

A Life-Saving Decision

Cozumel, Mexico is a truly magical island. It is difficult to put into words how this place can completely embrace you and give you a sense of contentment and peace. Those who have experienced it will know what I mean. Beyond that feeling, the island itself is spectacular. The crystal clear turquoise water is breathtaking. There are beautiful parks scattered all around. The east side of the island is marked by pristine beaches. The island is steeped in the Mexican and Mayan cultures with celebrations throughout the year. And the people of the island are some of the most genuine and generous people you will ever meet. For all of these reasons and more, my husband and I vowed many years ago that we would retire here in 2015. As a move in that direction, we obtained a year-round lease on a studio apartment in 2008 so we could vacation as often and for as long as we were able.

The following year, 2009, was one of significant change and major decisions. As a university professor and department chair, my life was consumed with work and was extremely stressful. It was so stressful that my lifestyle was far from healthy, and I had been diagnosed with congestive heart failure the previous year. In December 2009, it was time to get serious. We gave up our lease and purchased a beautiful ocean-front condominium on Cozumel, still with plans to retire in 2015.

2010 saw more stress and worsening health. Work had reached the point that it was intolerable, so I took an early retirement in July. At that point, my life depended on it. By December 7, we had sold everything we owned in Texas and made the move to Cozumel.

At 54, I could not access my retirement without penalty for another 5 years, so I needed to find some means of income. In Mexico, that is difficult for foreigners and the pay is minimal; minimum wage is about \$6 USD per day. I did have a little time to figure out what I wanted to do, though.

As one can imagine, we spend a fair amount of time picking up friends at the airport. It's fascinating to watch all the people as they come out of Customs. You see exhaustion, excitement, frustration, and a host of other emotions on their faces. The thing that frequently caught our attention was the families who were coming here for vacation.

Traveling with children can be a challenge. That may be the understatement of all understatements. Dealing with the children themselves is challenge enough as you work your way through airports and try to keep them entertained on the flight(s). On top of that, though, is the thing we noticed most. Holy cow, the amount of gear parents have to wrangle when they travel! In addition to all the heavy luggage, there are strollers, car seats, pack 'n plays and a host of other things. We never failed to feel sorry for these parents. Eureka! A business idea was born.

Baby in Paradise opened for business in December 2012. We rent all manner of baby and toddler gear to island visitors so they don't have to bring it with them. We have everything I mentioned before plus beach toys, high chairs, monitors and more. We even deliver anywhere on the island and pick up when it's time for visitors to go home. The business is small but growing steadily thanks to a strong social marketing presence and advertisement on websites that travelers frequent. I plan to expand, adding other services, and I have a couple of other business ideas in my back pocket for the future.

Today, my life is nothing like it was 3 or 4 years ago. I wake up to a beautiful blue ocean view looking across to Playa del Carmen on the mainland. Mornings are spent on deliveries/pick ups and other business-related activities. A little time is devoted to personal necessities like shopping and cleaning. Then it's time for me. By 2:00 or 3:00, I am out in the sun, be it at the pool or the beach. If I want, I can snorkel or just relax at El Cielo (a most beautiful and enchanting spot to tie up a boat and just enjoy the shallow water and starfish). My husband is a diver, so he is out exploring the reefs every chance he gets. The diving here is some of the best in the world. One of the things we really love is the ability to walk so many places.

Life moves at a much slower pace now. I recently learned that there are no further signs of my congestive heart failure. I have lost 100 pounds. My blood pressure medications have been reduced. Life is like a dream. My business is beginning to cover living expenses, which are very low here. You can live quite well on \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year. The people are truly wonderful and welcoming. I don't think I could have ever dreamed that my life could be so peaceful. Almost anything I could want or need is here, including great medical care at unbelievably affordable rates.

I was a teacher before; today I teach people about this magical island! My goal now is to get more of my friends to join me in this spectacular lifestyle!