

# Lunch at Thorny's

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**A story by Russ Sherwin, Mazatlan, Mexico, copyright 2002**

Thorny's serves the best hamburgers in Mazatlan, possibly in Mexico. Boat-buddy Howard told us this on our first day in Mazatlan, and it was proven unequivocally at lunch that same day. Last Tuesday I set out by myself to run some errands, with a vague idea that if time permitted, I would have lunch at Thorny's.

I stood at the bus stop outside El Cid Marina for a good long time waiting for the Sabalo Centro bus that would take me downtown. There is something about waiting for a bus that makes the appearance of busses impossible. Sort of a Schroedinger's Cat type of thing. So when no busses appeared, I walked the couple of blocks toward Hotel Playa Real where busses gather in great numbers, standing with their wheels turned into the curb, vacant and silent. Through the windshields of the older ones, ones whose windshields are not so heavily tinted as the new ones, can be seen the shoes of the drivers propped on the steering wheel. These busses are clearly out of service, like horses tied to a hitching post outside a saloon. They will awaken when they are needed, but now they are dozing like their drivers.

I walked along the sidewalk, insulated by the snoozing busses from the view of other busses passing in the street. There were a number of them I would have happily boarded and ridden had they stopped, but they didn't because they couldn't see me. When I reached the bus stop, I waited. Now they could see me clearly, and see my eagerness to board them reflected in my face, but still they roared by, leaving a wake of paper cups, diesel fumes, and cigarette wrappers. Finally one stopped, one of the new air-conditioned ones, and for 9 pesos I rode in kingly splendor down to the Internet Café which was my first objective of the day. Then I went into the Papeleria next door and bought two reams of copy paper for the printer on board *Four Seasons*.

Thorny's hamburgers are of the type that are seldom found in the U.S., let alone in Mexico. They are about an inch thick, hand formed of premium beef, and cooked to perfection. It was upon leaving the Papeleria and finding that it was 11:30 that the possibility of having lunch at Thorny's firmed into resolution. Now all I had to do was find it.

Having been driven to a place once and then finding one's own way there later are two different things, especially when the first time one is in animated conversation with friends and not paying attention. I knew it was near the Cathedral, and I was determined to get there by bus. I did not want to give in to the seductive call of the Pulmonias, open air taxis which are everywhere in Mazatlan. These, unlike busses, are thick as gnats at sundown. This would be cheating. One should be able to get anywhere in Mazatlan on the bus. Once again, after crossing the street from the Papeleria, I waited at the bus stop. The flow of busses immediately dwindled to a trickle. I was waiting for the Sabalo Centro bus, but I would take Sabalo Coco if it came, since I thought they ran fairly near the same course. Finally Sabalo Coco came and actually stopped. I boarded, but after struggling through the immediate traffic jam we found ourselves in, the bus made an abrupt left turn in a direction I did not approve of. It was halfway to Sam's Club before I could get off. Humbled, I walked back to the same bus stop and waited for Sabalo Centro. No dice. At least 7 more Sabalo Cocos came by and roared off in the wrong direction, carrying happy Sam's

customers, no doubt, and many more came by proposing destinations I'd never heard of, but no Centros. After 20 minutes of Centro busses staying away in herds, probably bunched up just around the corner waiting for me to leave, I gave in and flagged down a Pulmonia.

The driver, of course, spoke about as much English as I do Spanish, so when I told him I wanted to go to "Thorny's Hamburgueses", he queried, "Tony's?" No, I said, Thorny's. He knew three Tony's, but no Thorny's, and seemed unable to even get his tongue around it, dissolving into fits of laughter whenever he tried. I remembered it was somewhere near the Cathedral, so I told him that and for 40 pesos we sped off in a cloud of fumes. I felt that if I could get to the Cathedral I could walk in ever widening circles until I tripped and fell in the door of Thorny's. If it had a door, which in fact it does not, being a sidewalk café.

Thorny, according to Howard, has started, run, and sold a number of Hamburger joints beginning in Santa Cruz, California, and ending here in Mazatlan. He is the image of an aged, burned out flower child, but whatever he may be, he serves world class burgers. My Pulmonia deposited me near the Cathedral as planned and I began my spiral. This quickly took me into some very interesting neighborhoods with increasingly decrepit cars being worked on by increasingly disreputable people, so I began to spiral back toward the Cathedral. No Thorny sightings. I passed lots of sidewalk stands with tacos, tamales, shrimp, oysters, clams, lobsters, and chicken, even several versions of hamburgers, but I was seeking only Thorny's.

Now I remembered it was near a square bounded on one edge by a theater. I just couldn't remember what theater. I was having fun anyway, just rambling along, looking at the markets and getting the sense of the town. The two reams of copy paper I had bought at the Papeleria were becoming increasingly heavy, however. I found Barbershop Central, where every third store was a barbershop, and I filed this away for future reference. I will need a haircut soon, but not today. On my third trip past the marketplace, I spotted a poster for various theaters, and Voila! Teatro Angela Peralta was one of them. This was the one. I waited until a young couple came by and I pointed to the advertisement for Teatro Angela Peralta and asked where I might find this theater. They were very accommodating, and told me it was two blocks that way, then two blocks left.

I have never yet received instructions from any Mexican that had even the remotest semblance of accuracy. It is not with maliciousness that they give you false instructions; they do their best, in fact. They earnestly want to give you directions. So earnestly that they will make them up if they don't know them. Two blocks means not 2, as the number, but "some quantity, maybe 2, maybe more" in the direction they are pointing. Or possibly in some other direction, though this will not become clear until you have traveled in the first direction and become lost. So after going two blocks "that way" and then at least four blocks left with no Teatro in sight, I tried for directions again. And again I received exactly the same instructions. It was still two blocks that way, then two blocks left. After another six or eight blocks, I found the square, and the Theater and I knew that Thorny's couldn't be far off. I recognized everything!

Thorny puts large slices of fresh tomatoes and onions on his burgers, and they come on a toasted bun. An American made bun. He includes mayonnaise on the bun, and pickles. You can get it customized to your liking, for example, sans mayonnaise, but it is a difficult and error prone process as Donna found out the first time we were there. It is best if the assembly of the burger is not tampered with. There are also perfectly done French fries on the plate.

I came in on the wrong side of the square, so I had to go several times back to the theater and start over, but with determination, I finally found Thorny's.

Did I mention that this was Tuesday? Just for your future reference, in case you should ever want the world's best hamburger, Thorny's is closed on Tuesdays.

**The End**