

Hiking to the El Faro Lighthouse

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Perched upon Cerron Del Creston on the southern end of Mexico's Peninsular Mazatlán, you'll find a lighthouse that has served this part of the Pacific Ocean since 1828. Mazatlan is a city in the Mexican state of Sinaloa.

The El Faro Lighthouse watches over the largest port between the U.S. and the Panama Canal. Being the highest natural lighthouse in the Americas, it sits just over 500 feet above sea level. It also recently overtook Gibraltar as the highest natural, operational lighthouse in the world. Being too high to see up close, the beacon on the Iberian Peninsula got moved to a lower elevation in 2015.

El Faro means "lighthouse" in Spanish. As one of 10 such light-emitting towers along the pacific coast of the Americas, it is easily identified by the unique signature code relative to its visible light time of each rotation. When captains of an ocean going vessel mark a lighthouse, they log that reading. Upon seeing the next beacon, they can calculate where they are in the Pacific Ocean, based on the signatures of the two lighthouses. Although commonly called the El Faro Lighthouse, its actual name, which is rarely used, is Isla Creston Lighthouse

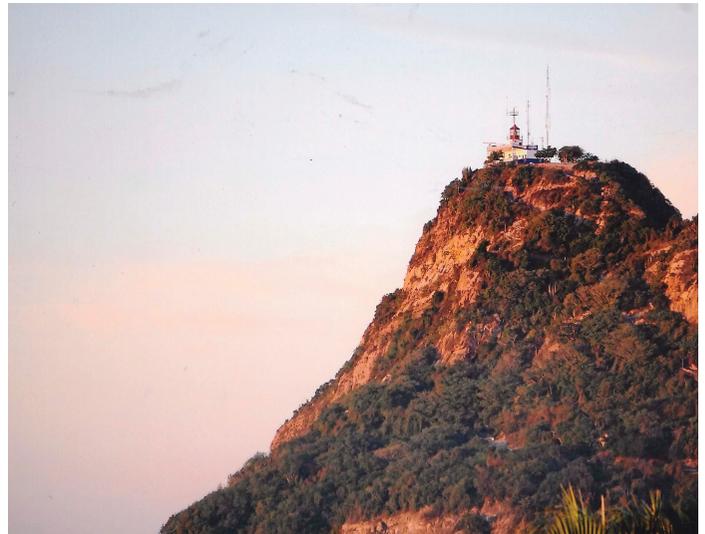
Traversing the half mile trail to one of the most iconic lighthouses in the world takes about 30-40 minutes at a casual stroll. The free self-guided tour begins at the base of Cerron Del Creston near the Playa Sur Marina and La Paz ferry terminal.

As you begin hiking upwards, the path quickly turns from a concrete driveway to a dirt path. At about the halfway point of the trek, the unpaved walkway ends and concrete steps begin. If you count your way up, you should arrive at 340 risers. Be sure to stop along the way for a breather and a really pleasant view. Joggers are also common on this hill, and once you make the hike, it becomes clear why they utilize the pathway.

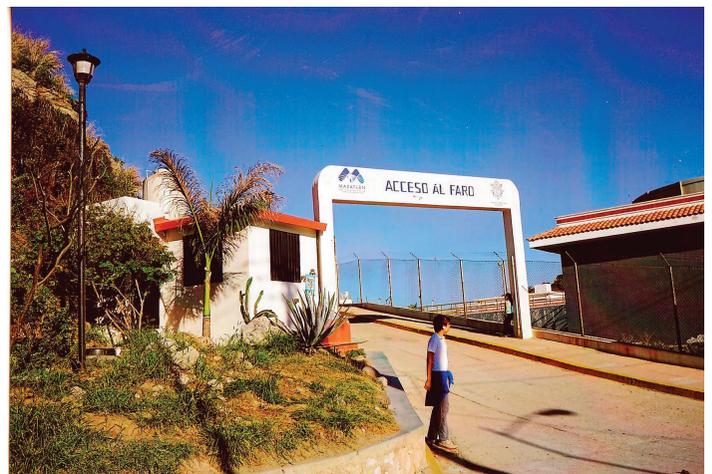
Various flowers and cacti shoot up out of the hill throughout the hike and subtly compliment the natural beauty found along the way. Towards the top, the escalating stairway grows fairly steep. The sightseeing hiker can find plenty of places to take a break, relax, and enjoy the scenery. Hikes can enjoy sitting on a circular concrete bench and watching ships cruising in and out of the port. They can take in the expansive view of Chivo Island and the gateway to the city of Mazatlán, often referred to as "The Pearl of the Pacific."

The El Faro Lighthouse originally used fire fueled by whale oil, wood, and coconut chips. After construction of the actual lighthouse and the lighting of the first lamp in 1879, the illumination became significantly brighter. It burned oil and utilized the Fresnel lens, a product of the Henry-LePaute Company of Paris, France, in combination with a compilation of mirrors and hand-polished lenses. In 1905, hydrogen replaced the oil and in 1933 it converted to electricity. With upwards of 600,000 candlepower, it now enables ships to locate the port from up to 30 nautical miles away.

Once you're at the top of the hill, you'll find magnificent 360-degree views encompassing the ocean, the city, and the surrounding area. While smelling fresh ocean air from cliff edge



This distant view of El Faro is the only way most tourists ever get to see the lighthouse.



Entry gate to El Faro.



The steps going to and from El Faro all offer amazing views.



El Faro is surrounded by an array of antennas.



More of the steps that go to and from El Faro. The view is spectacular from every step.

If you are considering the trek up Cerron Del Creston to the El Faro Lighthouse, here are a few things to keep in mind for your hike.

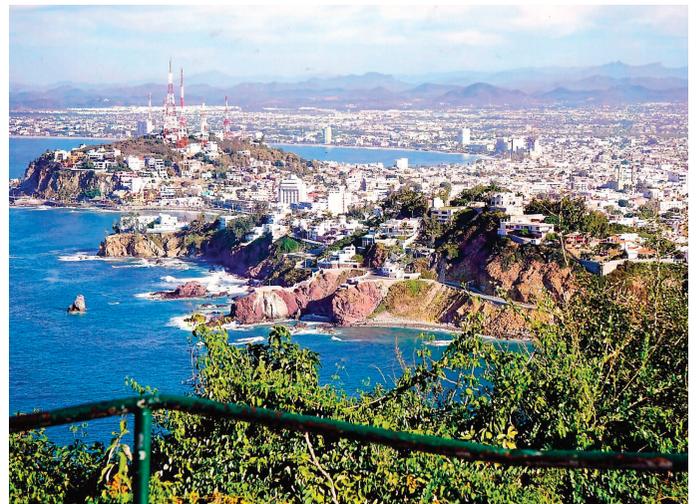
- ◆ Wear shoes. The dirt road portion of the hike can be a little steep in places. You will want some added grip over flip-flops or sandals.
- ◆ Get an early start. The sun can get hot once it is too far overhead. 8:30 am seemed to work out nicely for me.
- ◆ If you decide to go for sunset, bring a light source for the way down. Although there is some lighting along the way, it's dark in a few spots. It's not a place you want to be tripping or stumbling.
- ◆ Take a lunch or snack and your favorite beverage, particularly if you plan to hang on top for a while. Juice and water are the only items available at the top.
- ◆ There are no alternatives for people with disabilities; ambulatory or self-mobility issues. Be prepared for a good bit of exercise. Remember, you're hiking over 500 feet above sea level on a half-mile long path.
- ◆ There are no restroom facilities available at the top, or otherwise.

vantage points, you can see the golden zone of the Mazatlán in the distance to the west. The Pacifico Brewery and the Central Historical District sit to the northwest, and looking north you'll see Stone Island.

This unobstructed viewing atop the small, flat peak makes it well worth the effort to get there. At the top, the short, red and white lighthouse has a doorway to a little room that you can enter and purchase a juice or bottled water. That is the highest point you'll reach. Currently, you can no longer access the staircase that leads to the actual lens and light area.

Just outside the approach to the port are a couple small outcroppings. Known by locals as piedra blanco and piedra negra (white and black rocks), they caused many early vessels to become victims of the sea. Jutting out of the water, they support small towers with lights. They now save ships from tearing holes in their hulls and sinking before entering the gateway to the Port of Mazatlán.

In the latest reviews, the hike to El Faro Lighthouse ranked #8 out of 64 in the tourist listing of "The Best Things to Experience in Mazatlán." There are fantastic views on the hike up. I found it well worth the time and effort to reach the crest to be "above it all" with an incredible birds eye view of Mazatlán and the surrounding area.



There are very few lighthouses in the world where a person can experience a spectacular view such as this as can be done from El Faro.



The old Fresnel lens in the lantern at El Faro is still in use.