like extras from *Rambo*—the 1985 sequel was filmed in the jungly hills above the lagoon. It's the closest thing to a Hollywood scene you're likely to see in this lovably ramshackle refuge. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY NELISSA BARNES

Tour boats waiting at the south end of the Coyuca Lagoon in the town of Pie de la Cuesta