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Ajijic's New Casa del Sol Inn

By Judy King



The beautiful pool and patio at Casa del Sol Inn.

Lisa filled a cup with coffee at the beverage bar in the Hacienda Room of Ajijic's new Casa del Sol Inn and then followed the inn's owner and me outside to the shady table beside the inn's sparkling, crystal-clear pool.

"Sometimes it seems like a new inn or B&B opens here at Lakeside every week," Lisa said, scanning the terrace with its comfortable conversation areas and pool loungers. "With all the company I have from the states, I go preview them all. Cathy, I can tell you, very few of the other places can compare with the ambiance, quality and attention to detail and service you've created here."

Soon after the extensive renovation of the Casa del Sol building at Javier Mina #7 began, Lisa started stopping in to see the progress, and as soon as she could see the warm ambiance and extra amenities planned by owners Dick Paddock and Cathy Roberts, she started urging me to schedule a slot in Living at Lake Chapala to feature this new eight-room inn.

By January and the planned opening, Lisa told me that Dick was terminally ill with cancer. Still, with the help of new friends and family members from North of the border, the intrepid Cathy opened on schedule and stayed open during the unfathomably difficult weeks leading to Dick's death on February 8.



All of the balconies, nooks and crannies, corners and passageways of Casa del Sol have been delightfully furnished with small, intimate conversation areas.

"We'd first seen this property on our November 2004 visit to Ajijic and could see the potential. It had good bones. By the time we'd made our offer and then closed in August 2005, we knew Dick was sick, but we thought we'd have several more years to enjoy living here together. I'd never planned to own or operate a B&B, this was Dick's dream, and he lived to see the inn finished. During our January 26 grand opening, we took digital photos of the food and band and the people wandering through the building and then we'd take the camera to the bedroom in our apartment so he could be part of the celebration.

"It was a great day. He was thrilled that we'd finished construction on time and when I told him we'd taken ten reservations that day he just beamed. I think on some level Dick always planned that the inn would be perfect for me, to give me something to keep me going."



This Casa del Sol room features two queen size beds and a charming balcony with comfortable chairs for reading or visiting.

"I worked in corporate America as a human resources director long enough to hone my skills as a compartmentalizer. Being with the guests and staying busy so many hours a day keeps my mind calm." She gazed at the pool for a minute and said, "He was right. The inn keeps me going, that and my friends. We really had only been here for six months and over 40 people showed up for the memorial service we had for Dick. Everyone from the nurses who were so caring to extraordinary service from the oxygen supply company to the

doctors—the local doctors were great and two of the urologists drove out from Guadalajara with blood for Dick when he needed it."

Cathy squared her shoulders and changed the subject with a determination that has carried her through this difficult time, saying, "Now, how about a tour."

As we walked into the building Cathy pointed out a cozy bar area. "The guests and I gather here for sunset most nights. They enjoy sharing their experiences of the day. We offer the guests snacks and have an honor bar with wine, beer, sodas and a pitcher of margaritas. They really seem to enjoy sharing the adventures of their day with each other, and we all learn from one another.

"We've added many extras here to create an environment that is both comfortable and beautiful. My friend Suzanne Forrer guided me every step of the way to create the image of lush landscaping, even though most of our plants are in pots, and to create tasteful but colorful and fun Mexican décor in all of the guest rooms and our common areas.



Each of the seven rooms in Casa del Sol has its own distinctly different, elegant Mexican personality.



There's a charming sitting area just outside the doors of this guest room. Like most of the rooms at Casa del Sol, there is adequate cross ventilation in this room with the entry door, the sitting area door and the window.

"We've even gone the extra mile on the things that aren't visible at a glance. We made sure that our beds are top notch and all of our cotton sheets are luxury quality with a high thread count. That means that when we're busy we have an extra woman who comes in just to launder and iron the sheets. The part-time cleaning staff just don't have time to do it all."

Rooms and Amenities

In all there are eight guest rooms at Casa del Sol, plus of course Cathy's owner's apartment. She thinks the size of the inn is perfect. "There are enough guests here for folks to get a chance to meet some new people, but with just 10-16 people here, I can be sure that everyone is well taken care of and having a good time. In order to ensure that good time we do have a couple of rules. We prefer to book a minimum two-night stay, and with my own dogs on site, we cannot accept guests with pets."

While most of the rooms are on the second story, there is one room on the first floor, and there is handicapped access to the second floor of the inn via the quaint lift which is also used to transport luggage to the upper level.

"We wanted to be sure that our guests had plenty of water and good water pressure, so we have installed a water pressure system and extra water heating capacity." Cathy beamed with pleasure as she added, "In addition there is a whole building water purification system, so the water from the water taps throughout the inn is pure and safe, plus we provide bottled water for our guests."

"Did you notice how bright and clear the water is in our pool? We're one of the first inns in town to have a top of the line, salt water filtration system for our pool. Our guests are loving it. There is no chlorine to damage swimsuits or wreck havoc on our hair. The salt water even leaves our skin soft...it is easy on the eyes. The temperature has been steady at around 85 Fahrenheit, with our solar heating system."



The guests love having their own kitchen on one of the terraces. This cute area has everything necessary to make an extra-early pot of coffee, chill a bottle of wine, warm up last night's "doggy bag."

Breakfast

In order to give guests that extra splash of service, this inn has a full menu of choices during the breakfast time from 8:30 a.m. until 10 a.m. daily.

"When I've stayed in most B&Bs in the U.S., there has only been one choice at breakfast."

Sometimes I'm just not in the mood for pancakes or a western omelet. Since that's been my pet peeve, I wanted to make it better for our guests.

"We always serve fresh fruit, juices, yogurt, granola, our own special home-made muffins and eggs fixed any way the guest wants them. We have a variety of ingredients on hand for adding to omelets or scrambles, a choice of several breakfast meats and breads, and then every day we have a chef's special. Today that was waffles with strawberries, whipped cream and *real* maple syrup."

Cathy told Lisa and me that the convenient guest kitchen always evokes great comments from visitors to the inn. "Folks tell us that is something they've always wanted—a place to fix a cup of tea, keep some sodas or yoghurt or have a glass of milk and a piece of toast at bedtime. I get tired of eating out when I'm traveling. Sometimes I just want to have a plain ham sandwich. Some of the guests have purchased fresh fruits and vegetables at the street market and then used the mini-kitchen to make beautiful salads for their suppers."



There are delightful spots to sit and relax or read near every room at Casa del Sol.

"Can you help guests who want to see some of the area?" Lisa was still thinking about all the friends that have said they are coming to visit this year. "My friends that will be here next summer want to visit Tequila and see the distillery there and then go on to Magdalena to shop for opals."

Cathy nodded, "I'm always available to help our guests with the additional services that make all the difference on a trip. We do help plan and book personal or group tours of the area, we can even have horses and a guide brought right to our door if our guests enjoy horse back riding! We can usually arrange for a group to book the entire inn, if they contact us far enough in advance. In fact, we're convinced that our service is surpassed only by our ambiance."

As Cathy led Lisa and me on through the rooms we admired the ambiance of the inn. All eight rooms are attractive and all have delightfully decorated and designed private talavera bathrooms, a king-size or two queen-size beds, luxurious mattresses, sheets and pillows, cable TV, internet access for the guests' laptops and ceiling fans. The rooms all have a balcony or secluded terrace with comfortable furniture. Guests may also use the inn's telephone to make free calls locally and to the U.S. and Canada.



Just when guests think they've seen everything Casa del Sol has to offer, Cathy has one more surprise in store. There's a rooftop mirador with a bird's eye view of St. Andrés steeple. Ajijic's parish church is located near the central plaza just three blocks away.

Both Lisa and I were impressed with the décor, the amenities and especially with Cathy's sincere desire to make her guests comfortable and happy. Casa del Sol is located near the center of Ajijic on a quiet residential street. It's just a short walk from the Lake Chapala Society, several excellent restaurants, dozens of boutiques, galleries and shops and the town plaza, with all of the activities and services that happen there.

Casa del Sol Inn

Javier Mina #7, Ajijic

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From U.S. call Toll Free: 1 866-403-9275

Website: www.casadelsolinn.com

Email: info@casadelsolinn.com

Costs and Reservations:

Depending on the room and time of year, one or two persons stay in a room with a balcony for \$85-\$95 U.S. per night with a two-night minimum. Non-balcony rooms are \$75-85 U.S. There is a \$15 U.S. charge for each additional person. These prices include breakfast and all taxes.

Cathy asks that guests be sure to make reservations well in advance to avoid disappointment. Reservations must be guaranteed with a 50% U.S. deposit.
