

hen you arrive on the island of Holbox, the first thing you'll notice is what's missing: There are no high-rises, no paved roads, and no cars. Indeed, this sparsely populated, 26-mile-long fishing island off the Yucatán Peninsula got electricity only 15 years ago. What Holbox does offer—and what repeatedly draws the families who have discovered it—is that much-sought feeling of removal from the modern world. (So what if the wet-T-shirt mecca of Cancún is a mere 100 miles southeast?)

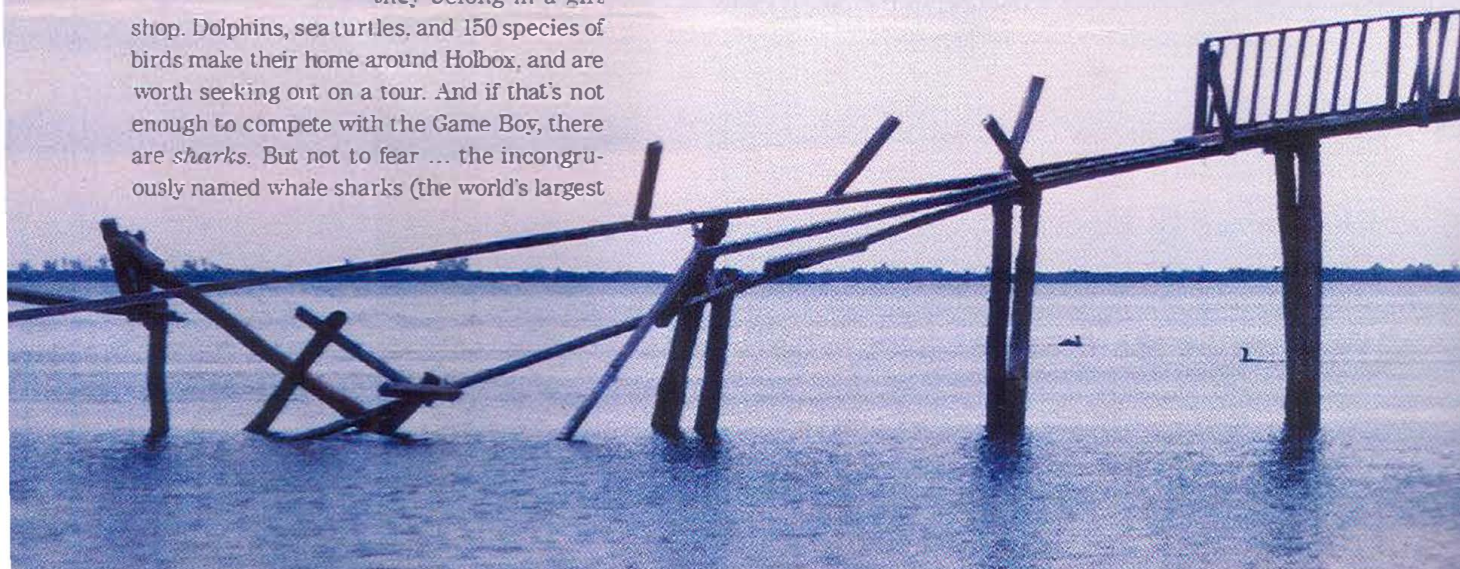
Of course, what's tranquil for Mom and Dad can sometimes translate to torturous boredom for the kids. Luckily, that won't be the case here: The beach is ideal for young swimmers,

with shallow, waveless water and shells so perfect they look like they belong in a gift

HOLBOX, MEXICO

Casa Sandra

shop. Dolphins, sea turtles, and 150 species of birds make their home around Holbox, and are worth seeking out on a tour. And if that's not enough to compete with the Game Boy, there are *sharks*. But not to fear ... the incongruously named whale sharks (the world's largest





Clockwise from left:
The balcony at Casa Sandra; shells collected on the beach; the local cinema; beachcombing along the seemingly boundless shore; the owner (left) and staff at La Isla del Colibrí, a café in town.



fish) cluster in such great numbers and are so friendly that any confident swimmer can safely flutter-kick among them (in the company of a boat-tour guide).

Between adventures, Casa Sandra is an idyllic place to call home. Owned by Cuban expat Sandra Perez Lozano, the inn is luxe but relaxed, with a staff that's attentive without being suffocating. Perez Lozano herself is always around, asking after guests' days and hanging out with her young son, Antonio. At the restaurant, the chef comes to each table to personally describe the specials. Each of the 12 rooms and suites overlooks the ocean and has comfortable hacienda-style furniture. And on the beach, big, welcoming *palapas* offer some shady solitude and beckon you to do absolutely nothing.

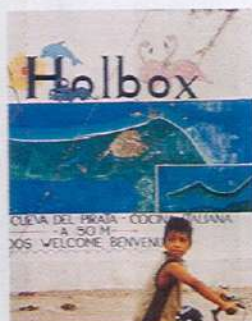
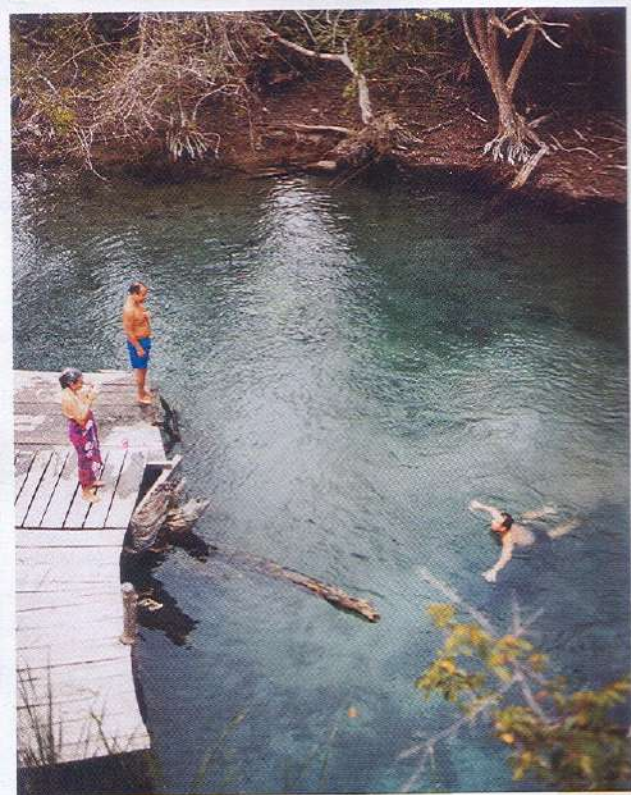
ECO MATTERS

Holbox is part of the Yum Balam Bioserve, a 380,000-acre cluster of islands that is environmentally protected by the local and national governments.

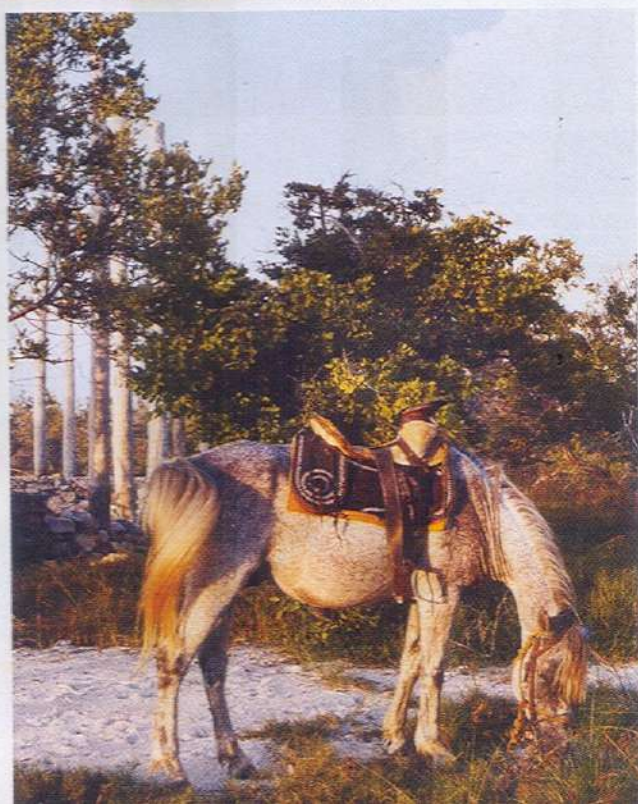


For more information on Holbox and Casa Sandra, turn to page 170.

Budding naturalists should keep their eyes peeled: Dolphin



Clockwise from above: Lounging in a palapa at Casa Sandra; a guide horse taking a break from an island tour; a freshwater swimming hole in the middle of a neighboring island; one of the inn's rooms; whitefish soup at Casa Sandra; Holbox's welcome sign.



common sights.