



Hacienda Hotel, Mulegé

After merging the Club Mulegé Lodge with the older hacienda building behind it in 1962, Salazar and his Mexican partner renamed their hotel the Hacienda de Mulegé, or the Vieja Hacienda (Old House) of Mulegé.

Today it's just known as the Hotel Hacienda. Right in the center of town across the street from the plaza, the Hacienda is a group of 26 rooms around a cozy central courtyard with colorful plants and flowers, and a small bar which doubles as a reception counter off to the side. Ten of the rooms were added in 1959 during rebuilding following a major *chubasco* (storm) that hit town. Nine rooms were just added recently.

In 1964 the Hacienda was purchased by owner/manager Alfonso "Al" Cuesta. He loved talking to American guests, and according to one source, it was "in the most broken English you've ever heard." His practice over the past 36 years has paid off, because I found Señor Cuesta, now 73 years old, to speak fluent English.

The 1971 *Sunset Guide to Baja California* talks about Mulegé's historic Hacienda and indicated that Cuesta himself must have felt his English needed some work with this report: "A sign outside the 200-year-old adobe near the plaza reads: '*Vieja Hacienda Hotel — Broken English spoken.*'"

The article continued, concurring with my assessment of Señor Cuesta's linguistic ability, "Inside the Hacienda Hotel, a spacious courtyard lined with rocking chairs is filled with colorful bougainvillea, including one purple-flowered specimen 90 years old. The rooms are enormous, with high beamed ceilings and adobe walls three feet thick. Rates are \$10 a day per person on the American plan, \$5 on the European plan. The owner, incidentally, speaks excellent English."

Reports from the '60s and '70s noted that Cuesta took pride in showing off his great treasure, a beautiful Stradivarius violin crafted in 1731. I asked him how he came by such a piece of antiquity and he laughed and said, "It's a long story." He admitted that he never did take violin lessons, having taught himself how to play the instrument.

Cuesta is one of those hands-on guys you'd almost expect to be an accomplished violinist just by practicing on his own. I heard from someone that he is an accomplished bush pilot. I met him at his newest enterprise, the Cuesta Real Hotel on the river south of town (just before the Serenidad). The hotel was still undergoing construction, growing on the lot that extends from the highway to the river. He gestured about and indicated what he was planning. "And then," he added, pointing to possible future expansion, "My children can always make it bigger."

Cuesta has five sons and a daughter. Two of the boys moved to Ensenada, and his daughter to Guanajuato, Mexico, but the others are in Mulegé. Son Adrián S. Cuesta Romero now manages the vintage Hacienda Hotel. Son Ciro A. Cuesta Romero is an authorized guide who takes tourists to Indian paintings and petroglyphs in the Mulegé area.

The Old Hacienda Hotel in the center of town is an old, high-ceilinged kind of place, with acoustics that still allow you to hear dogs barking and roosters crowing outside. The room rates are still very low. There's now a restaurant owned by Americans on a corner of the building facing the plaza.

The Hacienda attracts travelers who like old Mexican ambience and the ability to walk outside and browse around the picturesque town of Mulegé.