



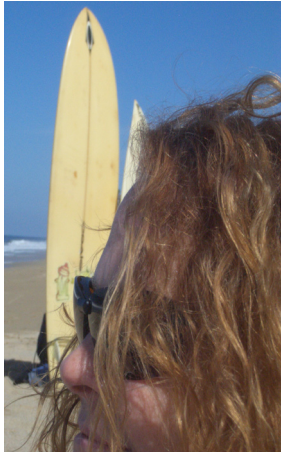
# mexico xpatz

the magazine for travelers & xpatz

June, 2009

eco living  
surfing  
history  
luxury rentals  
healthcare  
real-estate  
cuisine  
xpat stories  
yoga  
galleries  
the best flan  
puerto vallarta  
polo  
huichol indians  
Barry Golson's "gringos in paradise"

# Letter from the Publisher



Small and quiet,  
with an old-  
world feel, San  
Pancho is an  
oasis amidst  
chaos.

The village is charming, the beach expansive, clean and beautiful. And not crowded. Devoid of the sophistication of better-known destinations, San Pancho is one of the few beach towns that remain quiet and quaint—no high-rises, sparse traffic and lights out by 10. Its growth can be seen along the edges, though for the most part it is happening behind gargantuan iron gates surrounded by lush landscaping along the coast or back in the jungle overlooking the water. The Americans seem to blend very well here, taking care to delicately and respectfully integrate into the local scene.

Coastal, but tropical, unlike the Riviera Maya. Beautiful stretch of beach, but just a couple of people. Wonderful restaurants hinting at the dawn of sophistication, but quiet.

What a totally beautiful, unspoiled place this is. Hot in the sun, cool in the shade—green and apricot and magenta—surrounded by jungle. Lovely beaches, so few people, minimal congestion.

The dogs, on the other hand, they're everywhere. Miniature somethings; short legs, odd long bodies, wide heads. A quasi Chihuahua, dachshund, pit-bull if you will. Multiple. On every corner.

Cobblestoned streets, restaurant boasting a sign “Fresh Meat Lasagna” with only two tables on the sidewalk, the intermittent sound of roosters and a horse here and there.

The center of town is small and quaint, the main street leading to the beach. The road out of town is amazingly well groomed and lined with enormous, lush trees. The outlying towns of Sayulita and Bucerías are a quick, easy drive just south. A quick jaunt on what feels like the Road to Hana, a lovely road edged by mountains and jungle, takes you to places like Bucerías—the Mexican version of Venice Beach—and Sayulita—a bustling village great for surfing. Both excursions left me frantic to “get home” to the peace and tranquility of San Pancho.

A man on horseback followed by his dog trots down a cobblestoned street to the market. He nods to a carload of teenagers racing by. Old and new mingle. Little taco stands, elegant restaurants. Old adobe homes alongside mansions.

San Pancho is definitely up and coming. It has not quite arrived but it's a heartbeat away.

7:45 AM | Breakfast on the balcony      12:00 PM | Yoga at the shore      7:00 PM | Dinner under the stars  
 9:00 AM | Perfecting golf swing      **4:00 PM | Family "meeting" on the beach**      9:00 PM | Big screen movies on the beach

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# Between the Covers

Letter  
from  
the  
Editor

In this issue of *MexicoXpatz*, we move from the high sierra of Guanajuato to the tropical beaches of Nayarit. That's where you'll find San Pancho, a small fishing village that is just popping up on the radar of expats and travelers. About an hour up the coast from Puerto Vallarta, San Pancho (formally known as San Francisco) offers a laid-back atmosphere in stark contrast to its more famous neighbor to the south.

San Pancho is prime territory for both whale watching and surfing; Todd Hedrick's *Surfing San Pancho* gives tips on the best times to go and the best places to get your gear. There are plenty of places to stay that offer ocean views perfect for watching the whales that call the "Riviera Nayarit" their winter home. Marilyn Newman profiles some of the upscale spots in her article about luxury vacation rentals and there's an article about Casa Obelisco, a more affordable yet delightful bed-and-breakfast run by two American expat couples.

Small, yes; but boring, no. San Pancho has plenty to do, whether your tastes run to nature hikes, horseback riding, surfing, yoga retreats or just plain sight-seeing. Via Yoga is an expat enterprise run by two Seattle aficionados who offer yoga and Pilates retreats during the fall and winter months. Nancy Brown's *Things to Do* article lists activities to keep you busy during your visit. If you like hanging around the horse set, there's even a polo club, La Patrona. Read about it and its fascinating owners in Eileen Pierce's feature. There's also a glimpse of things to do in Puerto Vallarta if your journey finds you there.

The art scene is thriving as you will learn in Cori Jacobs' *The Galleries of San Pancho*. Bob Schulman's look at local legend "Mama Mono" adds insight into how important native arts are to the community. "Green living" and sensitivity to the

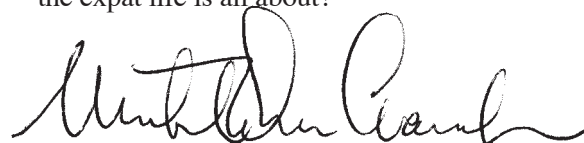
ecoscape are top-of-mind in San Pancho. Andrea Walker details how the local residents are living in harmony with nature, and Zena Polin highlights the efforts of a local group dedicated to renewing the sea turtle population that has been threatened both by nature and by a growing population.

Don't think you'll go hungry in San Pancho, either. Robin Noelle takes a look at local eateries, and Greg Miles talks with a couple about their experiences starting their restaurant. When you're ready to try your own hand at some San Pancho cuisine, we have recipes for a full meal courtesy of local restaurateur Amandine Darmstaedter, and Ellen Green shares the secret of "Eme's" flan recipe that locals claim is the best there is.

If you're considering the San Pancho area as a place to settle down, either full- or part-time, we have plenty of information for you. Bob Schulman's *Look Back* at the area's history and Robin Noelle's *Bird's Eye View* set the scene. Rebecca Arce gives you a look at the real estate market, and Gail Mitchell offers snapshots of four local expats and the journeys that led them to San Pancho. *ForbesTraveller* editor Barry Golson tells about how his dream of living in Mexico led him and his wife to the village of Sayulita, ten minutes south of San Pancho.

As delightful as living in Mexico can be, it helps to have a sense of humor to smooth out the occasional rough spot, and Robin Noelle offers readers a chuckle or two as she looks at driving in Mexico and the "little things" that pop up in the expat life.

This, our third issue, is the most ambitious to date. It's chock-full of information wrapped in the luxurious design MexicoXpatz is famous for. Take your time to enjoy it. After all, isn't relaxing what the expat life is all about?



Michael McClanahan, Editor

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# MexicoXpatz, LLC

3RD ISSUE - JUNE, 2009

3980 Broadway, Suite 103-153  
Boulder, CO 80302

[Publisher@MexicoXpatz.com](mailto:Publisher@MexicoXpatz.com)

Media Kit and Writers Guidelines at  
[www.mexicoxpatz.com](http://www.mexicoxpatz.com)

MexicoXpatz welcomes all  
written and photographic submissions.

Subscriptions: Four (4) issues annually \$9.99 US. Visit  
[www.mexicoxpatz.com](http://www.mexicoxpatz.com)

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Todd Hedrick  
Greg Miles

## **Photography**

Greg Miles

## **Website**

Lanitech Web Design

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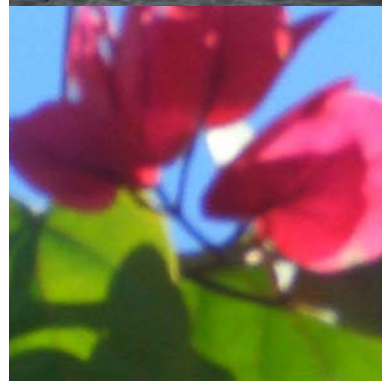
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The Roots of San Pancho

by Bob Schulman

# A Look

## The Roots of San Pancho

Legends say there was once an Eden-like place on the shores of western Mexico's modern-day state of Nayarit. Called Aztlán, it was said to be home to seven tribes who had moved there to live in harmony with each other and share a common language.

They broke up about a thousand years ago—some say to escape evil rulers who'd taken over—and each went its own way, eventually to settle down in different parts of the country.

One of the tribes was the Mexica. According to a prophesy, their new home would be a spot where they'd see an eagle perched on a cactus and eating a snake. It took some 200 years, but they finally found it—on a small, swampy island on a lake in Mexico's central highlands.

Later on, the Mexicas built a great city on the island where residents traveled along canals instead of streets under a skyline of spiraling pyramids and grand palaces. The city, named Tenochtitlán, today marks the location of Mexico City, and the country's national symbol is an eagle on a cactus eating a snake.

The Mexicas—who became known as Aztecs after the place they came from—went on to carve a coast-to-coast empire out of the rest of the country. It thrived

for two centuries, until the Spanish conquistadores showed up in 1519.

Just where was Aztlán? The experts differ on that, but the top contender seems to be the state of Nayarit. Local historians are sure of it. That's why the state's official coat of arms shows an eagle surrounded by seven footprints (symbolizing the paths of the seven tribes' pilgrimage from Aztlán).

What's more, a place in northern Nayarit thought to have been the ancient capital of the seven tribes is still there. Called Mexcaltitán, it's a city on an island cut by canals in the middle of a lake, much like a mini-Tenochtitlán. Look closely on the map, and you'll spot it about 45 miles down the Nayaritan coast from the state's northern border with Sinaloa.

# Back

So how does San Pancho fit into all this?

Farther down the coast of the ancient Aztlán empire (now called the Riviera Nayarit) is a town once known as Azapán. It's believed to have been a Mexica village, perhaps populated by tribal members who stayed behind when the others left to look for the eagle on the cactus.

What happened there over the next couple of centuries isn't known, but records show that Spanish troops

laid claim to the village in 1525. Their commander, Francisco Cortés de Buenaventura, changed its name to San Francisco (after his namesake saint) de Azapán.

Later on the name was shortened to simply San Francisco.

And as everyone around Mexico knows, Pancho is a commonly used nickname for Francisco. Hence: Azapán to San Francisco de Azapán to San Francisco to San Pancho. 🍷

by Robin Noelle

# Birds-*S*



**Southern Nayarit is one of the fastest growing regions in all of the Americas**

Up until recently, the most common question asked of a new face in San Francisco, Nayarit (San Pancho to the locals) was not “where are you from?” but “how did you find out about San Pancho?” The petite beach town, situated only 25 miles north of tourist mecca Puerto Vallarta, offers a chance to escape the timeshare salesmen and mega-resorts without giving up too many of the comforts of home. Until only a couple of years ago when the travel press began to cover it, San Pancho was still relatively unknown.

Once a simple fishing community consisting of approximately four extended families, San Pancho

was adopted by the then President of Mexico, Luis Echeverría, as a personal project to develop a self-sustaining city as a model to be emulated around the world. This is why you will find most of San Pancho’s streets are named after countries and the main road is named *Tercer Mundo*, or Third World. Echeverría encouraged the families to bring in more people, and as rewards for their work towards helping him build his model city, they were given plots of land on which to live and work. In addition to the new homes that featured indoor plumbing and electricity (something new for the area), the community built three schools, a

# De Viejo

## San Pancho: A Model Mexican Town



teaching hospital and planted massive orchards of fruit trees to help provide income to the growing town.

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**Until recently San Pancho was a fiercely guarded secret, the local expats not wanting to draw big tourist crowds to their secret paradise**

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At the end of the President's term, he was forced to flee the country and thus abandon his project, leaving the town to sustain itself, which it did, slumbering

peacefully until the mid-90s when it was discovered as a secret hideaway by visiting foreigners. Even up until recently San Pancho was a fiercely guarded secret, the "local" *gabachos* (Northerners) not wanting to draw big tourist crowds to their secret paradise.

Indeed, San Pancho is a little slice of heaven for as many as 1,500-1,800 residents, of which the majority are still related to the original San Pancho families. The quaint shops lining cobblestone streets, the petite *zócalo* (town square) and several miles of golden sand beaches give San Pancho the air of a traditional Mexican fishing village, however the

introduction of about 200 foreign-born residents has added an international flair to the little hamlet.

With those foreign residents has come a French bakery, several International restaurants, community projects, including endangered sea turtle conservation and a library, and a small clutch of art galleries and boutiques. Perched on a hill, there's even a yoga studio that offers a variety of classes and workshops.

## *Where in the World is San Pancho?*

### **Dolphins and whales frequent the San Pancho coast from November to February each year**

From the international airport in Puerto Vallarta, head north on Highway 200 along the coast. Soon after leaving the beach town of Bucerías, you'll enter a verdant jungle that covers the hills. Keep your eyes peeled and you might see some of the local wildlife and tropical birds that make this area their home. A few miles after passing the turnoff for the surfer's haven Sayulita, you'll see a small sign noting San Francisco, Nayarit. Make a left turn and you're on Tercer Mundo, the main street.

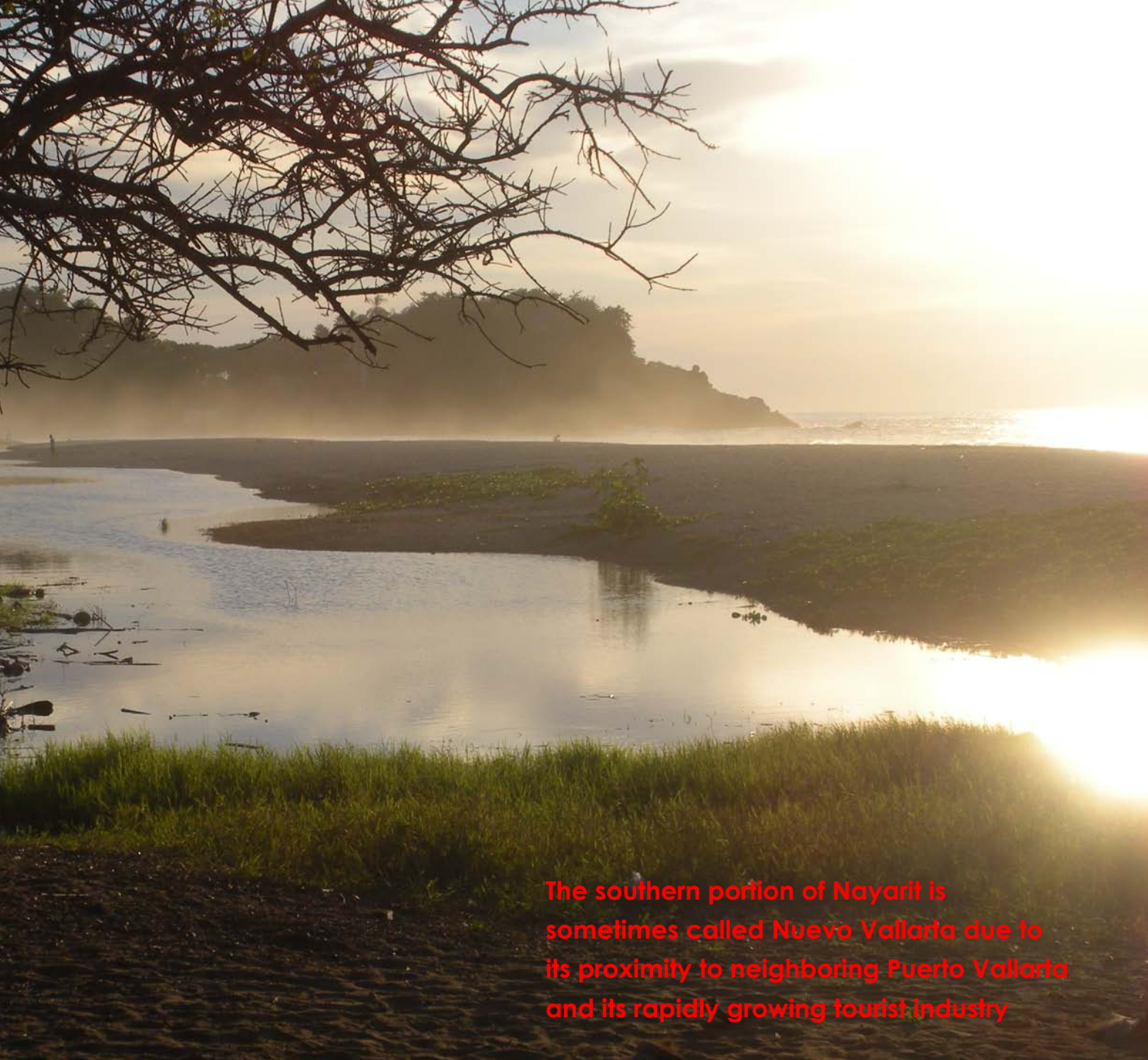
If you follow this street straight to the end, you will end up at small boardwalk where the local vendors set up their stands to sell handicrafts and jewelry to beachgoers. This is the main access to the several miles of beach that is most popular with beachcombers and surfers. At first glance, you may think that San Pancho isn't much more than the main drag lined with boutiques, taco stands and real estate offices, but it doesn't end here. By turning right two blocks before the street ends, you'll head north, following the coastline, past a large gated community and back into a hidden little neighborhood that hosts fine dining, several high-end shops and the area's only resort, Costa Azul.



## *What to Do*

Unfortunately, the beach is steep and the surf can be quite rough, so San Pancho is not a good location for swimming. Waders, during the milder times, can enjoy frolicking in the surf, but surfers and boogie boarders will have the most fun in the giant waves. Experienced and strong swimmers only please!

Despite the lack of ocean swimming, there are several beach restaurants to lunch at while enjoying the sound of the waves, and during the day you



**The southern portion of Nayarit is sometimes called Nuevo Vallarta due to its proximity to neighboring Puerto Vallarta and its rapidly growing tourist industry**

will find families enjoying the sun and sand. After you've had enough sun, head inland and take in an espresso, then browse the little shops and galleries that line Tercer Mundo. When the time comes to enjoy a stunning Pacific Ocean sunset, grab your drink and head back to the beach to watch the sky burst into color as the sun sinks below the horizon.

If you find San Pancho too tranquil for your tastes, you can always head to Puerto Vallarta for the day or visit Sayulita, the neighboring town that's a surfers' haven. You'll find a variety of tours, water activities and other outdoor recreation to while away the hours before heading back to peaceful San Pancho in the evenings.

## *Where to Stay*

There's a variety of places to stay in San Pancho, although the majority of people probably find a rental house on one of the popular rental websites like Rentalo or VRBO.com. There are a couple of small hotels right in town and as you head out into the jungle, there is the Costa Azul adventure resort and a few more bungalows and Bed & Breakfast places.

For in-town lodging, try Roberto's Bungalow ([www.robertosbungalow.com](http://www.robertosbungalow.com)).

*robertosbungalows.com*), five bungalows offering kitchenettes and modern amenities, just a few blocks from the beach. Whether you want to stay in the resort or not, Costa Azul (*www.costaazul.com*) offers great beach access and a beautiful pool for your enjoyment. There are three levels of accommodations with all-inclusive options (the best being the recently remodeled beachfront suites) when booked online, but visitors who wish to just use the facilities without staying overnight are welcome to do so free with a visit to the on-site restaurant (Wahoo's—see restaurant round-up for more information) or for \$10 US without a food/beverage purchase.

Just past Costa Azul is the lovely Casa Obelisco (*www.casaobelisco.com*) where John, Judi, Bill and Barbara will make you feel like one of the family. The casa has four rooms, each unique and offering garden and pool views. The property is directly across the street from the beach, or you can just enjoy the day lazing by the pool and sipping margaritas from the poolside bar.

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**With the exception of Costa Azul, all of the beachfront properties are villas and are best suited to large groups**

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**Huichol Indians  
decorate the San  
Pancho Plaza with  
their beaded works of  
symbolic art**

Looking for a little more adventure on your vacation? You can give upscale camping a whirl out at Tailwind (*www.tailwindoutdoor.com*) where you can rent outdoor eco-bungalows and indulge in all manner of outdoor recreation with your hosts, including kayaking tours, bird watching and local nature hikes.

With the exception of Costa Azul, all of the actual beachfront properties are villas, many of which can be rented by the day or week, and are best suited to large groups.

## *What You Need to Know*

San Pancho is situated in the jungle and on the ocean so while the sea breeze keeps most of the bugs away, insect repellent is a good idea, especially during the rainy summer months. While most properties spray for insects and so they can be rare, scorpions are native to the area so it's a good idea to shake out shoes and towels before using them and don't walk barefoot at night. If you are stung, there's no need to rush to the local hospital unless you begin to have trouble breathing, in which case head over and get a shot of antivenin. Like bee stings, scorpion stings aren't fatal unless you have a severe allergic reaction. They just hurt.

The UV index in this part of the world is a bit higher, so use a higher SPF sunscreen than you normally would and limit your sun between the hottest hours of the day when the sun is at its peak (11 am - 2 pm).



Electricity is 110 and most modern accommodations will have installed 3-prong outlets suitable for laptop power supplies. If you find yourself with only two prongs, you can purchase an adapter at the local hardware store for about 50 cents.

There is an internet café in town but most hotels and some restaurants offer free Wi-Fi to guests. Cell phone service is routed through the Mexican monopoly Telcel, which offers excellent coverage throughout Mexico although roaming charges will apply and are quite steep (\$1.20 minute to call the US).

In recent years, Mexico has done a great job of cleaning up the water supply, so brushing your teeth and showering is not a problem and shouldn't cause any stomach upset. Stick to bottled water for drinking, however. Because San Pancho is such a modern town, you can be assured that your accommodations will have hot water.



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**Be sure to leave plenty of time in order to make your flight home or dinner reservations if you are headed into Puerto Vallarta**

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Renting a car at the Puerto Vallarta airport is an option for those traveling to San Pancho, however it is expensive (\$65+ per day, including all insurance required) and can be unnerving for timid drivers or those not used to the road regulations. The road between Puerto Vallarta and San Pancho is two lanes and winding with dangerous curves. It is frequented by large semi trucks, so the time it takes to traverse the 25 miles between cities can be unpredictable. Be sure to leave plenty of time in order to make your flight home or dinner reservations if you are headed into Puerto Vallarta. A better option is taking one of the many communal taxi vans (\$40-60) or even the bus which runs frequently on the main highway (\$2).

**Until the early 1970s, San Pancho had no running water or electricity**

Like the rest of Mexico, the monetary unit is the peso (check the local bank windows for the current exchange rate) and you should get cash from a bank-related ATM (Banamex, Bancomer, etc.) for the best exchange rate. Once you arrive in San Pancho, there is an ATM should you need to replenish your funds. Most businesses operate on a cash-only rule so hard currency in small denominations is preferred.

Many of the locals speak at least some English, although you will enjoy your trip more if you know at least a few polite phrases in Spanish.

You can get additional information about real estate from any one of the local real estate offices.

For more information on San Pancho, try these websites:

[www.sanpancho.com/](http://www.sanpancho.com/)

[www.discovernayarit.com/](http://www.discovernayarit.com/)

[www.go2rivieranayarit.com/](http://www.go2rivieranayarit.com/) ✖

# 24 Hours in Puerto Vallarta

by Ricky Arce

An unexpected change  
of plans leads to a brief  
but enjoyable diversion

The plane seemed to skim the tops of a thousand palm trees before circling over the sparkling sapphire bay and touching down in Puerto Vallarta. My original travel plan was for my friend Charlotte and me to head north from the airport to tranquil San Francisco, or San Pancho in the local lingo, for several days of rest and relaxation and, for Charlotte, looking at real estate. But our flights were changed at the last minute and now we were to arrive a night earlier than our hotel reservations.

**There is archaeological evidence of continuous human habitation at Puerto Vallarta since 580 B.C.**

“Couldn’t be better,” gushed Charlotte, who had been in Puerto Vallarta several times before. “We’ll spend the extra time in PV. We’ll just turn right instead of left when we exit the airport,” she gaily proclaimed

over my feeble protests, assuring me she would give me lots of choices and handle all the details. And so I found myself heading into the glittering lights of Puerto Vallarta for what would turn out to be a tempting taste of a terrific Mexican town.

## Resting Our Heads

Hotel choices in Puerto Vallarta run the gamut from glitzy international hotels to tony boutique inns, I learned. Over 2 million tourists visit Vallarta every year, so there’s pretty much a lodging choice for every taste and pocketbook. “Keep in mind that these prices usually don’t include taxes (17%) and sometimes service fees,” Charlotte warned me and patiently laid out several hotel choices by geographic location. She is very organized.

Most convenient to the airport are the hotels in the beautiful Marina area. The Marriott CasaMagna and Westin Regina boast pristine white beaches, attractive, modern guest rooms and every amenity you would expect in such high-end international chain hotels: fine restaurants, spa services, knowledgeable concierge services, magnificent swimming pools, charming gardens and acres of marble. Better yet, the impressive Marina Vallarta is filled with luxury boats from around the world and a *malecón* (boardwalk) lined with restaurants and shops is a short walk away. Golf is nearby as well. Rates start at about \$250 per



Puerto Vallarta is the fifth-largest city in Jalisco, with an official 2005 population of 177,830 (Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city, with a metro population of 4.3 million, is Jalisco's largest)

**The Night of the Iguana  
(1963), starring Ava  
Gardner, Richard Burton  
and Deborah Kerr was  
filmed on location in the  
Puerto Vallarta area.**

I wanted a more Mexican accent for my one night in this coastal city so we moved down Charlotte's list.

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**We only had one night and I  
wanted to see Vallarta**

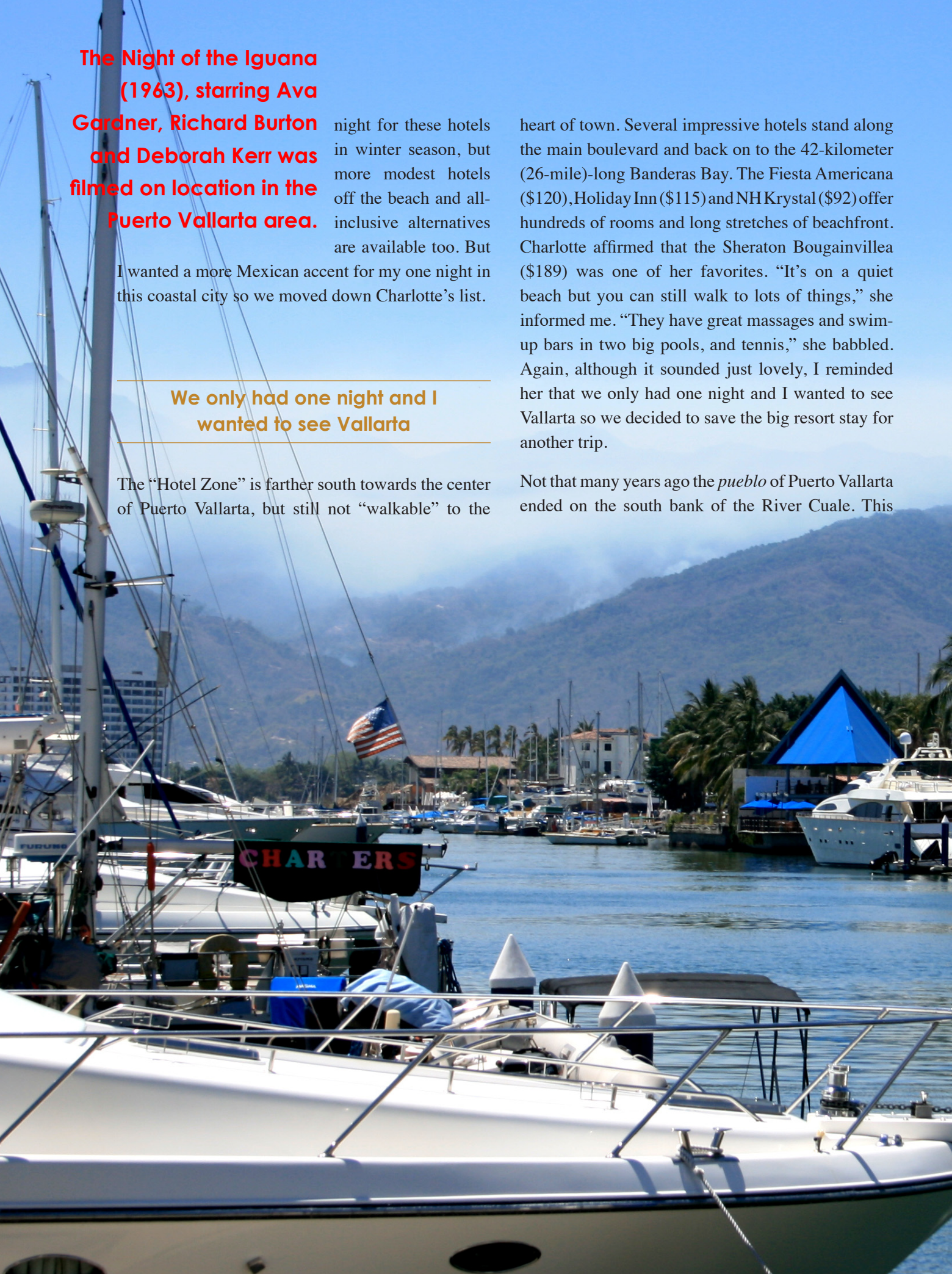
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The "Hotel Zone" is farther south towards the center of Puerto Vallarta, but still not "walkable" to the

night for these hotels in winter season, but more modest hotels off the beach and all-inclusive alternatives are available too. But

heart of town. Several impressive hotels stand along the main boulevard and back on to the 42-kilometer (26-mile)-long Banderas Bay. The Fiesta Americana (\$120), Holiday Inn (\$115) and NH Krystal (\$92) offer hundreds of rooms and long stretches of beachfront. Charlotte affirmed that the Sheraton Bougainvillea (\$189) was one of her favorites. "It's on a quiet beach but you can still walk to lots of things," she informed me. "They have great massages and swim-up bars in two big pools, and tennis," she babbled. Again, although it sounded just lovely, I reminded her that we only had one night and I wanted to see Vallarta so we decided to save the big resort stay for another trip.

Not that many years ago the *pueblo* of Puerto Vallarta ended on the south bank of the River Cuale. This



is no longer true, but the bridge over the river still delineates “Old Town” or the “Romantic Zone” from the rest of Vallarta. Boutiques, galleries, restaurants and coffee shops line the cobblestoned streets just a block back from the bay and things don’t get quiet at night, I am told. Charlotte suggested Hotel Playa Los Arcos for the night. Its 171 rooms and suites are furnished in what can best be described as updated Mexican colonial style. One entrance to the inn is directly across from the busy, popular Playa del Sol beach and the other on the main street of the Romantic Zone, *Olas Altas*, or High Waves, boulevard. Rooms start at about \$148 for one night, although there are packages for longer stays. People apparently return there year after year with their families to enjoy the sparkling pool, friendly restaurants and the great

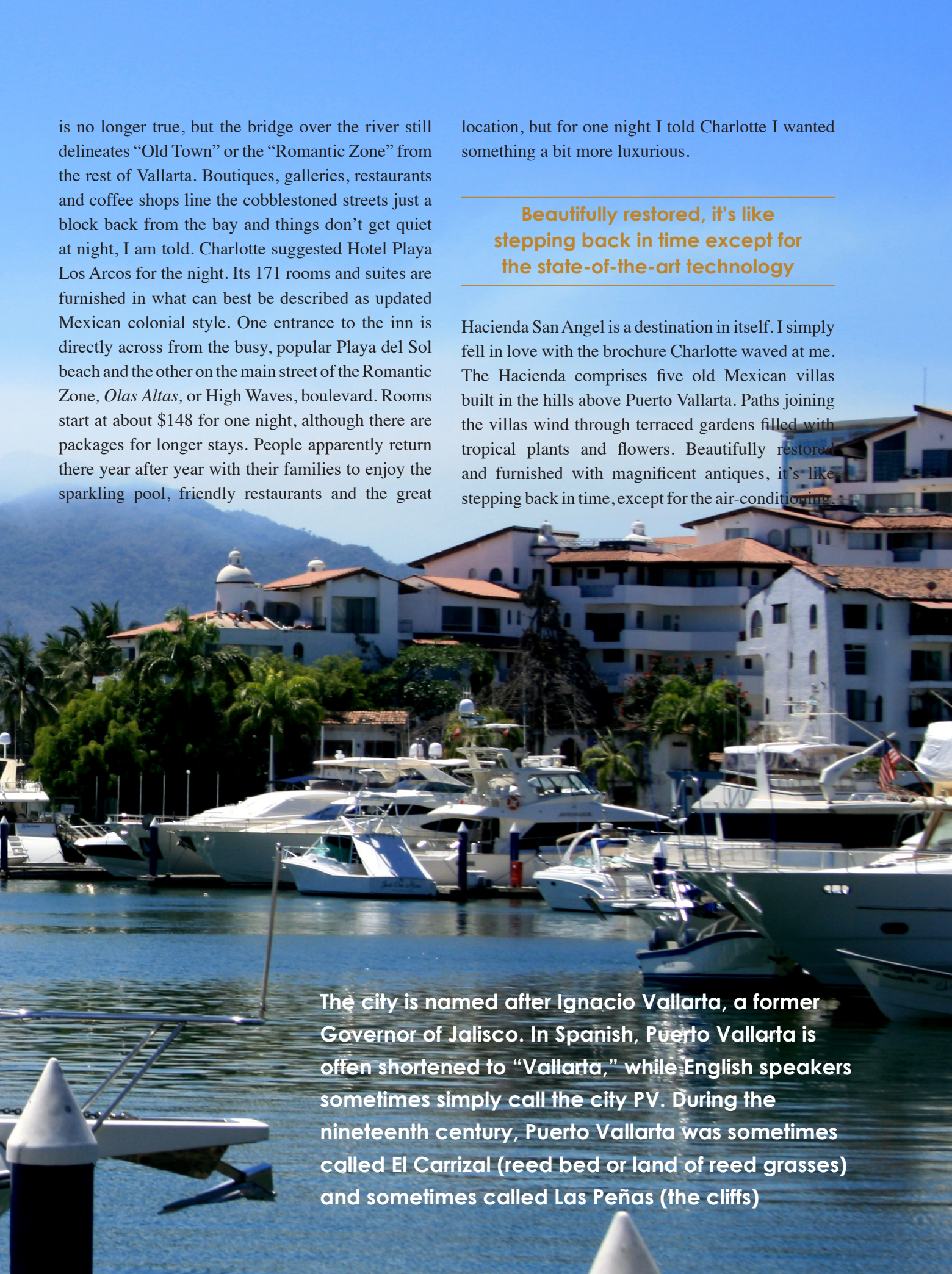
location, but for one night I told Charlotte I wanted something a bit more luxurious.

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**Beautifully restored, it's like stepping back in time except for the state-of-the-art technology**

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Hacienda San Angel is a destination in itself. I simply fell in love with the brochure Charlotte waved at me. The Hacienda comprises five old Mexican villas built in the hills above Puerto Vallarta. Paths joining the villas wind through terraced gardens filled with tropical plants and flowers. Beautifully restored and furnished with magnificent antiques, it’s like stepping back in time, except for the air-conditioning.



**The city is named after Ignacio Vallarta, a former Governor of Jalisco. In Spanish, Puerto Vallarta is often shortened to “Vallarta,” while English speakers sometimes simply call the city PV. During the nineteenth century, Puerto Vallarta was sometimes called El Carrizal (reed bed or land of reed grasses) and sometimes called Las Peñas (the cliffs)**



thick white napery felt luxurious. And the food was sensational. The menu is “continental” with Mexican touches and includes perfect calamari in a stunning presentation, sizzling steaks, seafood and duck. And I somehow saved room for a delectable dessert.

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**While we settled in with endless cups of steaming coffee we felt like princesses**

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In the morning Charlotte instructed me to breakfast very lightly as we were going to La Palapa for brunch and shopping. Located at Pulpito 103,

DVD player, CD library and other essential, but unobtrusive, state-of-the-art technology. Three swimming pools, strolling mariachis at cocktail time and killer views of the town and bay, particularly from the elegant restaurant, are enchanting. Beach and town are an easy downhill walk if you can tear yourself away from the fairy-tale surroundings.

Of course, all this comes at a price: suites start at \$320 per night (including a scrumptious breakfast) and go up to \$680 for the San Miguel Suite with private Jacuzzi. I talked Charlotte into taking the San Gabriel suite for the night because it has two double beds, while all the others contain King or queen bedding. I was enchanted with the claw-foot tub and the chair with angel carvings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but most of all with the wonderful feeling that I had stepped back in time to old Mexico.

## Feed Me!

After an amazing sunset, the lights of Puerto Vallarta were just starting to twinkle below us when we set off for dinner. All over Puerto Vallarta tempting smells waft from street-side vendors, hole-in-the-wall taverns and swanky restaurants. Charlotte had spent the afternoon trying to decide among her favorites and finally picked River Café. A stylish restaurant on the Cuale Island, it’s a treat for all the senses: a jazz duo played in the background and the



directly on the beach, tropical sophistication is the theme of this stunning eatery. Sit inside in cozy booths under swirling fans or under market umbrellas on the beach. We opted for the beach to watch the passing people parade and stuffed ourselves on mango and guava yogurt with fruit and shaved coconut. And that was just to start! I choose brioche French toast and Charlotte ordered an omelet with squash blossoms and mushrooms. The menu for dinner, when the restaurant is outrageously romantic, is similarly spectacular.

And while we settled in with endless cups of steaming coffee we felt like princesses because vendors brought their wares to our table unfurling yards of colorful shawls, *pareos* (wraparound skirts), tablecloths, and

rugs. We were shown cases of jewelry, strings of beads, wood carvings, toys, and even sandals. And if you just want to soak up the sun and the atmosphere without vendors, just ask for a “Do Not Disturb” sign for your table.

We waddled away and I couldn’t believe it when two hours later Charlotte had the nerve to point to ViteA and ask me if I wanted to stop for something to eat. The oceanfront bistro at Libertad #2 looked so inviting that I agreed to a cappuccino and a chance to sit. Modern art deco is the theme with the bay as a backdrop. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner as is La Palapa and River Café, the menus for each meal were different and enticing.

**Almost 50% of Puerto Vallarta’s workforce is employed in tourist-related industries. It was once named as “La Ciudad Más Amigable en el Mundo” (The Friendliest City in the World)**

## Filling Our Time

Perusing the crafts markets, shops and beach wares took up most of our time, but I realized too late there was a lot more to do. We missed the chance to take a boat and view whales and dolphins. We also overlooked the opportunity for a guided home tour of three spectacular houses organized by the charitable group the International Friendship Club. We never visited the church with its landmark crown and we didn’t manage to go snorkeling with manta rays and sea turtles at *Los Arcos*. Even though we were on Cuale Island, we were too busy haggling for silver rings and souvenirs to stop at the archaeological museum.

We did catch a band concert in the main square, though, and managed some terrific people watching and then stopped at a gallery to watch Huichol Indians create intricate animals from tiny colored beads. But the time was too short for many of the myriad activities available in Vallarta. So we skipped golf, tennis, bridge, yoga, Spanish classes, sailing, cooking classes, *salsa* lessons and, oh, yes, just hanging out in the sunshine and watching the waves roll in. ✨



# Calendar

San Pancho/P

## January

**Late January/Early  
February—San Pancho's  
Women-to-Women Charity  
Fashion Show.**

This annual event features original works by area designers, with local models plying the runway. All proceeds are donated to a different women's charity or organization each year.

## February

**Late February—Puerto  
Vallarta National Charro  
(cowboy) Championships.**

Cowboys (and cowgirls) from all over Mexico gather for this four day tournament, competing in a range of events like calf roping, bronco riding and roping tricks. The championships include a parade, mariachi bands and charro-themed art exhibitions.

**Late February—San Pancho  
Jaltemba Cup Charity Golf  
Tournament.**

This community challenge was begun by two expatriates living in the Jaltemba area several years ago. Intended to both build community and raise funds for charity, this two day event is becoming increasingly popular each year. All funds from the 2009 event went to the Dana Farbor Cancer Fund.

**Late February/Early March—  
San Pancho Music Festival.**

Another event begun by area expats to build community, the four day event now draws some of the best regional musicians. Admission is absolutely free.

## March

**16—Birthday of Benito  
Juárez**

It is a national holiday and all public offices, schools and many businesses are closed. Thanks to his resisting French occupation and modernizing Mexico during his five consecutive terms as president (between 1858 and 1872), Juárez is considered the nation's greatest leader.

## April

**5-12—Semana Santa**

Holy Week is a celebration of the last days of the life of Christ. It begins each year on Palm Sunday and ends on Easter Saturday with some celebrations, such as Passion Plays and the Procession of the Twelve Stations of the Cross, common throughout Mexico. In Puerto Vallarta, expect crowded beaches since the holiday coincides with school vacation week and inland families make their way seaside to cool down.

**12—Pascua**

Easter Sunday celebrates the resurrection of Christ. During Pascua, the city wakes up at night with thousands of young people socializing in the streets, along the Malecón and in nightclubs and cafes.

## May

**1—Mexico's Labor Day**

A national holiday and all public offices, schools and many businesses are closed.

**3—Día de la Santa Cruz**

On Day of the Holy Cross any building sites or unfinished construction are topped with crosses to protect workers. It is customary for contractors or building owners to allow workers and their families to celebrate with picnics and fireworks at the site. In Puerto Vallarta there is a neighborhood fair surrounding the Santa Cruz Church, with carnival rides, food and games.

**5—Cinco de Mayo**

The Fifth of May celebrates the 1862 victory of a small group of Mexican soldiers over a French battalion following Napoleon III's imposition of an Imperial Monarchy on the nation. Celebrations involve the usual: drinking, dancing and eating.

**10—Día de las Madres**

Mother's Day is similar the world over and a very special day all across Mexico, given the status of the mother in Mexican families. In Puerto Vallarta, mothers are honored with recuerdos (gifts) and special church services.

**31—Puerto Vallarta's  
Birthday**

On 31 May, 1928, Puerto Vallarta became a municipality. Forty years later on the same date it became an official city. Entertainment along the Malecón, speeches by dignitaries, fireworks and a massive cake shared by all are the highlights of the celebration.

# of Events

## Puerto Vallarta

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### June

#### 1–Día de la Marina

Navy Day honors Mexico's naval forces with an offshore parade of navy ships, tour boats and fishing boats all flying their nautical flags. After the procession the boats form a circle and conclude with a short ceremony honoring naval personnel. In Yelapa, locals celebrate by gathering in small *pangas* and heading out to sea to toss flowers in the water before racing back to the beach for an all-day, all-night fiesta.

#### 24–Día de San Juan Bautista

This religious feast celebrates the birth of St. John the Baptist. Swimming at dawn and water-themed jokes are the order of the day.

### July

#### 26–Paseada las Palmas

Thousands of Vallartenses head to the town of Las Palmas for a day of horsemanship and parties.

### August-September

#### 30- Sept.1–Cristo de los Brazos Caídos

This is a celebration in honor of St. Anthony. Expect parades, fireworks and church-centered religious activities.

### September

#### 14–Día del Charro

On Cowboy Day a morning parade through Puerto Vallarta is led by horsemen and women

wearing traditionally decorated trousers, jackets and sombreros atop steeds decked in their finest gear. The parade is followed by festivities at local charro rings that include bullfights, calf roping, dancing and food.

#### 15 & 16–Día de la Independencia

A national holiday, schools, banks, post offices, government offices and many shops are closed. The holiday honors the day Miguel Hidalgo announced the Mexican revolt against Spanish rule. Celebration begins with the traditional *Grito de Dolores* (Cry of Pain), the call to freedom uttered by priest Miguel Hidalgo. By nightfall expect mariachis, food and speeches of national pride, followed by parades and charros the next day.

### October

#### 12–Día de la Raza

Another national holiday. Schools, banks, post offices, government offices and many shops are closed. Honoring the first encounter with Europeans, this holiday is associated with Columbus landing in the Americas in 1492.

### November

#### 1 & 2–Día de los Muertos

Day of the Dead or All Saint's Day is Mexico's version of Halloween.

#### 12 to 22–Festival Gourmet Internacional

This is one of Puerto Vallarta's biggest events. Held over 10

days, the international festival was begun 15 years ago and has been growing ever since. Rather than a competition, the emphasis of the event is "a friendly and creative exchange between grand masters of the art of cooking and young talents from all over the world." For ten nights, these chefs' collaborative efforts are showcased in 25 participating venues.

#### 16–Revolution Day

Schools, banks, post offices, government offices and many shops are closed for this national holiday.

### December

#### 1 to 12–Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

Puerto Vallarta celebrates this event with daily processions to the Church of Guadalupe in the center of downtown Vallarta. Civic, social and business groups from adjoining communities all participate. Some processions include floats, dancers, music and fireworks. Church bells ring frequently both day and night. The event culminates with a fiesta, fireworks and food vendors in the central plaza.

#### 16 to 24–Las Posadas

The Inns is a nine-night reenactment of Mary's and Joseph's nearly futile search for a place to rest. Neighbors take turns assuring there is "no room at the inn" as candlelit processions follow the holy family's wanderings through San Miguel's streets.

#### 25–La Navidad

Christmas is another opportunity for families to gather, attend mass and eat abundantly.

# Things

by Nancy Brown

San Pancho is a find  
for anyone who enjoys  
being outdoors.

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The weather's ideal, the scenery stunning, the sunsets unsurpassed. Regardless of your interests, you'll find plenty to do in and around San Pancho. Here is a brief guide to some outdoor activities that are popular with both residents and visitors.

## Bird Watching

San Pancho has great opportunities for bird watching because of its diverse habitats. The ocean, the lagoon, the town itself, the surrounding jungle and farmers' fields all attract different species. Serious birders recommend bringing binoculars and both a Mexico bird book and one for the Western U.S. or Texas to help with identification. San Pancho Birding Club has bird watching tours on weekend mornings. Check their blog or e-mail them for schedule updates.

<http://sanpanchobirdingclub.blogspot.com>;  
e-mail, [birdingsanpancho@gmail.com](mailto:birdingsanpancho@gmail.com)

## Fishing

Take a no-frills fishing trip on open ocean off San Pancho's beach. Captain Pando Flores charges reasonable rates for half- or full-day trips in his seaworthy 27-foot outboards (*pangas*, in Mexican parlance). You're most likely to catch mahi-mahi, red snapper or Spanish mackerel.

Call 311.258.4304 in San Pancho to make



arrangements; e-mail, [mexicosta@hotmail.com](mailto:mexicosta@hotmail.com)

## Golf

Puerto Vallarta is gaining on Cabo San Lucas as Mexico's most popular golf destination. Golfers say that, win or lose, it's the dramatic views of the Sierra

# To Do In San Pancho



owners at the resort, and members of the Punta Mita Golf Club.

Both accomplished players and duffers may find the Field of Dreams course, north of San Pancho in El Monteón, to be just their speed. The nine-hole, par 3 track is a quick play, but the greens can be tricky, so it's not boring. No carts, no caddies, and budget-priced. Information is at [www.campodeensueno.com](http://www.campodeensueno.com). Don't panic when you see the green fees; they're listed in pesos, not dollars.

Prices for Puerto Vallarta-area courses are generally higher than in the U.S. Packages, discounts and add-on fees vary; rental clubs are available. Check [www.vallartaonline.com/golf](http://www.vallartaonline.com/golf) for a list of courses, and then go to the individual course websites for details.

## Horseback riding

Costa Azul Adventure Resort in San Pancho offers horseback riding and other outdoor activities to the public. A morning two-hour ride goes deep into the jungle outside of town. Reserve tours at least one day in advance.

***Costa Azul Adventure Resort, Calle Las Palmas, San Pancho***

Call 311.258.4120 in San Pancho for reservations; [www.costaazul.com](http://www.costaazul.com)

Madre Mountains, Banderas Bay, and the Pacific ocean that make every round spectacular. *Golf Digest* lists three of the area's seven courses among the top ten in Mexico: two are at Vista Vallarta, one designed by Jack Nicklaus and a second designed by Tom Weiskopf, and Four Seasons Punta Mita, a Nicklaus course open only to guests, residence

## Kayaking, Hiking, Excursions

View Nayarit's rugged coastline from offshore in a sea kayak. Tailwind Outdoor Co. provides instruction, gear, tandem or individual kayaks, and transport from San Pancho. The Los Ayala trip is perfect for paddlers of all levels and includes a picnic on a secluded beach.

For landlubbers Tailwinds can arrange guided beach excursions, bird watching trips, local culture tours and jungle hikes. A special "Moonlight Magic" trek is offered once a month, five days before each full moon.

[www.tailwindoutdoor.com](http://www.tailwindoutdoor.com);

e-mail, [info@tailwindoutdoor.com](mailto:info@tailwindoutdoor.com).

## Polo

Take a surreal step from San Pancho into the glamorous world of polo at La Patrona Polo Club, which is open to the public. From the Club's airy deck you can have a drink or dinner, admire thoroughbred horses, and watch international-level players. The restaurant is open Tuesday through Saturday; games are on Saturdays at 5:00 p.m. Polo lessons are available.

Call 311.258.4378 in San Pancho for reservations and to check game schedule.

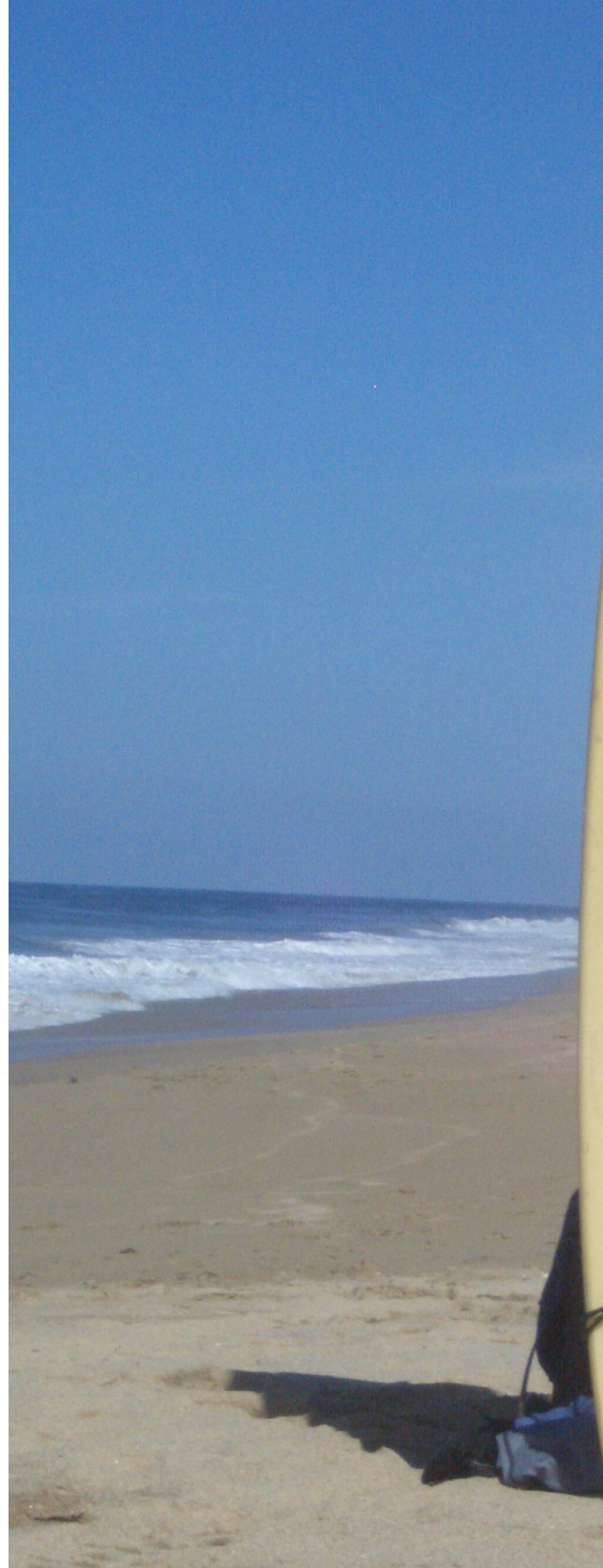
*Calle Ceilán #10, San Pancho*

[www.polovallarta.com](http://www.polovallarta.com);

e-mail, [info@polovallarta.com](mailto:info@polovallarta.com)

## Sea turtle presentation and hatchling release

San Pancho's marine turtle preservation group presents a media program about sea turtles at 7:00 on Thursday nights at Gallo's Pizza Restaurant. During hatchling release season (mid-August to mid-February), Director Frank Smith and his volunteers release baby turtles on the beach at sunset. Come and marvel at the tiny hatchlings as they scramble toward the ocean.



Call Frank Smith in San Pancho at 311.258.4100 to confirm presentation and hatchling release schedules; [www.project-tortuga.org](http://www.project-tortuga.org)



## Surfing

Surf's up at Nayarit beaches. The ocean can be powerful in San Pancho, more user-friendly in

the nearby towns of Sayulita and Lo de Marcos. Conditions change with the season and the day, so consult a local expert. Alonso Hernández, a San Pancho native, gives guided tours, and individual or group lessons (in English) for any skill level. Beginners or experts will find what they need at San Pancho Surf Shop, his fully-stocked store. Boards can be rented.

### ***San Pancho Surf Shop***

Calle America Latina #3, San Pancho

311.258.4312.

Alonso's cell phone: 045.322.159.8710

e-mail: haro240@hotmail.com

## Whale watching

During the winter months, humpback whales migrate to the deep, warm waters of Puerto Vallarta's Banderas Bay to breed and calve. Pods of whales can often be seen from San Pancho's beach, which is outside the Bay.

Humpback whale watching in the Bay area is regulated by the Mexican government, so it's best to book a tour through an authorized agency during the official season (early December through late March). Look on [www.puertovallartawhalewatching.org](http://www.puertovallartawhalewatching.org) for a list of authorized tour companies and vessels, and a wealth of information about responsible whale watching.

## Stroll the beach, watch the sunset

You don't need a guide or a lot of money to enjoy San Pancho. Take a moment to see the statue of St. Francis of Assisi, the village's patron saint, on the little plaza in front of the beach and to look at the murals depicting San Pancho's history. Then stroll the uncrowded, one-mile stretch, or park yourself in a chair at a beachfront restaurant and order a snack. Bring a camera, because the tropical sunsets are picture-perfect. Sometimes people applaud! 🌺

# Surfing La

I'll be honest with you. I've always wanted to use nachos as a metaphor for something and now I've found that something. Here goes: The surf in San Pancho is like a giant plate of nachos—there's a little something for everybody. Corny? OK. It might not be the perfect metaphor. I might also be over-stating the universal appeal of nachos. But putting aside my obvious obsession with the ubiquitous snack for a moment, the truth is that San Pancho is a surf spot with truly wide-ranging appeal. Surfers come in all different shapes, styles and abilities, and this spicy little surf spot really does offer something for everyone.

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**The general rule of thumb is, if you don't feel comfortable with the size of the wave, don't go out**

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San Pancho is a mixed bag. Its typical seas are not that challenging for advanced surfers and are usually a little too tough for beginners, but it can often be quite good for either. When waves are small (under three feet), it can be a very good beginners' surf, perfect for those who have some experience and are hoping to head into the intermediate category. There is no doubt that the very best spot in the area to learn is in nearby Sayulita, however, for those who can't bear to leave San Pancho, very small days can provide more than adequate opportunities for learning, and there is a nice place to rent boards

and hire surf instructors right in town. When big (6-12 feet) San Pancho can be a powerful, hollow wave perfect for experienced surfers looking for a challenge. As with all surf spots, the general rule of thumb is, if you don't feel comfortable with the size of the wave, don't go out. If powerful waves are your particular style of nacho, then have at it! But if not, be smart. Grab a cerveza at one of the beach-side restaurants and enjoy watching from a comfortable distance. Smaller waves are certainly on the way.

Generally considered a rock bottom break, throughout the rainy season (August-mid October) the river that shapes the San Pancho break overflows and fills it in with sand, making it a partially sandy bottom. This sand over-flow usually has the effect of creating good sand bars and filling in spaces between the rocks, which makes for smoother and steeper waves. Advanced surfers will find the best potential at San Pancho, therefore, in the summer rainy season, whereas beginners and intermediate surfers will likely find more appropriate waves in the winter months. This is a generalization, however, and by no means the rule. On any given week of any given year, it is more than likely that a group of surfers of wide-ranging abilities will score at least a few days of surf to their liking.

by Todd Hedrick

# San Pancho

Ten years ago I came to a wedding in San Pancho around Thanksgiving not expecting to get any sizeable surf, and much to my surprise, at the end of my trip we had three amazing days of near perfect 8- to 10-foot surf. It turned out to be one of the best surf trips of my life. And the nachos weren't too bad, either.

## Where to Go

### San Pancho Surf Shop

Instruction, Rentals and Supplies

This is the go-to place in San Pancho for surf boards, supplies, rentals, and instruction. The shop's located one block off the main road, three blocks back from the beach, left at América Latina road, on the right side. The owner's name is Alonzo Hernández. The board rental selection is limited, so if you are picky, bring your own sticks, or try one of the shops in Sayulita, about ten minutes to the south by car, or Punta de Mita, another half-hour down the beach.

### Tigre Surf School, Sayulita

Instruction, Boards, Rentals, Boat Trips.

At the main beach.

[www.sayulita.com/tigre\\_surf\\_school.htm](http://www.sayulita.com/tigre_surf_school.htm)

### Luna Azul Surf School, Sayulita

Instruction, Boards, Rentals.

At the main beach.

### Tranquilo Surf School, Punta De Mita

Instruction, Boards, Rentals.

Josué Villegas, owner

[www.tranquilosurf.com](http://www.tranquilosurf.com)

### Mictlan Surf School, Punta De Mita

Instruction, Boards, Rentals, Boat Trips.

Highly recommended for surfing boat trips to Punta De Mita area breaks.

[www.mictlansurf.com](http://www.mictlansurf.com) ✦



# Victory Through Effort.

Gypsy, Greek  
and Swiss  
heritages  
combine  
with a love of  
horsemanship  
to bring polo  
to an unlikely  
corner of  
Mexico



Polo has been described as “playing golf in an earthquake,” and on a recent Saturday evening at La Patrona Polo Club and Restaurant in San Pancho, with horses thundering back and forth between the goalposts, their riders swinging mallets, whacking at the ball, cutting each other off, jostling for position, it is easy to see why. At moments like these, all the action compressed into one riot of color and movement, the ground shaking beneath their feet, the spectators, even those in deep conversation, are riveted. They may not understand the intricacies of the game, but the power and speed of polo is reason enough to watch.

There is a buzz in the crowd, some of it generated by the match, and some, perhaps even more, by a social scene that borders on the manic. The guests,

a mix of North Americans, Mexicans and Europeans all dressed in bright colors and soft fabrics, the ladies sporting dangling earrings and flowing skirts, are pleased with themselves. There is a fury of table hopping and giddy chatter while the announcer patiently explains the play, calling the goals and errors as the game pounds on.

Open less than five months, La Patrona is a phenomenon, a new restaurant in a quiet pueblo 35 miles north of Vallarta that is drawing a loyal reservation-only crowd on Saturday nights and a growing one during the week. Diners, polo fans and social butterflies from all local communities, as well as a large contingent from Puerto Vallarta, have put La Patrona on the map and in the press.

However, the polo club was not exactly an overnight success. Indeed, for the last decade, the owners had

# La Patrona Polo Club by Eileen Pierce



trouble drumming up eight players for their Saturday afternoon games, and the two benches in front of the stables were more than adequate for the spectators—mostly family members—who showed up to watch. It wasn't until the restaurant opened last fall that things began to change.

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**More than food or entertainment  
or polo, La Patrona serves  
up a kind of magic**

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A sprawling innovation designed to act as both restaurant and viewing stand, it comprises four large spaces separated by levels and rooftops rather than walls and includes three bars, an art gallery, and seating for 150 guests. No expense was spared when it came to La Patrona's roomy, stainless-steel kitchen and its

state-of-the-art wine cellar with an extensive selection of fine wines ranging in price from 300 to 14,000 pesos. Its gourmet menu is excellent and reasonably priced, and the 2½ hour show of dressage, mariachi, illusion, contortion and dance, which follows the Saturday night match, would be reason enough to add La Patrona to your social calendar.

Still, more than the food or the entertainment or the polo, what La Patrona is serving up is a kind of magic, a sort of Fellini meets the British Raj experience.

“La Patrona is an enchilada filled with dancers and gypsy music and polo,” says Iván

Echeverría. “It's about illusion...”

“...and the circus!” interrupts his wife, Gabrielle. They smile at one another as if a decade and a half hadn't swept by, depositing two children, a polo field, 32 ponies and a perfect martini of a lifestyle on them.

Iván Cruz Echeverría's father (no relation to Mexico's former President Luis Echeverría, the original patron of San Pancho) was a governor of Mexico City, his mother from Puebla, his grandparents gypsy exiles from Franco's Spain.

“I am a mutt,” he says proudly, but it soon becomes abundantly clear that it is the gypsy part of this potent brew that Iván most identifies with. From the “gypsy food” on his menu—the deer, the rabbit and the duck—to the music that accompanies his grand Saturday

night events, to the dramatic cadence of his speech, Iván evokes caravans and campfires and wild full-moon nights. He points proudly to the escapades of his ancestors, the men and women who crossed stealthily back and forth between Spain and France, citizens of neither, allegiance to none.

Iván is no less excited by his wife Gabrielle’s lineage—the Greeks and the Swiss, whose lives centered on the world of horses, of jumping and dressage, set against beautiful European landscapes. Their fathers, both cavalry officers, and their combined histories are too large for small screens.

It comes as no surprise that Iván was pursuing a career in filmmaking when the couple met. Gabrielle was 17, newly arrived from Switzerland, looking for adventure. She met Iván in Mexico City and their romance with one another began much as their mutual infatuation with polo—“instantly.”

“We met thousands of years ago, and we are always finding each other again,” he says.

“We have 15 years,” explains Gabrielle with a sweet wide smile. Picasso would have covered canvasses with the elegant angles of her face. At 30-ish she is stunning; at 50 she will be magnificent. And if she is the quieter of the two, she is by no means less passionate.

It wasn’t until they moved to Nuevo Vallarta that they discovered the game that would change their lives.

“We heard through a friend of a friend about a jumper, Enrique Tron, who was transforming an old *campo de soccer* in Puerto Vallarta into a place to play polo,” explains Iván. “So one day we checked it out. We fell in love with it the first time we played.”

What is it about polo that makes two people switch gears so rapidly and with such fervor?

She says, “It’s the galloping.”

He says, “It’s riding with the pack. Polo takes you very close to all the horses. You ride as one of them. It’s very exciting.”

The couple quickly began transforming a piece of



property in San Pancho which they had bought a year or so earlier with an eye toward building a cultural center.

“It was a big mango orchard,” says Iván. “We cleared it little by little, tree by tree, and with every tree Gabrielle was crying.”

Their mentor Hugh Dawnay, a polo player and retired major in the Irish military whose father had won an Olympic medal, taught the couple how to play.

“He showed us the soul of polo,” Iván says.

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**Originally a way to train cavalry units, polo was more a battle than a match**

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Nicknamed the King of Games, polo comes from the Tibetan word for ball, “pula,” and was invented somewhere between the 6th Century BC and 1 AD in Persia. Originally designed as a way to train the king’s cavalry units, and with as many as 100 warriors on each team, it was a cutthroat affair, more battle than match. The British military discovered polo in India during the early 19th Century and brought it home with them to England.

“The Brits took it out of context,” explains Iván. “They made it the Game of Kings, very snotty, very expensive.”

The couple’s shared romantic vision for La Patrona is not, according to Iván, “about making money,” Iván says. “It’s about doing what we love to do with

people who love to do it. We want to open up polo to the world. We would like to teach new generations about polo because it is a game that’s disappearing.”

If slogans mean anything, the Cruz Echeverría’s—*Amat Victoria Curam*—The victory to whom makes the greatest effort—might indeed serve them well.

*Learn more about La Patrona Polo Club at [www.polovallarta.com](http://www.polovallarta.com).* ✨

# country

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## Bob Schulman

Bob Schulman is a Denver-based freelance travel writer specializing in Mexican destinations. He's taken more than a hundred trips south of the border over the years and says "there's always new and exciting to write about...Mexico seems to just get better and better." Bob currently contributes stories to Travel Weekly, Frontier Airlines' inflight magazine, Mexico Travel & Life Magazine and the La Oferta Newspaper.

Travel writing is his second career. Earlier, Bob was one of the principal founders of Frontier Airlines and served as the carrier's vice president for corporate communications until he retired a few years ago. A self-described "airline bum," he previously held senior p.r. posts with Reno Air, the original Frontier Airlines, Eastern Airlines and Mohawk Airlines.

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## Mike McClanahan

Mike has over thirty years' experience as a professional communicator, writer and editor. His business writing has appeared in numerous trade and industry publications including, *Corporate Apparel*, *Photo Lab Management*, *Ad/Marketing Review*, *Info*, and *The Marketing Journal*. He has contributed lifestyle, consumer and general interest articles to several publications including *Colorado Golfer* and *Wild Blue Yonder*, the in-flight magazine of Frontier Airlines. He has a degree in Latin American Studies, is fluent in Spanish, and conversant in Portuguese.

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## Rebecca Arce

Before moving to Mexico in 2001 from the New York area, Ricky Arce worked for a large international bank as a senior attorney for derivative products. She is everlastingly grateful she had the opportunity to retire before the invention of the Blackberry. She currently divides her time between homes in Vallarta and San Miguel de Allende and is a freelance writer for several publications, including *Vallarta Lifestyles Magazine*, *Virtual Vallarta*, *Inside Mexico* and *Opportunity World*. She is working on a humorous book about living in Mexico, but admits that it's going rather slowly as other pleasurable activities and commitments easily distract her.

# Contributors

Barry Golson is the editor of ForbesTraveler.com and author of two books about the expat life. This article is excerpted from *Gringos in Paradise*, the story of his move to Mexico. His latest book is *Retirement Without Borders*. Learn more about Barry and his work at [www.gringosinparadise.net](http://www.gringosinparadise.net) and [www.retirementwithoutborders.com](http://www.retirementwithoutborders.com).

After many years as a mom, martial artist and business owner, Dawn DelVecchio pulled up roots in stylish Santa Fe, New Mexico for points east—Far East. Making a home and second career in Thailand, she began freelancing on topics as diverse as design, dining, travel, yachting and wine. After a stint as an editor for a luxury regional magazine, she moved back to the States to reunite with the sweetheart of her youth. Today she spends her summers in the Colorado Rockies and her winters in the tropics of at least one hemisphere, writing for publications in the USA and overseas.

Nancy Brown thinks of San Pancho as her second hometown. She and her husband built a house there in 2001, and since then they've led two lives: San Pancho in the winter and Connecticut the rest of the year. When she worked in addiction treatment, Nancy wrote newsletters and brochures, but now she writes for the fun of it. Her work has appeared in *Transitions Abroad* and on [www.Mexconnect.com](http://www.Mexconnect.com). She contributes to her writers' group blog ([www.sanpanchowriters.blogspot.com](http://www.sanpanchowriters.blogspot.com)) about experiences in Mexico.

Andrea Walker lives in Birmingham, Alabama with her husband and writes for local and national publications. When she's not busy writing, she also runs her own marketing and event planning firm.

## Barry Golson

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## Dawn DelVecchio

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## Nancy Brown

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## Andrea Walker

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## Zena Polin

Zena Polin is an author, editor and writer about travel, tourism, finance, real estate and food and wine. She is the author of two guidebooks, *The Other Side of Sydney* and *The Pub, Club and Grub Guide to Washington, D.C.*; the managing editor and principal writer for *Visitor St. Kitts and Nevis* and *Discover St. Kitts*; and writes for a Caribbean cable television show, St. Kitts Travel Channel. Zena is also a contributing writer about food and wine for *Dollhouse Magazine* and *Washington Flyer*. She is the owner of The Winning Ticket, a public relations, marketing and communications firm. Zena is an avid traveler and has lived, worked and visited more than 70 countries. She has just completed her first novel.

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## Eileen Pierce

Eileen is a freelance writer and former journalist. Most recently, she contributed the Mexican chapter of *Retirement Without Borders* by Barry Golson. Eileen owns and manages The Inn at San Pancho, in San Pancho, Nayarit, Mexico.

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## Cori Jacobs

A love of art, Spanish and cultural exploration drew Cori south to Mexico. She has traveled extensively through much of the country exploring ruins, museums and searching for the ultimate quesadilla. She currently resides and has her art studio in San Pancho, where the ocean, community and nature provide inspiration for her growing creations.

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## Amandine Darmstaedter

Born in Belgium, Amandine Darmstaedter attended culinary school in Mexico City after moving to Mexico. She moved to San Pancho in 2002 to open Café del Mar (Mediterranean, Mexican and Asian cuisine) when San Pancho was still undiscovered. The restaurant soon attracted a following in the Bahía de Banderas area, drawing customers from as far away as Punta Mita and Puerto Vallarta. As San Pancho grew, an opportunity to open a second restaurant presented itself. With a completely different concept and menu, Marplata, in the Costa Azul area, opened as an Argentinean style grill with classic European cuisine and has been called one of the finest and most glamorous restaurants in the area. It has been featured in dining articles several times in Mexico and the US.

La Perla del Mar restaurant on the Malecón in San Pancho is Darmstaedter's third local project. La Perla is open for breakfast and lunch and offers an unpretentious but delicious menu of seafood and antojitos at its beachfront property. She is also part of a family group that operates a small, authentic Asian restaurant in Mexico City, El Malayo.

Todd Hedrick is a surfer, writer, and Nacho Lover based in Northern California. Over the last 15 years he has traveled up and down the coast of Mexico looking for waves and interesting places to explore.

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## Todd Hedrick

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In 2007, weary of regular paychecks and employer-provided healthcare benefits, Robin Noelle left the corporate world of public relations and sales to move to Mexico and write full-time. Now Noelle contributes to a number of publications and websites on the topics of lifestyle, travel and food.

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## Robin Noelle

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Noelle is currently updating the *Moon Guide to Puerto Vallarta* (8th edition, Avalon Travel, 2009), for which she has extensively traveled throughout the Mexican states of Jalisco and Nayarit. Her Mexico related writing has been featured in *MexicoXpatz Magazine*, *The People's Guide to Mexico* website, DiscoverNayarit.com and both English-language newspapers serving Puerto Vallarta; *PV Mirror* and *Vallarta Tribune*. Additionally, *Relish Magazine* (March 2009) features two authentically Mexican recipes in an article written by Noelle.

Wry, engaging and meticulously researched--Noelle writes on many topics relating to travel including but not limited to adventure, luxury & budget, spas, reviews, round-ups and destination features.

As an unorthodox hedonist, Greg Miles was always drawn to art, writing, and photography – not to mention wine, chocolate, and travel. He became an award-winning (more about that later) photojournalist after losing a bet with his mother during a game of quarters. His love of Mexico and travel are matched only by his love of Tequila, siestas and boasting falsehoods about winning awards. When not traveling or playing quarters, you can find him playing banjo in his bluegrass band, screaming ridiculous lyrics into a microphone, being a celebrity chef on imaginary television shows or painting portraits of naked women.

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## Greg Miles

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# Dining San Pancho

**Tiny  
but tasty  
is the  
rule here**

For such a petite beach town, San Pancho has quite a few dining options that range from casual and traditional Mexican cuisine to fine International dining. Considering that many people fall in love with the area and return year after year, it's nice to know that there are options whether you are in town for the weekend or the winter.

Like most areas in Mexico, cash is the best option when going out to eat and in many cases, it is the only option. When dining at small taco stands or beachfront palapa restaurants, always bring cash in small denominations. Change can be hard to come by, especially at breakfast and lunch when there have been few sales. Although you can pay in U.S. dollars, you will find that the exchange rates offered by restaurants are usually 10:1 or 11:1 and never the going bank rate which at this writing is close to 14:1

Ola Rica

# in Pancho

by Robin Noelle

The average wage in Mexico is somewhere between \$5 and \$7 per day so don't be stingy when tipping. Like many restaurant workers around the world, these employees depend on their tips and often are supporting a large family on what they make. If you've received good service, please recognize that with the appropriate gratuity (between 10-20% depending on the quality of service).

It's not necessary to worry about the water quality these days; restaurants use purified water for cooking and ice cubes so go ahead and order fresh limeade or iced tea. You can always order bottled water if you prefer.

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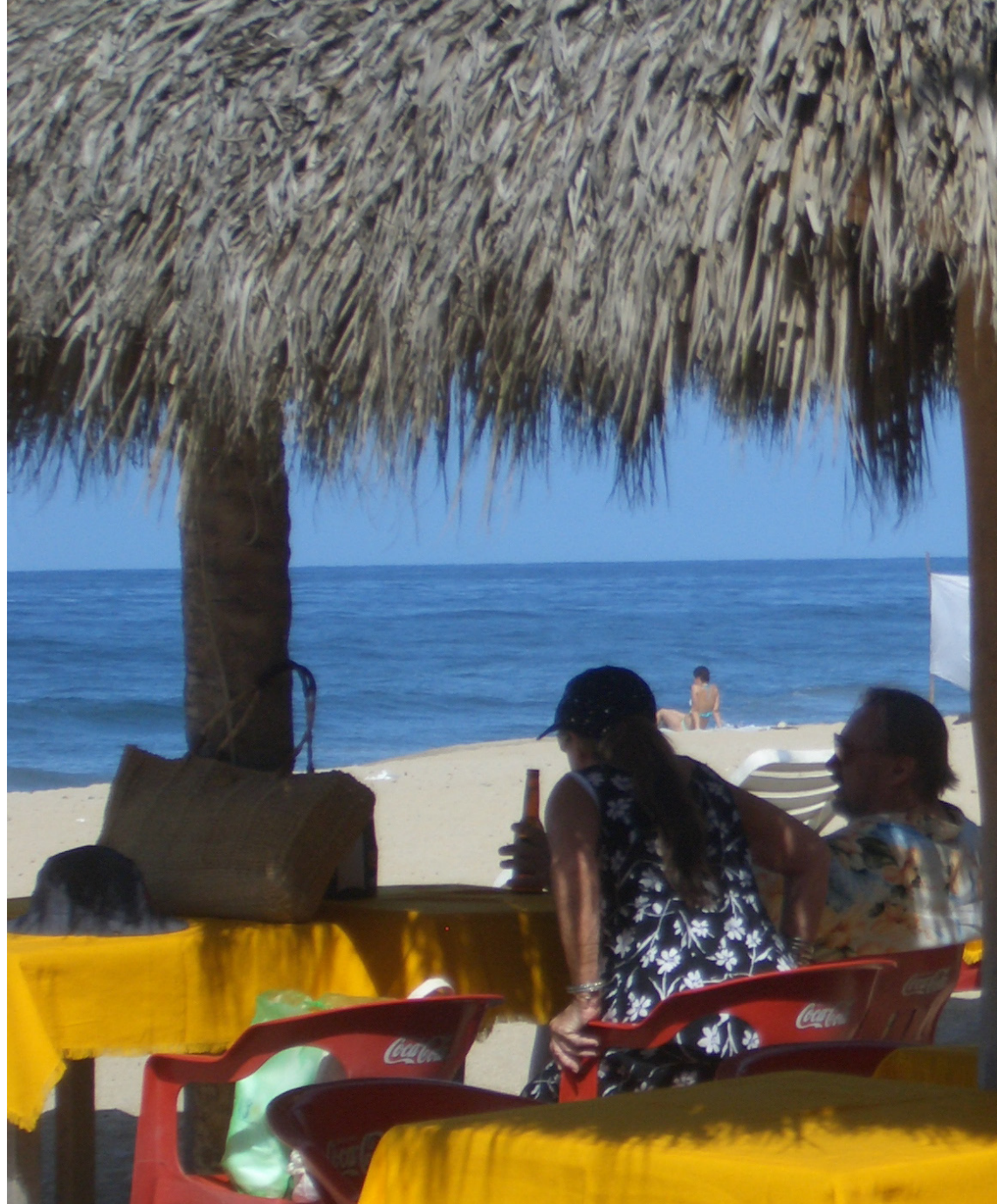
**You will most certainly be approached by vendors while eating. If they become bothersome, let your server know**

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While you may not see as many when dining inside a restaurant, you will most certainly be approached by vendors while eating. Some people enjoy

viewing the brightly colored *pareos* or trays of silver jewelry, while others do not. If the vendors become particularly bothersome, let your server know and he will pass along the information for you. A polite "no, thank you" or "no, gracias" is the best way to deal with vendors if you are not interested. It can be hard to resist a little moppet with a box of Chiclets, but do not feel obligated to purchase something.

Another common sight, especially at restaurants on the beach, is dogs. Sometimes the dogs have owners who are dining as well and others are stray or community beach dogs. All are harmless and will wander off if ignored. It's not that uncommon for even nicer restaurants to have a pet dog or to allow patrons to bring their pets in with them. This is not always the case however, so before you bring Fluffy with you, be sure to check the restaurant's policy. On the other hand, if you prefer not to dine with furry friends, ask to be reseated away from the offending pooch.



## Dining on Tercer Mundo

Tercer Mundo (Third World) is the main street that runs through San Pancho from the highway to the beach.

### The Taco Stand \$

*Dinner only, outside dining*

Just past the little park, about halfway between the highway and the beach, is a corner taco stand that specializes in *tacos al pastor*. A large, vertical rotisserie of sliced pork rotates above a flame and as the orders come in, the chef slices off the meat and

then adds a little roasted pineapple that sits atop the spit. Traditionally, the tacos are topped with onions and cilantro so if you prefer them plain, just let them know in advance. There are other tacos available as well and a host of toppings on each table, including cucumber, beans and fresh salsas.

### San Pancho Café (Chili Rellenos) \$\$

*Dinner only, opens at 6 p.m.*

A block down from the taco stand, situated on the second floor, is Chili Rellenos. Also known as the San Pancho Café, they offer a moderately priced dining alternative to the sidewalk taco stands and high-end



international cuisine restaurants. The namesake chili relleno is raved about by those who have tried it, but they offer a fine, if small, selection of other Mexican favorites as well. There are several types of sizzling fajitas to try as well as enchiladas, and for the meat lover, a great BBQ plate with pork ribs and chicken in a tangy, homemade sauce.

There is a full bar offering cocktails and wine for those wishing to imbibe, and soft drinks and juice for those who don't. The service is friendly and attentive with the staff cheerfully willing to accommodate any special requests.

The restaurant sits under a palapa and is open-air, so

if you are visiting during the cooler winter months, you may wish to bring a sweater or light jacket.

### **Los Delphines \$**

*Dinner only, outside dining*

A block past Chili Rellenos is another sidewalk dining joint on the patio of one of the homes lining Tercer Mundo. Los Delphines offers more variety than the local taco stands. Diners can order *sopes* (a small, soft, thick tortilla topped with your choice of meat), tacos, burritos and quesadillas. On the weekends, Los Delphines is known for its superb pozole, a chicken soup made with cracked corn and

topped with cabbage, onions and cilantro. Many local residents bring their own containers and fill them with pozole to have throughout the week. It really is delicious!

Aside from the fresh, authentic Mexican dinner options, those with a sweet tooth cannot miss the flan. Look for a small paper plate tacked to the wall that says, “*hay flan.*” The thick and creamy custard rests on a layer of caramelized coconut and is topped with a thin drizzle of caramel sauce. Many people will attest, this author especially, that it is the absolute best flan in the country.

### La Ola Rica \$\$\$

*Dinner 6-11 p.m. Closed Sunday*

*(311) 258-4123 for reservations*

A little farther up the street, you will find La Ola Rica. La Ola Rica was one of the first fine dining options in San Pancho and remains a favorite today. It offers a rustically Mexican atmosphere, but with refinement. You won't find people dining in beachwear or extremely casual clothing. It's one of the few places where you can get a quality martini in town; they make a great Lemon Drop, too.

The menu offers a nice array of dishes, and it's hard to go wrong with whatever you pick. La Ola Rica is known, however, for *carne asada* and for shrimp dishes (particularly the coconut shrimp). They normally have live music on Tuesday nights, so reservations are recommended. Try the molten chocolate cake for dessert.

### Maria's \$\$

*Breakfast, lunch & dinner*

Continuing on Tercer Mundo, on the left side, you will find the ever popular Maria's. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner (check the hours as they close between meals), you can get a wide variety of traditional Mexican dishes. For breakfast try the *huevos a la Mexicana* (scrambled eggs with onion, tomato and chili) or *chiliquiles* (tortilla chips



in red sauce, covered with cheese and often made with chicken or eggs). For lunch there are several sandwich options as well as hot dishes.

Maria's is casual and a great place for families or large groups.

### La Perla del Mar \$\$

*1-9 p.m., lunch & dinner, beach dining*

La Perla is the oldest restaurant in San Pancho and has been acquired by the group that owns several other restaurants in town. One of only two beach restaurants, La Perla specializes in fresh seafood. Red snapper is always a favorite if you are looking for a full meal or just relax with your feet in the sand and have some ceviche and guacamole for a light snack. Not a seafood lover? La Perla also offers a standard hamburger with fries, a club sandwich and a few other options.

Due to the popularity and laid-back beach attitude, the service can be slow, but why hurry? Sip a margarita and enjoy the sunset or watch the surfers catch some waves.

## Off the Beaten Path



### Café del Mar \$\$\$

5-11 p.m., closed Wednesday

(311) 258-4251

Turning off Tercer Mundo, head up the hill on Calle China to Café del Mar, a favorite for fine dining in San Pancho. With its artistic and tropical atmosphere, ocean view and cool breezes, it's not hard to see why Café del Mar is popular.

Here you will find a unique menu that makes use of the local ingredients, but in a different way. If you are looking for something other than authentic Mexican or typical seafood dishes, you can try fresh fish, chicken, and pastas with an international flair. There are Asian-inspired dishes and plates that emphasize the tropical nature of the region. Café del Mar is certainly one of the "don't miss" restaurants of San Pancho.

### Wahoo's at Costa Azul \$\$

7 a.m.-10 p.m. Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Located in the Costa Azul resort

There are two great reasons to have a meal at Wahoo's—the reasonable prices, and because after your meal, you are welcome to enjoy the lovely

facilities at Costa Azul. Situated beachfront, Wahoo's has the traditional palapa atmosphere and offers a variety of dishes for breakfast, lunch and dinner. There's seafood, burgers and sandwiches as well as a smattering of Mexican dishes to choose from, all at much lower than normal resort prices. While nothing really stands out on the menu, the food is good.

With a meal at Wahoo's you are welcome to use the beach and pool facilities at the resort, so head down for breakfast and then spend the day.

### Mar Plata \$\$\$

5-11 p.m. Closed Monday

(311) 258-4424 for reservations

The latest addition to the ever-growing list of fine restaurants in San Pancho is Mar Plata, an elegant Argentinean steakhouse, developed by the same owners of Café del Mar and La Perla. Under the light of dozens of brass star-shaped lanterns, you can choose from a mouth-watering array of menu items including flank steak and duck. Condé Nast listed Mar Plata as one of the best new restaurants in the world (2007). The entrées seem to be enjoyed by all, but the appetizers and salads have gotten mixed reviews from other critics. Mar Plata is a popular choice for special events and weddings so be sure to call ahead if you are making a special trip in for dinner.

### Other Taco Stands and Fondas \$

Hours vary

There are other little sidewalk taco stands spread throughout town that offer cheap and delicious tacos and other authentic Mexican fare. Across from the hospital on Calle Africa is a taco stand that is often open for lunch and dinner and gets good local reviews. Eva's Tacos is on the corner of Calle China, just down the hill from Café del Mar and is another evening option. If there's something happening in the town square like a carnival, dance or *quinceañera*, try dining at the little restaurant on Calle Argelia, set up on the patio of a local resident's home. ✨

# Taking the

Opening a restaurant is a tough and risky proposition, but with some good advice, it can be fun and rewarding, too

“Have fun. Now is the time to be happy!” she says to us. Gloria’s light green eyes flash as she continues: “When, if not now?”

She’s an expat and her enthusiasm is infectious. Across the table from her sits Triny, a petite native of San Pancho and Gloria’s partner in business and life. We sit at a table outside of La Ola Rica, one of the most successful restaurants in San Pancho. I pepper them with questions: How did you get started? What recommendations do you have for others who want to start a restaurant? Their story unfolds like old photographs falling from a scrapbook.

The adventure began in 1993 with a sidewalk, a table, 4 chairs, and a Krups Coffee Maker. They sold coffee for two months and decided to plan a dinner, approaching friends and family with a proposition:

“Saturday night dinner—this is how much it’ll cost. Wanna come?” A couple of months later, with those same friends and family urging them on, they increased their seating and hired an employee. Fast forward 16 years to now. They have 17 tables, seat 85 to 90 people and employ 14, all of them locals with about half being Triny’s family. It’s a close-knit family. It’s a close-knit village.

Gloria continues: “There’s very little foreign business in San Pancho. The locals control most of it, and they’re protecting their interests. They’ve been here for a long time and they don’t want to lose their culture or lifestyle, so they’re probably not going to sell out to a big chain who will tear down homes to put in a



# be. Dunge.

by Greg Miles



big store.”

What else do they recommend?

They give advice both philosophical and practical.

- Start by getting the guide *Ley Federal del Trabajo*. It details regulations on paying employees: vacation pay, Sundays, etc. For instance, if you fire someone, you have to pay them three months’ wages. If they quit, you have to pay them one month’s wages.
- Set your sights, make goals and accomplish them.
- Do your homework regarding licensing and permits.
- Get a good, honest accountant.

- Get a business license. It’ll cost about \$1,500 pesos and can take a few months.
- Don’t lose sight of why you’re here.
- Get a liquor license. They can cost \$5K to \$6K U.S. and can take 9 months or better to acquire, but you can find one for sale from another business and buy it from them. There are a limited number of licenses available.
- Check into zoning laws—you can’t get a liquor license if you’re within a certain distance of a church or school.
- The most important thing is word of mouth. If you’re good or if you’re bad, everyone will know it.
- There’s a real need for restaurants here, but 80% of restaurants fail.
- Be patient. The bureaucracy moves slowly here. Don’t expect things to move the way they do in the states, and be ready to “take care” of someone who can help things move along in your direction.
- People want to come down here [Mexico] and change it. Leave it alone and relax into it. It works.
- Buy your building if you can. They start at around \$150K U.S.
- Start with a concept and don’t get in over your head.

Don’t kid yourself: opening a business in Mexico (or anywhere else) is hard, risky work. But if it’s your dream and you’ve realistically assessed your capabilities, as Gloria says, “If not now, when?” ✨

by Mike McClanahan

# Surf' n Turf, the

When Kelly Kemp and Michelle Gantz decided to bring a new dimension to yoga retreats, their sights were set a couple thousand miles south of their home in Seattle. They found the perfect location about half an hour up the coast from Puerto Vallarta, a little fishing village called Sayulita, home of some of the best surfing in Mexico.

It all started with a chance encounter when Kelly was on vacation. She stayed at Villa Amor, a property that had been recommended by a friend who knew the

owner. “When I was introduced to Rod Ingram, Villa Amor’s owner, we sat and chatted over a glass of wine. I told him about my passion for yoga and the next thing I knew, we were discussing how we could develop yoga retreats at the resort,” Kelly explains. “When I got back to Seattle, I told Michelle, who was my yoga instructor, about the idea. I quit my job as sales manager for some Seattle radio stations, and six months later, Michelle and I held the first retreat of our new venture, Via Yoga.”



# The Eastern Way

The name Via Yoga was chosen deliberately. Kelly says it was picked because she and Michelle wanted yoga to be the unifying element for several different types of vacations. “We started with the obvious, yoga and surfing, because Sayulita is world-famous as a surfing destination,” she says. “Then we added Spanish classes as part of the mix. Michelle is a certified Pilates instructor, so that was the next offering. Now we’re looking at other additions like a culinary retreat, all of them tied into yoga and/or

Pilates to make them both a learning experience and a way to soothe the soul in a tropical haven.”

Via Yoga retreats are scheduled from November through April to take advantage of the beautiful “winter” weather at Sayulita, which is at the same latitude as Hawaii. It’s also the high season for travel to Mexico, so some advance planning is in order to make sure there’s room on the plane to Puerto Vallarta, your jumping-off point for Villa Amor, a

**Six days of yoga and surfing in a tropical paradise**



33-room open-air resort where the retreats are held, 45-minutes north of the airport by shuttle.

The six-day retreats typically start with an 8 a.m. yoga class followed by breakfast at 9:30. Early risers can attend a silent meditation session at 7:30. After breakfast, guests have several options: surfing is available, including classes and board rental; there are Spanish lessons for those looking to brush up on the lingo; and whale-watching, horseback riding and kayaking are also offered. Or you can simply explore the restaurants, shops and galleries of Sayulita and the northern Costa Vallarta from San Pancho to Punta Mita. If your Zen-like pursuits include golf, the concierge at Villa Amor can arrange tee times for you at one of the courses nearby, including a Jack Nicklaus track just down the coast at Punta Mita.

Come 5:00, it's time for another yoga class, then dinner. Three evenings are set aside for a meal with your class group, and three are free for you to sample

the local fare or cook for yourself, since most rooms at the villa have fully equipped kitchenettes. Fresh groceries are available at markets just a short stroll from Villa Amor.

Via Yoga is recognized by *Yoga Journal* as one of nine amazing yoga retreat destinations in the world, and Villa Amor has gotten kudos from several top magazines including *Sunset* and *Condé Nast Traveler*.

Space is limited to 20 guests per retreat, and dates and retreat programs are subject to change, so check for the latest information. Rates for the six-day retreats, which range from \$1,995 to \$4,095 US, are per person, airfare not included. As this article is being written, Via Yoga is offering \$600 off any full rate retreat package for the 2009 season. For details about this offer and other promotions, call (800) 603-9642 or visit [www.viayoga.com](http://www.viayoga.com). ✨







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# The Galleries of San Pancho

by Cori Jacobs

Modern and traditional art mix in the friendly confines of San Pancho's artistic community

San Pancho, surrounded by lush jungle, with its long, gleaming beach, crashing surf and quiet leafy cobbled streets, is a friendly town. As I walk down the street, the sun shining warmly overhead, an older ranchero ambles by on his horse, a vegetable truck rattles past, and friends wave and stop to chat, discussing a recent jazz concert in the main Plaza del Sol or an upcoming evening of Cabaret. A swirl of languages eddy around me, French, Spanish, English, Italian, Huichol, as this growing international community fuses with the local Mexican townspeople to create an eclectic mix of cultural diversity in this small coastal village. San Pancho is a growing haven to an array of shops and galleries featuring the works of national and international artists, performers, musicians and jewelers, many of whom reside and have their studios in San Pancho.



Named the cultural capital of Nayarit in 2008, the town also hosts two large art and music festivals each year—the Colectivo San Pancho in December, and the Amado Nervo Festival in May—along with numerous monthly openings, concerts and performances. Visitors and residents alike are welcomed and delighted by surprise beach concerts, puppet shows, spontaneous art installations and visiting circus troupes.

Along Avenida Tercer Mundo, the main street leading into San Pancho, I am first drawn to the Conscious Dream Gallery. Featuring the works of Daniel Stone, each piece resonates with rich color and symbolism. A dance of energy and sound, the paintings are a meditation on the creator's journeys between this world and that of his dreams, each a song opening the viewer to another level of perception and experience.

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The beauty and tranquility of San Pancho provide fertile ground for the creative imagination

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Across the street is Ukari Gallery. The creative endeavor of two friends, the gallery shows exhibits of paintings and photography and specializes in fine silver jewelry. Tahitian black pearls gleam from sleek silver settings, wonderfully creative earrings sparkle, and intricate beadwork glows from within this intimate space. All the artists shown in the gallery live in the pueblo and welcome commissions for special creations.



Continuing down the main street, Galería Corazón sits on the leafy corner of Avenida Tercer Mundo and Calle América Latina. Specializing in Mexican folk art and ceramics, the gallery also features the works of several modern Mexican master craftspeople. Gallery owners John and Judi Levens travel the countryside in search of fine crafts and artworks. From the mountains of Michoacán and the historic pueblos around the lake of Patzcuaro, they visit different artists' studios, hand-selecting each piece shown in the gallery.

Minimalist and modern, the simple interior design of Tatehuari Jewelers and Gallery allows the eye no distraction from the unique and lovely jewelry shown within. Second generation jeweler Luis Narvaez personally hand-fabricates every piece designed by his wife and gallery co-owner Susana Sanborn. They compliment their unique pieces with monthly rotating shows of sculpture, painting, ceramics and other fine arts. From antique Chinese gambling chips to exotic amber and sparkling Drusy, the exceptional, one-of-a-kind gems used in her jewelry are each handpicked by Sanborn and set to best highlight the distinctiveness of the stones.

Continuing toward the beach, I reach Galería del Nayar. Featuring the work of gallery owner Ariel Sainz, the space also hosts shows of local and visiting artists, along with theater and performance events. Actor, painter and sculptor, Sainz is also one of the main creators and organizers of the Colectivo San Pancho, the yearly art festival that brings together San Pancho's many artists and craftspeople in a vibrant two-day celebration.

The Colectivo takes place in the main Plaza del Sol of San Pancho. A parade of the town's children, transformed by handcrafted masks, drummers and stilt-walkers open the event, and throughout the festival a central stage provides entertainment from folkloric and flamenco dance to Huichol ceremonial presentations, classical and jazz music, martial arts and circus performances. Visual artists show paintings and photography, jewelers present their wares, and visiting craftspeople set up booths displaying clothing and woven goods. Printmaking and other workshops are offered, and delicious regional foods assure none go hungry. The Colectivo is a wonderful opportunity to join in the community, share artistic projects and celebrate the creativity of the town. Each year it is exciting to see the transformations and growth of this independent and organic event.

For a young artist such as myself, the beauty and tranquility of San Pancho provide fertile ground for the creative imagination. Living in a community with other artsy folk has provided wonderful opportunities for weekly afternoon gatherings of coffee drinking, painting, drawing, and collective collaboration. The rich indigenous and pre-Columbian art traditions of Mexico, along with the natural lushness of nearby jungles and mountains, inspire new avenues of artistic exploration. From my early experiments with textiles and clothing, selling hand-painted wares in the markets of Sayulita and La Penita, to my first painting exhibit and later gallery shows, the community of San Pancho remains open and supportive to its artists, both long-time residents and newer arrivals. Visitors to San Pancho are sure to be delighted by the creative endeavors of this growing artistic community, whose friendly galleries and hidden studios welcome the curious traveler. ✨





# huichol

## Warring

### Modern artists carry on an ancient tradition

As I bump down the dusty track, winding higher into the mountains, huge trees loom overhead. With each passing moment I move farther away from the last traces of urban life and closer towards Roseta, a small Huichol village in the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains of western Mexico. Roseta is a collection of adobe homes, children running down narrow winding paths, roosters crowing and women hand-grinding corn to make fresh tortillas for every meal over an open fire. Perched above the Santiago River, surrounded on all sides by rolling hills and mountains, Roseta is home to the Huichol artist José Taizan González, towards whose world I now direct my steps.

The Huichol, or “Wixarica” as they call themselves, are an indigenous people with a rich cultural, spiritual and artistic tradition whose history stretches back to pre-Columbian times. Speaking their indigenous language and Spanish, the majority of Huichol people reside in small agricultural mountain villages, with a growing number also dedicating themselves to the creation of finely-crafted yarn paintings, intricate beadwork and



stunning embroidery.

Amid the simple earthen surroundings, I am always stunned by the dance of bright colors when the show of new yarn paintings begins. With a warm smile José holds up one amazing painting after another, quietly explaining the stories told within each work. To create the paintings, a thin layer of a beeswax/pine resin mixture is spread onto a prepared board. Then fine yarns are pressed into the soft wax until the surface is

# eloquent

by Cori Jacobs



small peyote cactus, which along with the deer and corn, represents the foundation upon which the culture is built and its continued sustenance. Today's yarn paintings, their multicolored images carrying the Huichol cultural stories outward to the urban global world, began as small string paintings and beaded gourd bowls left as offerings and prayers at different holy places high within the rugged mountains and windblown desert.

After viewing José's new paintings, I sit down with the family to a simple meal of freshly cooked beans, salsa and tortillas. We discuss their upcoming plans for a journey to the desert, the rising price of materials, and the coolness of mountain nights. A twilight tranquility permeates the air, broken only by the shouts of playing children as they dart across the darkening yard. Experiencing the advantages and hardships of village life, I look with new eyes upon the many Huichol who migrate seasonally to sell their crafts along the coast from Puerto Vallarta to San

Blas. Dressed in white clothing adorned with brightly embroidered flowers, birds, deer and other traditional designs, they sit beside tables covered with intricate beaded animals, bracelets, earrings and glowing yarn paintings. Through their work they share a glimpse into a rich magical world of myth, color, and ancient wisdom. ✨

covered in an intricate and vibrant swirl of color. Each piece tells a unique story based on cultural myths, ritual objects, or the individual artist's visions during traditional ceremonies.

It is from this ancient spiritual well that the modern yarn and bead painting tradition springs. For centuries the Huichol have journeyed to Wirikuta, the desert of central Mexico, a sacred place they hold as their ancestral spiritual homeland. Here they harvest the

by Bob Schulman

# The Legend of Mama Mono



Puerto Vallarta, Nuevo Vallarta, Bucerías, La Cruz de Huanacastle, Punta Mita and other towns rimming Banderas Bay are fast becoming known as art meccas. The works of hometown artists abound, such as those of the late Manuel Lepe who gained international acclaim for his paintings of happy children, little angels and street scenes from his beloved Puerto Vallarta.

Hotels are in the act, too, like the art gallery featured at the elegant Hotel des Artistes Beach Club & Spa

in Punta Mita. Recently on display were paintings by local artist Judith Ewing Morlan.

Many others around the bay have become big names on the art scene as well. Some not only hit the jackpot, but became legends doing it. One goes by the nickname, “Mama Mono” for her specialty: “monos,” or replicas of pre-Columbian art.

Up to the early 1980s, Mama Mono’s studio was her modest home in the hills overlooking Puerto Vallarta.

# Mama Mono



That  
statuette  
you  
bought  
may  
come  
with  
a story

There, she spent her days creating exquisite statues and other pieces while many of her 19 children scampered around the house.

It was easy to do business with her. You simply leafed through her thick photo albums of figurines—mostly those of Aztec gods and goddesses—and picked the ones you wanted her to copy. Several of the youngsters pitched in, some helping to shape the mono statues out of clay while others painted on dyes and glazes, then

readied them for baking in an ancient kiln that looked like it was going to explode at any moment.

Her main customers were high-class art dealers down in the city (who resold her works to the public at huge markups). Others were famous artisans, including one who commissioned her to make a number of surrealistic, two-foot-high ceramic Christmas trees on which he applied a white glaze coating. Although it's believed he only paid her a few dollars each for the trees, some were later seen with price tags as high as \$800 in the downtown shops.

Mama Mono's rise to fame started one day in 1983 when a reporter for *TravelAge West*, an American trade magazine for travel agents, came by for an interview. "Would you give discounts (on the monos) to travel agents," reporter Scott Dial asked? "Sure," she said.

After Dial's story appeared, including pictures of some of her best figurines, travel agents started beating a path to the factory, as did their clients. Then the friends and neighbors of the agents and clients started showing up.

The word was out: Mama Mono's studio was the place to go to get hard-to-find quality monos—and at a discount, no less. Her works even began appearing in international galleries, including tony shops near San Francisco.

Old-timers around Puerto Vallarta say Mama Mono cashed in on the business some time ago. Relatives report she still makes a few pieces now and then, but just as a hobby.

So next time you're browsing Banderas Bay's better art shops, check out the pre-Columbian art replicas and see if you can find one with the inscription "Mama Mono P.V." on the bottom. You'll not only get a great mono, but a great legend as well. ✨

by Marilyn Newman

# Vacation



Quiet nights and  
languorous days are yours  
for the asking—  
and a bundle of cash

Nestled beside what was once known as a secret surfers' haven on the Pacific coast, "Little San Francisco" (aka San Pancho) is a friendly village about 35 minutes north of the Puerto Vallarta Airport.

It seems staid in contrast to the boisterous eclecticism of the towns nearby; sidewalk taco stands still outnumber full service restaurants. The wide, white beach is laid back by day and the cobbled main drag is deserted by early evening. Peaceful vacation villas are magnificently perched on the hillsides around a

# Luxury in San Pancho

town that has long boasted more amenities than other small Mexican villages. But where commerce once revolved around food stands and auto repair shops, organic cafés and yoga studios have sprung up and high-end vacation rentals for the well-heeled traveler are resplendent.

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Your accommodations feel more like visiting an old friend's home—a rich old friend

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A good part of San Pancho's charm lies in the fact that it is devoid of the urbanized tourist culture of better known resorts. Here your accommodations feel more like visiting an old friend's home—a rich old friend. Two of those "homes" are luxurious villas whose names evoke heavenly magic and strive to make it a reality for their well-heeled guests.

Elegantly furnished in Mexican Colonial style, Casa Cielito has over 6,000 square feet of living space including five bedrooms, each with its own bath, large sweeping terraces, and panoramic views. The garden

terraces surrounding an elegant beachfront pool are punctuated with thatched-roof palapa seating areas. The property is the perfect vacation getaway for family or for a romantic escape, with prices ranging from \$1,500 to \$2,400/day depending on the season.

Villa Vista Mágica is a one-of-a-kind, luxurious villa. Surrounded by a two-mile coastline of sandy, virgin beaches and nestled privately away from the hustle and bustle of daily life, Villa Vista Mágica boasts a unique circular architecture throughout its six casitas, or little villas, allowing a flowing feeling of harmony and providing a breathtaking view of the beach and surrounding mountains at every turn. Villa Vista Mágica provides a wonderland-type ambiance that will enchant visitors of every age. Prices range from \$5,145 to \$6,850 per day, depending on the season.

Of course, one can find everything in San Pancho, from quaint bungalows starting at \$50 per night to those exclusive properties that, well, if you have to ask....

Whether you're looking for a quiet getaway or the vacation of the rich and famous, you'll feel at home in San Pancho. ✨

# Discover TailWind.

## Treading softly through nature

Eco-Resort: along with “voluntourism,” it’s one of the buzzwords that boutique resorts and travel companies love to bandy about. Add a little solar lighting and you’ve got an eco-resort! While many resorts talk the talk, the owners of TailWind walk the walk in a big way.

Built into a densely tropical expanse of jungle-covered hillside outside of San Francisco, Nayarit, Tailwind Outdoor offers what can be described as luxury camping. After traveling several kilometers down a dirt jungle road, visitors arrive at the Tailwind headquarters, a cute palapa with a small dipping pool and patio.

Down the lighted pathways, there are two platforms available for guests, each entirely private and open to nature. King-size beds, surrounded by gauzy mosquito netting, rest under a thick canvas tent, the sides of which can be extended for additional privacy. Each platform has a hammock, a small table and chairs, a propane stovetop, and a basin. There is also critter-proof storage for food and clothing. While there is electricity and running water, the accommodations are still rustic with an outdoor shower and a composting toilet up the path. There is a more modern lodging option, a cute bungalow that has a flush toilet and semi-indoor shower for those not interested in peeing in the woods.

Despite the natural surroundings, there is nothing to fear. Local wildlife such as coatis, raccoons and foxes can be heard and sometimes seen in the area but none are brave enough to approach the platforms unless you’ve left food out. There’s the occasional spider and small lizard too, but tucked inside the mosquito

netting, you are safe from any creepy crawlies.

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Aside from the stunning landscape, the most impressive thing about Tailwind is the commitment to being green

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# A Real Eco-Resort

by Robin Noelle

## It doesn't have to be boring

Aside from the stunning landscape, the most impressive thing about Tailwind is the commitment to being green. Rainwater is collected annually and all grey water is reused for watering the plants on the grounds. There is a focus on “zero-scaping,” the use of low- and non-maintenance plants like bananas that require little water. Compost from cooking is brought into San

Pancho and delivered to the organic garden where the Tailwind family gets the fresh vegetables that you will get to sample during your first night welcome dinner. Much of the construction has been done with found materials; rocks collected from river beds, driftwood and trees felled during storms. Almost no land has been cleared to accommodate the dwellings; instead Tailwind has been designed around the land.

Tailwind's dedication to being low-impact has resulted in their being the first resort in Mexico to be awarded a certificate of sustainability by Sustainable Travel International. This news as well as the positive feedback from guests has prompted the construction of an additional bungalow which should be ready for next season.

If you love the outdoors, you will not get bored at Tailwind. Head Guide and co-owner Tamara leads hikes, bird-watching tours, and her specialty, sea kayaking trips for all levels. You can take the path down to the little cove of private beach or take the Avocado Loop hike on your own through avocado orchards and lush jungle. In the evenings, you can retire to your private platform or visit with the Jacobi family up at the headquarters where they make you feel right at home, even out in the wild jungle.

Rates:

\$75/night per safari-style bungalow, meals not included

[www.tailwindoutdoor.com](http://www.tailwindoutdoor.com)

For more information on eco-friendly travel, see [www.sustainabletravelinternational.org](http://www.sustainabletravelinternational.org). ✨



by Mike McClanahan

# Casa Obelisco

Two expat couples transform their home into a world-class B&B



Escaping the bustle of Puerto Vallarta on Highway 200, the tourist-plagued angst falls away in successive layers as the northward journey passes through Bucerías, where the road cuts through the mountains across a small tropical peninsula. Villages like San Ignacio and Sayulita, each one a little more laid-back than the former, mark the trip. By the time you reach the tiny settlement of San Francisco (San Pancho to its friends), the rumble of your tires on the cobbled access road is like the sound of a relaxing rain.

Climbing up Calle América Latina, the Pacific

Ocean comes into view, and then past a white arch, a large beige mansion perches behind a stone wall. You have arrived at Casa Obelisco, a Mediterranean-style villa built in 1999 as a retirement hideaway for two Silicon Valley couples who had fallen in love with San Pancho on a vacation side trip from Puerto Vallarta.

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**As thoughts began turning toward retirement, the memories of good times in Mexico led them to look southward**

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John Levens and Bill Kirkwood met while working for National Semiconductor in Germany in the 1970s. They each married in the '80s and the couples became close friends, often vacationing together in Puerto Vallarta. They decided to build a house in the sleepy little seaside village, one large enough for both couples to live in in comfort and privacy and still have plenty of room for family and friends to visit.

As the building progressed, it occurred to the new expats-to-be that they were going to be spending a lot of time in San Pancho, and while it is quaint and charming, it isn't overly blessed with things to fill an active couple's days year after year. That's when they hit on the idea of running a bed-and-breakfast hotel in the four guest rooms they had included in the plan. They had always liked entertaining, and the constant flow of new people would keep things interesting. The fact that they hadn't ever done it was only a minor concern. If they didn't like it, they'd just stop.

As the end of the century approached, the couples planned a Millennium Party to usher in the new era and celebrate the completion of their tropical home with a handful of friends from the States. Construction was proceeding on schedule, so John and his wife Judi planned to return to San Pancho a few weeks ahead of time to apply the finishing touches. Bill and Barbara would follow a week later. The night before they left, the Levenses got a call from their construction manager suggesting they might be more comfortable the first few nights in a hotel. The hot water wasn't working yet, he said. They told him they'd prefer to stay at the house to do what they could to keep things moving.

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**The manager fixed a bed outside the room where he spent the first night guarding the couple with his dog and a machete**

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"The manager was right," Judi says. "When we arrived, there was no hot water. No cold water either. Or windows. Or doors." So to provide some security

while the Levenses slept in their well-ventilated bedroom, the manager fixed himself a bed outside the room where he spent the first night guarding the couple with his dog and a machete. When questioned about the need for such measures, he replied that everyone knew the place was full of expensive new furnishings and there was no point in taking chances. He couldn't stay the second night, but left his dog and the machete. By the third night, they were down to just the machete. Before bedding down, they stacked a spare mattress across the doorway and lined it with a row of empty beer bottles to act as an alarm against intruders.

Things did continue to progress, though, and when Bill and Barbara arrived the following week, the water was working, most of the windows were in and several doors had been hung. When the guests came two weeks later, everything was ready and they had a great party.

In spite of occasional frustrations, the couples say the building experience was generally positive. One of the things that kept it that way was hiring an American expat to oversee the contractor and take care of day-to-day needs, reporting on progress and releasing funds as needed. "He saved us a huge amount of heartache," Judi says. "One time when he was on vacation, we dealt with the details ourselves. That's when we realized how much he was saving us in panic calls, heartburn and sleepless nights."

If you look for the obelisk at Casa Obelisco, you won't find it. The name comes from the giant tiled flower lying under the water at the villa's swimming pool. Barbara and Judi wanted a graphic of a flower as part of the pool's décor, and when they saw a large tile mosaic of a hibiscus in a Guadalajara workshop, they knew it was just what they were looking for. Although obelisco means obelisk in Spanish, through a dialectical quirk, in the San Pancho area it also refers to the hibiscus. They chose it for the name of the villa, too.

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**Casa Obelisco was built to be both a home to love and place to for guests to enjoy a truly memorable stay**

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Casa Obelisco was built to be both a home to love and place to for guests to enjoy a truly memorable stay. The owners designed it with special attention to beauty, privacy and comfort. Each guest room has a private bath finished in tile from the Cerámico San Pedro, a renowned manufacturer of rustic and artistic tile. The baths are roomy with double hand-painted sinks and private commodes. The luxurious beds come with mosquito nets, a decided advantage for those who like to sleep basking in the tropical breeze to the sounds of waves crashing on the shore without sharing the experience with uninvited guests. Alternatively, each room is air conditioned for those who prefer it. Hand-loomed Mexican cotton spreads cover large, comfortable mattresses topped by buttery-soft linens.

Guests are housed in four bedroom suites, each with its own distinctive decorative theme. “We tried to decorate each suite to reinforce the unique view our guests would have when they stay there,” Judi says. “Each has its own distinct personality, so it’s hard for me to pick a favorite.”

Vista Ballena is named for its view of the ocean where whales can be seen frolicking about during their winter migration to the Nayarit coast. The cobalt blue and white décor reinforces the ocean view, and during the times the real whales are not around, guests are compensated for their absence with a whale-patterned theme in the bathroom.

Las Conchas (The Seashells) has a green theme that echoes the view of the villa’s gardens and the ocean beyond its spacious private deck. The deck is furnished with a hammock and a pair of chaise longues for siestas al fresco.

The flower-studded gardens of Casa Obelisco inspire the décor of the Las Flores suite. The bathroom sinks are hand-painted with flowers and the siesta-friendly deck overlooks the resort’s pool with an ocean view through the gardens. Guests are greeted on arrival with an arrangement of pink bougainvilleas on the king-size bed. “Sleep on the petals and you’ll have extra-sweet dreams!” Judi suggests.

Primal greens reinforce the surroundings of the aptly-named La Jungla suite. The furnished patio is surrounded by hibiscus and palm trees and even has a banana tree within reach. A private path winds off the patio down to the villa’s swimming pool. Or if you prefer to bathe in seclusion, the bathroom has a large two-person shower. “I always feel a little wild in the Jungle Room,” admits Judi.

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**“The roof is the perfect place to sip a margarita and watch the magnificent Pacific sunsets”**

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Of course you won’t be spending all your time in your suite—the weather and the scenery are too nice.



Casa Obelisco has seen to it that there are plenty of options to commune with nature on the property. Judi advises that “The roof is the perfect place to sip a margarita and watch the magnificent Pacific sunsets.” The rooftop patio is ringed with built-in benches and planters full of bougainvillea. There are tables and chairs for snacking and, by special arrangement, having a starlit dinner whipped up just for you by Barbara or Judi.

The large pool has a palapa-shaded swim-up bar they call El Chango Borracho (The Drunken Monkey) after a tipsy monkey depicted in the bar’s mural. The bartender will make your drinks to order and also has a selection of snacks to tide you over ‘til mealtime. Two lounges are available for taking in the sun, and there is an outdoor shower tucked away in a palm grove off the pool. Amenities include a CD player and a refrigerator that guests can use to store snacks or food they have brought in from one of San Pancho’s *tiendas* to cook on the gas grill. Depending on the season, you may even be able to pick your own bananas or limes from trees that surround the pool.

There’s no doubt that the Levenses and Kirkwoods have a knack for making their guests comfortable, from the breakfasts served by Barbara and Julie to the warm greetings you can count on from their Labradoodle Kahlua who seems to have never met a person he doesn’t like. There are also cats on the property, so the owners offer that as a caution to persons with allergies.

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**“We’ve had many funny things happen regarding running the B&B, way too many to recount”**

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Now that they have a few years’ experience running the casa as a B&B, Judi says there’s not much chance of them stopping. It’s just been too much fun. “We’ve had many funny things happen regarding running the B&B, way too many to recount,” Judi says. “But, I remember the early days when Barb was still travelling to the US to work and John, Bill and I were serving breakfast in the pool bar acting like we knew what we were doing but calling ourselves the Three Stooges when we talked among ourselves.” Then there’s the guest who arrived naked and the guests who made love on the front doorsteps, but she says those are stories for another time.

One of the nicest things you can say about a bed-and-breakfast is that it feels like staying in a good friend’s home. And that’s just how you will feel by the time you leave Casa Obelisco.

They must be doing something right because this February, Forbes Traveller.com ranked them in the Top 10 Most Romantic Bed and Breakfasts Worldwide.

*Learn more about Casa Obelisco at*  
[www.casaobelisco.com](http://www.casaobelisco.com). ✨

# Grupo Ecológico

## Fighting to save today's resources for a better tomorrow

Just 40 minutes north of the hectic tourist destination of Puerto Vallarta is San Francisco, Nayarit, a calm pueblo with a friendly vibe that is better known as San Pancho. Home to the Grupo Ecológico de la Costa Verde, an ecology group devoted to preserving turtles and other marine life, San Pancho is a blueprint for how a small town can have a large effect on protecting the environment and defending marine life.

Turtles have been giving birth on the coast of Mexico for millions of years. At one time, vast swaths of these now endangered species waddled their way onto pristine beaches. But over the past century, coastal developments that made the beautiful white sand beaches home to a growing number of people led to a dwindling of the turtle population. In 1998, shortly before the ecological group began its work, only 72 nesting females remained. Even the locals, who once fed on the turtles and their eggs, began to fear that the turtles would face extinction.

In 1992, the Grupo Ecológico built the first marine nursery, and a year later it became the first nonprofit environmental group in the State of Nayarit to be granted official recognition by the Federal Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources. Within only a few months, a growing number of turtles began to return to San Pancho.

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Throughout  
the night,  
volunteers  
navigate  
the beach and  
gather warm eggs  
to shield them from  
human and animal predators

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Today, more than 902 nesting females come to San Pancho during the summer and fall months, and that number continues to grow. The Olive Ridley and Leatherback turtles follow their natural instinct to return to the beach where they were born to lay their eggs. To protect them and their potential offspring, an entire network has been created. Throughout the night, volunteers navigate the beach on a dune buggy and gather the warm eggs to shield them from human and



by Zena Polin

# de la Costa Verde



animal predators. Frank Smith, the group's director, then stores the eggs under environmentally controlled conditions until they are ready to hatch and are returned to the beach where they waddle back to sea to continue their fight for survival.

Mr. Smith was pleased to report that 2008 was a successful year. "By the end of December, 1,054 nests were recorded. Of these, 664 were placed in the box nursery (which has an 85% survival rate) while another 122 were placed in our beach nursery (with a 78% survival rate). A total of 199 nests were relocated to better areas along Playa Questa, Las Bancas and Los Chololo. From the above nests, an estimated 100,774 eggs were laid of which 76,789 hatchlings were released. Unfortunately 71 nests totaling 6,887

eggs were taken illegally."

In addition to poaching, several other challenges face Grupo Ecológico's efforts to make San Pancho a safe haven for turtles. Cold weather, hurricanes and even stray dogs prevent the turtles from coming ashore to nest, and poor road conditions and other infrastructure challenges make it difficult for the team of volunteers to collect the eggs. This past December, the cold weather may have caused the nest survival rate to drop below 78%, and the need for more volunteers and more funding to expand the box nursery and repair the dune buggy ensured an exhausting and busy fall for the group.

As part of their mission to develop and establish programs that emphasize environmental accountability and preservation for the community and visitors, the group holds workshops and field campaigns for children, sponsors community and wildland preservation and clean-up campaigns, and organizes outreach programs geared to improving public health and welfare.

Depending on the month, Grupo Ecológico offers different events to engage the community, volunteers and visitors. A turtle slide show presentation, guided tours of the marine nursery, visits to watch the release of hatchlings and viewings of nesting turtles are exciting ways to be a part of the process of saving these ancient sea creatures.

Thanks to the hard work of Grupo Ecológico, the word is out. Friends of the group are now finding and protecting nests in San Pancho and on other beaches towards the south. For more information on protecting turtles, on how to volunteer or to contribute: visit [www.project-tortuga.org](http://www.project-tortuga.org) or send an email to Frank Smith at [grupo-eco@project-tortuga.org](mailto:grupo-eco@project-tortuga.org). ✨

# Natural

## From water tanks to turtle nests, eco-consciousness is part of life in San Pancho



Situated on the majestic slopes of Sierra de Vallejo and decorated with lush jungles, San Francisco, known as San Pancho to the locals, remains an ecological gem in spite of its proximity to the overdeveloped tourist culture of Puerto Vallarta. Until 1970, residents of the town lived a simple life, most of them fisherman who lived in rustic housing without electricity. Then, with the encouragement of President Luis Echeverría, the town was transformed into a modern, self-sufficient community with schools, fisheries, a research center, and a hospital. Over the succeeding years, tourists began to visit the town and were fascinated by its unspoiled beauty and tranquil surroundings.

Townspeople, businesses, and organizations in San Pancho have worked tirelessly to preserve their natural surroundings and promote sustaining a healthy

environment as interest in the community has grown. There is pride in their voices when they speak of San Pancho and the progress they have achieved in protecting its rural essence.

### Earth, sun and water

Over the past few years, San Pancho real estate has blossomed with villa/bungalow rentals, private homes and new land developments, and the importance of promoting “green” living can be seen in home construction and landscaping. Companies like Emerald Coast Construction build high-end homes specifically tailored with energy-saving designs and technology. One of their most significant commitments is to build homes with compressed earth blocks instead of traditional concrete blocks and cement.

# Harmony



CEBs are made from local soils, which greatly lowers transportation costs and fuel consumption, and can last longer than concrete blocks. CEB walls allow a home to “breathe,” letting vapors and toxins pass out of the dwelling. Other environmentally friendly features of the homes are water catchments and branched grey water systems. Rainwater is captured from the roof, stored in tanks, and utilized later in dryer periods.

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Because of Mexico's nearly perfect climate, solar technology is an option for homeowners wanting an energy alternative

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Because of Mexico's nearly perfect climate, solar technology is an option for homeowners wanting an

energy alternative. San Pancho resident Sebastien Van Eersel works with Solar San Miguel installing solar panels and other solar systems on homes. He says at first residents were wary of trying solar technology due to bad experiences in the 1980s. “Systems were too faulty and solar energy business here dropped for a while,” says Van Eersel, “but once they see one system working properly and the technology is better, then that motivates them.”

The benefits to a homeowner of owning a solar energy system include lower electricity bills and the added security of having backup power during power failures or blackouts. Van Eersel remarks he has even installed solar panels for people who live in the jungle who otherwise have no electricity. “In this part of Mexico, there is a mix of people who are green-minded. Especially now with concerns over global warming and such, people are considering it more and more.”

The cost of installing a solar energy system is still a little pricey for some residents, but Van Eersel counters that people can invest in solar technology in small amounts. “Getting a solar water heater isn't too expensive. The costs really depend on functions of the home and how much electricity you want to use.”

San Pancho's tourist resorts also embrace environmental practices and programs. For 17 years, Costa Azul Adventure Resort has immersed their guests in the authentic culture and ecological mystique of San Pancho. Guests can embark on guided hikes through the lagoons and ancient trails, take a boat tour through the jungles, or try other natural activities like whale watching, snorkeling, kayaking, and surfing. The hotel refrains from promoting water skiing, off-

road vehicles, and personal watercraft. Throughout the resort, energy-saving lighting is used. In the evenings, only the most necessary lighting and electrical appliances are in service. Low-flow showerheads are installed in the rooms, as well as water-saving toilets. The hotel recycles all cans and bottles, and table scraps are donated daily to locals who raise pigs.

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If caught poaching nests or killing turtles,  
the penalty is up to five years in prison

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## Protecting the vulnerable

Mexico has more turtle nesting beaches than any other country in the world and poaching of the nests and their inhabitants has been a serious problem. Typically, the nests are taken for food or to sell. That is why Grupo Ecológico de la Costa Verde A.C. has been working for the past 17 years to protect endangered marine turtles. Director Frank Smith was visiting friends in 1991 when he became concerned over the safety of the marine turtles. At the beginning of the next season, he started the non-profit group and was saving up to 200 nests a day. After 17 years, that number has increased to 1,050. They were also the first organization in the area to build a marine nursery. In 1998, they switched from incubating nests on the beach to establishing a nursery at their headquarters in order to better incubate the nests in Styrofoam boxes. Smith says most people are behind the program but he still has to contend with a few setbacks. “Some people decide not to turn poachers in. They support the project but won’t speak up about who is taking the nests.” If caught with nests or killing turtles, the penalty is up to five years in prison. Smith says if the beaches weren’t protected, the turtles would have been eliminated in this area. “The coasts all the way to the north would have been depleted of the turtles,” Smith says. “It would have taken several thousand years just to repopulate the beaches.”

## Green inside and out

Among the many community efforts to promote eco-living also lies a growing interest in enhancing one’s spiritual and mental growth. San Pancho resident Gabriela Loreto owns El Estar, a yoga and wellness center that offers classes and workshops on yoga and meditation. Loreto noticed right away when she came to the town 20 years ago how the community was very in touch with nature. “San Pancho is organized and very open to change,” comments Loreto. “People from other countries come here and see how people are working to protect the quality of life.” Aside from her classes, people can purchase eco-friendly products such as bio-degradable soaps, medicinal herbs, compost containers and natural-fiber clothes. Along with her yoga center, Loreto and her husband are environmental advocates and try to educate the public on proper recycling, gardening, and creating composts. “The first time we came to San Pancho everyone would burn their garbage,” says Loreto. “People working with proper garbage disposal were really rare and it took awhile to change those habits.”

Loreto, along with several other residents and businesses, also organize an arts and culture festival held every December. The festival features artwork from recycled goods, costumes, a parade, and food grown from local gardens. “It’s a chance for everyone to see what we have achieved from our efforts,” she says.

Though it is a small community, San Pancho as a collective has developed a booming eco-conscious society that works to care for its natural habitat. And one can easily see why. Simply gaze out at the sparkling blue ocean that caresses San Pancho, walk barefoot in the soft golden sand of its beaches or take in a glorious sunset that casts a luminous glow over the sky. Here is nature in its most picturesque and undisturbed form. If the concerned residents continue to promote eco-consciousness, there is reason to hope it will stay that way. ✨



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# Completition

An expat couple discovers that Mexico's slower-paced lifestyle doesn't preclude bursts of creative energy

When I took an assignment a couple of years ago to write about Americans retiring in central Mexico, I rediscovered my childhood affection for the country and its people that I had first known decades earlier when my father, a mining engineer, was assigned to Mexico City. During later trips to the country, I came to feel that the overarching characteristics of Mexicans—amiability, generosity, creativity, honesty, joy in living—were most evident in the smaller towns. As for the article, I interviewed a wide range of gringo retirees, in various states of work, repose, and merriment, from Guadalajara to Puerto Vallarta.

It was at the end of the trip that, unexpectedly, my wife Thia and I arrived at the funky, dusty village that would grab our hearts: Sayulita.

A year later, we were taking part in the growing trend of retiring abroad. We sold our Manhattan apartment, packed up our SUV, and moved to the idyllic surfing and fishing village on Mexico's Pacific coast half an hour north of Puerto Vallarta and ten minutes south of San Pancho. The next year would be spent settling into our new life and planning and building our dream home.

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*We have saved a sum for landscaping, and Thia especially wants to find someone with an original design flair*

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Now well into the process, we have begun to talk to people about landscaping. The wall around our lot offers a comfortable sense of privacy and makes it perfect for one of those lush enclosed gardens we see in so many Mexican picture books. Though our bank account is getting lower, we have saved a sum for landscaping, and Thia especially wants to find someone with an original design flair.

As the structure has gone up, we have begun to wish that someone with a fresh eye could help us put the finishing architectural touches on the house. Though our original designer gave us excellent floor plans, he never really offered us elevation plans, something that showed what a house should actually look like. There was a sketch that showed the correct proportions of the house, but nothing with the detail we had hoped for. Now that we are seeing it in brick and mortar, it is looking a little plain and boxy.

At Choco Banana, the breakfast café by Sayulita's main plaza, we meet the next in the line of Mexican professionals who will decisively influence our lives. They are a husband and wife team named Benny and Hilda.

Benedicto Aristides Flores and Hilda Servan run a landscape design firm and nursery on the outskirts of Puerto Vallarta. I call and ask Benny and Hilda if they can come to Sayulita to meet us. They say they will be in the area this morning and they suggest



# 9 a Dream

by Barry Golson

we meet for breakfast at Choco Banana. Thia and I walk over. Sitting at one of the small, round tables is a slim blond woman and a large, somewhat rounded man wearing a safari hat and holding an oversized plastic mug of coffee he has asked the waiter to fill for him. In the months to come, I will never see Benny without his mug—or a distinctive sun hat from his vast collection.

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As they talk about their ideas for the garden, I begin to sense they are vibrating on our wavelength

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We introduce ourselves and Thia tells them what we hope for in a garden. I hang back; this is more Thia's realm than mine. They nod and tell her that they have some ideas they will run past us. Hilda speaks fluent English—they have spent a lot of time in the States—and Benny is one of those people who says he cannot speak English but understands everything Hilda and we say in English. They are a well-educated, well-traveled couple. Benny has been an architect as well, and decided that by teaming up with his wife and offering a total house-and-garden package, they could do better in business, and their reputation is indeed excellent. As they talk about their ideas for the garden, I begin to sense they are vibrating on our wavelength. I like everything I hear. I have brought the plans with me, including the elevation sketch. Though we are

straying from the garden topic, I begin telling Benny that we wish we had something more stylish going on with our house's facade; at this point, I say, our contractor Beto and we are improvising some of the design details, and are not always sure of ourselves. There is a wistfulness in my voice that Benny responds to. He reaches into his carrying case, pulls out a sketch pad, and there, in Choco Banana, begins redrawing the front of our house.

In fifteen minutes, with swift strokes of his black pen, he creates a detailed sketch that turns our boxy exterior into a wonder of pediments and columns and wrought iron, all cascading with flowers and vines. And then, an inspired touch: two large arches, done in old-aqueduct style, that frame the entrance from the driveway and cross the corner of our garden, ending in a jagged half arch with water from the top spilling into the pool.

I stare at it. I look at Thia. She nods happily.

"You're hired," I say. "When can you start?"

We discuss terms, and agree. As Hilda and Benny walk back to their truck, the plastic cup gripped firmly in Benny's fist, I realize that we will have a fresh, radically new look for both our house exterior and our garden. All of twenty-five minutes have passed.

Whoever said things move slowly in Mexico hasn't been to Choco Banana, in Sayulita, in August.

*Barry Golson is the editor of ForbesTraveler.com and author of two books about the expat life. This article is excerpted from **Gringos in Paradise**, the story of his move to Mexico. His latest book is **Retirement Without Borders**. Learn more about Barry and his work at [www.gringosinparadise.net](http://www.gringosinparadise.net) and [www.retirementwithoutborders.com](http://www.retirementwithoutborders.com). ✨*

# A Mission Paradise



by Ricky Arce

# to advice



When it comes to buying real estate in Mexico, sometimes the best choice is to wait

A dazzling sapphire ocean and broad white beaches couldn't distract Charlotte. Not once did the tender breezes rifling palm fronds along the 100 miles of Mexico's Riviera Nayarit coastline entice her to slow down. My friend was on a mission: to find the perfect home somewhere along the Pacific Ocean between the friendly surfer's town of Sayulita and the unprepossessing fishing village of San Blas on a week's trip.

"Now is the perfect time," Charlotte had announced one day and suddenly we were on an airplane to paradise to purchase property. She had been coming to the Puerto Vallarta area on vacations for many years, gradually moving north up the alluring coastline searching for the tranquil instead of the glitzy. Thus, when Charlotte was "downsized" by her company she excitedly crunched numbers and concluded that a piece of heaven in Mexico could be hers.

"But there's an economic crisis," I protested. "Aren't you nervous? Why don't you wait? How will you work at all from Mexico? And Mexico—it's a whole foreign country with a different language!"

Charlotte had an answer for everything. Research had shown her that the mortgage crisis in the United States wouldn't tremendously affect the vacation and second home market in Mexico. "Very few people have mortgages," Ronald Neuman of Sayulita Coastal Properties explains, so generally there isn't great pressure to sell and few foreclosure issues. He points out also that there is a strong base of buyers from Canada, as well as other parts of the world, who are not backing off. Moreover, taxes are very low, maintenance costs relatively inexpensive, and the rental market very strong. Therefore, opines Newman, people are more apt to wait to get their price rather than sell in desperation. Fred Feibel of F.L. Feibel y Asociados, the first real estate agency in San Pancho, points out that, in fact, often people come to this area looking for bargains and are disappointed that there aren't many

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**Professionals calculate that at least 1.5 million Americans own homes in Mexico and by 2025 that number will reach 12 million**

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“And the baby boomers are coming!” Geno Lamphiear of Calandria Real Estate in San Pancho reminds us. The U.S. State Department estimates that more than 500,000 Americans currently live throughout Mexico on a permanent basis. The Mexico Association of Real Estate Professionals

in Mexico. If Charlotte can find work, she can telecommute over internet telephones and high-speed service. In Puerto Vallarta, just an hour’s drive from San Pancho, she can shop in Home Depot, Costco, Wal-Mart, Office Depot and a wide variety of Mexican stores. And Charlotte can most likely afford to have someone cleaning her house and preparing fantastic meals from fresh local ingredients while she is working and shopping.

From the airport in Puerto Vallarta we head north on a four-lane highway—actually sometimes five



calculates that at least 1.5 million Americans own homes in Mexico and it is expected that by 2025 that number will reach 12 million.

Mexico is getting ready for this influx of foreigners. Just within the past few years, financing, escrow and title insurance have become common services

or six lanes if you count the parallel roads and the creative drivers passing on the shoulder—until we pass the exit to Punta Mita. The road narrows and suddenly there is a leafy canopy over us and lush jungle on either side of the sinuous byway. The state of Nayarit starts just a few miles north of Puerto Vallarta, which is in the state of Jalisco. It is one

of Mexico's least populated states with fewer than 1 million permanent residents, compared to the 6.7 million residents of Jalisco, where Puerto Vallarta is located. And while the municipality of Puerto Vallarta is positioned around the Bahía de Banderas or "Bay of Flags", the newly christened "Riviera Nayarit" comprises several different towns located primarily along ocean coast.

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**Over the past three years the government of Mexico has injected**

view to be unimpeded by high-rises and night clubs and she desires a small-town atmosphere. Also of paramount importance is that she believes this area is the best real estate investment at the moment. Over the past three years the government of Mexico has injected the Nayarit coastal areas with \$1.5 billion in infrastructure, mostly around the southern end of Banderas Bay, but ocean-facing locales like San Francisco, affectionately known as "San Pancho," have benefitted as well. And within three months of the March 2007 announcement that "Riviera" would be added to the state name of Nayarit, more money



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**the Nayarit coastal areas with \$1.5 billion in infrastructure**

Riviera Nayarit is Charlotte's choice over Puerto Vallarta because she's searching for a quieter retreat than she perceives PV to offer. She wants her water

was invested in the state than in all of 2006. In fact, Feibel notes that Mexicans are starting to buy more on the Riviera Nayarit, partly because Mexican credit has been expanding rather than tightening so far, so many wealthy Mexicans are purchasing for investment or preparing for retirement in their own country.

Selecting a reliable real estate agent familiar with the local area is always a good idea, particularly in Mexico. Although no license is required to sell real estate in Mexico, A.M.P.I. (Asociación Mexicana de Profesionales Inmobiliarios) has published ethical and fiduciary standards that its members are required to maintain. We look for a realtor who is an A.M.P.I. affiliate to provide some assurance that the complex process of a Mexican real estate transaction will go smoothly. Although there is a multi-listing service in Puerto Vallarta, Geno Lamphiear tells us that only a fraction of properties and lots available on the Riviera Nayarit are listed there. He stresses that most real estate agents—and there are many—know all the listings and work with other agents to find the perfect place for each client.

From ultra-exclusive gated communities to the slightly run-down resort town of Rincón de Guayabitos and the pristine beaches of more distant Chacala, Charlotte wants to see everything, but her main interests are the once-sleepy fishing villages of Sayulita and San Pancho, now home for many expats, and the newly developing area of Litibu. All along the coast, roads wind westward from Highway 200 to towns along the Pacific: Las Lomas and its Punta Monterrey; Lo de Marco with miles of broad, white beaches; Rincón de Guayabitos and La Peñita de Jaltemba located on the small bay of Jaltemba; Los Ayala, Boca del Naranjo, Chacala and others. Each town boasts a small enclave of foreigners immersing themselves in Mexico, but Charlotte decides she doesn't want to be quite so far from Vallarta and the closest airport. I think she's no pioneer and considers herself a notch above the trailer camps that dot these areas, but I'm her guest so I don't say anything.

She briefly considers Lo de Marco, a small town of 3,000 people about 10 kilometers north of San Pancho, “on the way to discovery,” according to Neuman of Sayulita Coastal Properties which has opened a second office there. We have taken a drive up to see a favorite beach Charlotte remembers and find that the access is now completely fenced off, validating the agent's statement that major development is planned for the area. Properties here start under \$100,000 for a lot and Gabriel Gallegos

of Sayulita Coastal Properties has a “small casita” he wants to show us for \$105,000. But even in Lo de Marco, where hills are low, that money doesn't get you an ocean view.

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### **We allot a day to each of the three locations of interest, and we're off on our personal treasure hunt**

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A view of the sea, if not direct access, is on the top of Charlotte's list. Beaches along the Riviera Nayarit vary from secluded rocky coves with towering cliffs to wide expanses of white sand lined with the ubiquitous palms. I like the view of the Sierra Madre Mountains covered with thick jungle foliage sloping to the shores, but Charlotte has her heart set on water. We allot a day to each of the three locations of interest—Sayulita, Litibu and San Pancho—and we're off on our personal treasure hunt.

## **Sayulita**

Investigating real estate in Sayulita is thoroughly enjoyable. Only a few years ago, Sayulita was a charming but grungy secret surfers' haven; now it boasts a wine bar and good non-fat lattes! In addition infrastructure has improved tremendously over the past 10 years. Whereas previously telephone lines were unavailable, there's now high-speed internet service and, more importantly to some, steady water pressure, a new sewer treatment plant and cobblestoned streets in place of dirt ones. I tend to wander into the many shops while Charlotte heads directly to her appointment with Ron Neuman. He, as well as other agents, believes that Sayulita and San Pancho are comparable price-wise. Likewise, he notes that in both towns a “high-rise” is only four stories, and there are very few of those. “San Pancho and Sayulita feel like Mexico. They're the antithesis of the big condo, city-style,” he says. Charlotte nods. That's why she's here.

But that is not to say there are no condo projects. Currently under construction, one block away from the beach on the charming north end of the Sayulita

bay, is Pájarao de Fuego. The four buildings housing a total of 35 units increase in ocean views as they terrace up the hillside, giving way to incredible views of the Pacific Ocean and surrounding jungle. Prices for these apartments start at \$265,000 and rise correspondingly with the view. But the Italian marble kitchen isn't something Charlotte is looking for. However, neither is she excited by a 1 bedroom 1 bath casita 15 minutes walk to town and beach for \$75,000, especially when she finds out water and electric are "available" but not yet functioning. Moving from the ridiculous to the sublime, we visit Casa Delfines, currently on the market for \$1.95 million, and marvel at the beautiful five bedrooms and eight bathrooms and garden with in-ground pool. The price includes two additional ocean-view lots, but it's all a bit more than Charlotte is ready to undertake.

We do manage to see some homes in the \$200,000 range that actually have walls and doors and complete kitchens, but they are not close to town or water and generally have only a jungle view.

Charlotte halfheartedly looks at lots, but building is not an option for her and an ocean view lot can cost well into the six figures, depending on size and location. So we move on to Litibu.

## Litibu

Until the Mexican government, in the form of FONATUR, stepped in, this area had been a virgin paradise with few inhabitants and one turtle camp. Now, as part of a major government development project, Litibu, located between exclusive Punta Mita and Sayulita, is the focus of deluxe resorts, condominium projects and signature golf courses.

"The folks who first moved to this gorgeous stretch of coast were pioneers," states Antonia Lavender of Prudential California Realty. She is giving us housing options in Litibu, but these mostly seem to be large condominium structures. Haixa Condominiums, for example, consists of 110 units in four towers, all with jungle views with prices ranging from \$270,000 up to \$720,000. La Tranquila offers 169 three-

bedroom condos in six-story buildings and offers fractional ownership as well as full-time. Located closer to the beach than Haixa, prices for units in the contemporary buildings start at \$800,000. There are, of course, lots—many in the million dollar range for their proximity to the ocean—and private homes for sale, some more easily affordable such as Casa Manzana with one bathroom, two bedrooms and a view for \$235,000, but Charlotte wants easy access to a town and the services and amenities which take a while to get in a developing area in Mexico. So we're off to San Pancho.

## San Pancho

San Pancho, with its whitewashed houses and coconut palm groves is a clean, cozy fishing town priding itself on an amazing culture of arts for a small village and incredible year-round ocean sunsets. In fact, San Pancho is evolving into a remarkable cultural center with many artists and musicians settling in permanently. I am especially charmed by the street names: off the broad Avenue of the Third World the streets are named for once exotic countries and places—Ethiopia, Asia, and China. And this classy town even possesses a polo field.

We find the same variety of real estate in San Pancho as in Sayulita: smaller homes with no view from \$180,000 up to the \$300,000s and amazing mansions with killer views or beachside access in the million-plus range. Development seems to be carefully controlled in this town. For example, Villa Encantada is a private resort community of six individual homes across from the beach in the Costa Azul area within San Pancho. Prices begin at \$625,000 for a cash purchase of a 2,200 square foot home and go up from there. From the highway we see a multitude of pink "San Pancho" signs and flags set amidst a large construction site. This will be "San Pancho Cultural Community," a vast complex of casitas, villas and residences with a commercial center, beach club and cultural offerings. This ambitious project plans to have workshops, bring opera to Nayarit, and even sponsor an artist-in-residence program. Geno Lamphiear takes us to Selva Azul where there are sites for 17 homes



and 12 townhomes on a hill with spectacular ocean views. Designated as an ecological development, homes will be built to take advantage of solar capacity and rainwater storage. The smallest lot, at 1329 square meters (about ¼ acre), is going for \$170,000, and several prime lots have been sold. But, Charlotte hasn't the patience to build so we're off again.

We're very impressed by a three-bedroom, two-bath furnished home with a pool in the town for \$330,000, but there's no view. For \$1,800,000, however, Charlotte can have a beachfront home with four bedrooms and five bathrooms. Again, we see one-story homes that can be built into two-level houses, homes surrounded by chicken wire (for the chickens) and lavish villas out of a fairytale. But nothing for which Charlotte is writing a check.

As in any real estate search, the real trick is to find the right home, at the right price, in the right location. But this isn't happening for Charlotte on this short trip, so she plans to return in a month and rent for a while, looking at leisure for her perfect place. I happily offer to help! ✨

## *Riviera Nayarit* Real Estate Resource Guide

### **Sayulita Coastal Properties**

[www.sayulitacoastalproperties.com](http://www.sayulitacoastalproperties.com)

Ronald Neuman and Gabriel Gallegos

### **Calandria Real Estate**

[www.calandriarealty.com](http://www.calandriarealty.com)

Geno Lamphiear

### **F.L. Feibel y Asociados**

[www.flfeibel.com/](http://www.flfeibel.com/)

Fred Feibel

### **Asociación Mexicana de Profesionales Inmobiliarios**

[www.ampi.org](http://www.ampi.org)

Site is in Spanish, but not that hard to understand, even for beginners

### **Prudential California Realty**

[www.ppurealtypv.com](http://www.ppurealtypv.com)

Antonia Lavender

# Real Estate Development at a Glance by Dawn DelVecchio

If you're thinking about buying in Mexico, these listings showcase the variety you will encounter

## Puerto Vallarta

Los Altos

Torre Diamante

## San Pancho

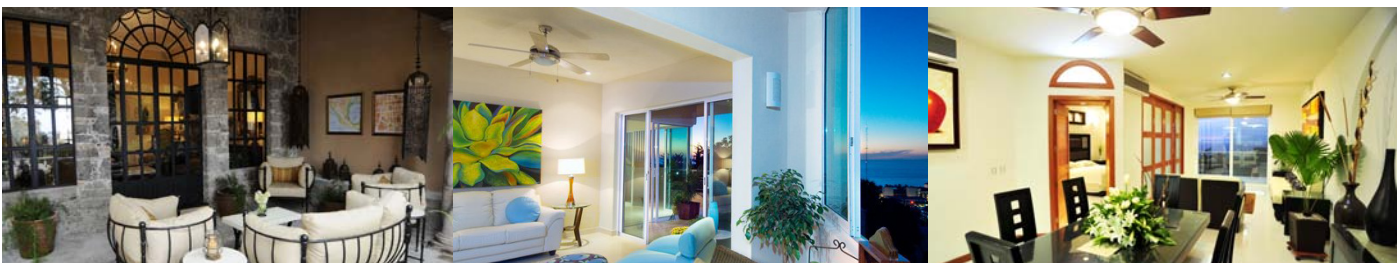
Armonia

## San Miguel de Allende

Artesana

## Puerto Escondido

Vivo Homes



\* Note on international calls

When calling phone numbers in Mexico from the U.S. and Canada, dial 011+52+ the area code and number. For international calls to cell phones in Mexico, dial 011-521+ the area code and number.





# Los Altos

## Puerto Vallarta - Condominiums

Los Altos Villas owners enjoy ocean views and the convenience of central living. This 29-unit condominium complex is located in downtown Puerto Vallarta. Two- and three-bedroom contemporary units with five different layouts range from 1,350 to 1,700 square feet. Wide terraces open onto stunning Puerto Vallarta views from both living and master bedroom spaces, making this a most unusual design. The six-story buildings are complete and thirteen units have already sold. The remaining 16 units are ready for occupancy.

Los Altos Villas has extensive landscaping throughout the common areas which include a large pool, gardens, private underground parking with elevator access to each level, a gym, Jacuzzi and mini-splits for owners and their guests.

This is a full-title ownership property. Prices range from \$249,000 to \$378,000 US. Unit owners seeking rental return on investment can expect 4-5% annually. A furnished model is available for viewing.

**Coldwell Banker, La Costa Realty**

**Darryl K. Bowie, GM**

**Carretera a Barra de Navidad # 480  
Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco México**

**Mexico phones:  
ofc. (322) 223-0055  
cell (322) 145-3007  
fax (322) 223-0025**

**US toll-free (866) 415-5757  
Mexico toll-free 01 (800) 821-5161**

**Email: [darryl@cblacosta.com](mailto:darryl@cblacosta.com)**







# Torre Diamante

## Puerto Vallarta - Condominiums

Contemporary design, exclusive living and unbeatable views are the hallmarks of Construcciones Panorámica's new Torre Diamante. With its prime location just 2,600 feet from Puerto Vallarta's malecón, this 10-unit complex offers spacious, two-bedroom condominiums, each with open den areas. There are only two units per floor, available in two sizes: 1581 or 1786 square feet.

Amenities include panoramic ocean views from all units, swimming pool, Jacuzzi, elevator, mini splits, top-of-the-line appliances, a water purification system in each unit and private parking.

This is a full-titled ownership property. Prices range from \$279,300 to \$381,800 US.

**Coldwell Banker, La Costa Realty**

**Darryl K. Bowie, GM**

**Carretera a Barra de Navidad # 480  
Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco México**

**Mexico phones:  
ofc. (322) 223-0055  
cell (322) 145-3007  
fax (322) 223-0025**

**US toll-free: (866) 415-5757  
Mexico toll-free: 01 (800) 821-5161**

**Email: [darryl@cblacosta.com](mailto:darryl@cblacosta.com)**

# Armonia

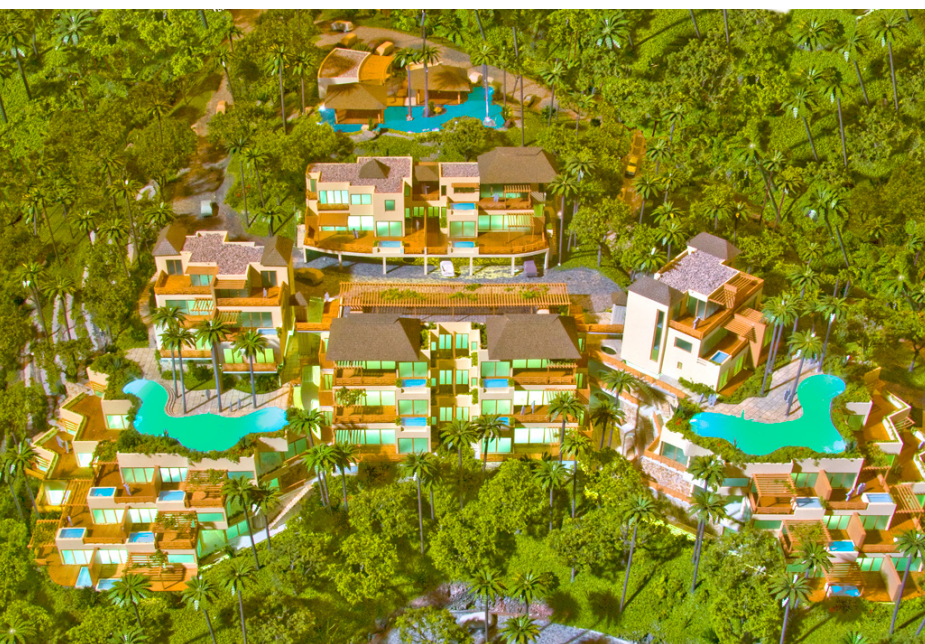
## San Pancho - Planned Community

Located in San Pancho's Selva Azul Development, Armonia is a master-planned community now underway. The spacious project will include four single-family homes, 20 hillside-terraced condominiums and a penthouse. The entire Selva Azul development is spread over approximately 60.5 acres. Owners will enjoy the benefits of covered parking, community pool, a gourmet hilltop restaurant and a private fitness center.

Armonia En Selva Azul's master plan was conceptualized with nature and privacy in mind. Architect Alberto Gómez is in charge of design. Known for luxury residential projects Punta Esmeralda, Real Del Mar and 3.14 Living in Nuevo Vallarta, Gómez integrates contemporary Mexican-Pacific style with nature to provide quality lifestyle luxury homes.

Just thirty miles north of Puerto Vallarta's airport, the community offers convenience that is off the beaten path. Infrastructure for Armonia will be complete by May 2009, and units (including the restaurant and fitness center) will be completed by July, 2011.

This is a full-titled ownership property. Prices range from \$346,500 to \$531,300 US.





**Calandria Realty**

**Geno Lamphiear**

**Avenida Tercer Mundo #50  
San Francisco (San Pancho),  
Nayarit, México 63732**

**Mexico phone: (311) 258-4285**

**Phone from US: 011 52 (311) 258-4285**

**Fax from US: 011 52 (311) 258-4462**

**Email: [GenoLamphiear@hotmail.com](mailto:GenoLamphiear@hotmail.com)**

**Website: [www.calandriarealty.com/  
armonia](http://www.calandriarealty.com/armonia)**



### San Miguel de Allende - Villas

The only five-star homes and resort that will be located in the very heart of San Miguel de Allende, Artesana Residences is a unique property. Building is now underway, and expected completion date for Artesanas is autumn/winter 2009.

Developer Bald Mountain de México SRL has come up with a bold plan for these two-, three-, four- and five-bedroom residences. Homes will include rooftop patios, gourmet kitchens, water features and elegant architectural design and finishes with the feel and

# Artesana



look of Old San Miguel. Residences range from 1,800-square-foot casitas to 7,500-square-foot villas.

Owners will have access to all amenities at the adjoining five-star resort, including a spa and fitness center, children's programs, residential concierge, event facilities, swimming pools, several dining venues and art classes through local schools.

Rosewood Hotels & Resorts will manage the Artesana Residences. It is a full-title ownership property. Prices range from under \$1 million to \$3 million US.

**Murphy O'Brien, Inc.**

**Regina Wong**

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**US toll-free: (800) 519-7683**

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# Vivo Homes and Boutique Condominiums

## Puerto Escondido - Planned Community

For those seeking quality living with full, luxury resort amenities, Puerto Escondido's new Vivo Homes and Boutique Condominiums, 200 miles down the coast from Acapulco, offers both. The project, located just 15 minutes from Puerto Escondido's International Airport, is being developed over 76 acres. When complete, there will be a total of 375 condominium units and 104 villas. Unit sales will begin in early June 2009.

Vivo owners will enjoy a broad range of resort services and amenities at the adjoining Vivo Resort. Family dining, a general store, childcare services, a fitness facility, swimming pools, a business center and Senses Spa are all in place. A planned waters sports center will give owners and their guests access to nearby Manialtepec Lake Lagoon for water skiing, kayaking, wake boarding, bird watching and boat tours.

This is a full-title ownership property. Prices range from \$70,000 to \$337,000 US. Unit owners seeking rental return on investment can participate in a rental program. The project is planned for completion during the 4th quarter of 2010.

### Vivo Resort, Homes and Boutique Condominiums

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Director-Sales & Marketing

U.S. Phone: 403 827-3210

Email: [chuck@vivoresorts.com](mailto:chuck@vivoresorts.com)

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by Mike McClanahan

# In the Pink

## Health Care in San Pancho

You might expect that a village the size of San Pancho would be a little short on medical facilities, and you would be right except for one thing. The Hospital General San Francisco, one of the many things that former president Luis Echeverría lavished on San Pancho before he left office under the cloud of scandal, is a modern, well-equipped 28-bed teaching hospital, the only one between Puerto Vallarta and Tepic. In addition to a 24-hour emergency room, it has 38 physicians on staff, over half of whom speak English. They include specialists in Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, Ob/Gyn and Emergency Medicine.

San Pancho has half a dozen pharmacies, some small, but a couple carry a good selection of sundries, including cosmetics. You will also find that several drugs that are prescription-only in the U.S. are available over-the-counter in Mexico, generally at a considerably lower cost. Fema Farmacia is a 24-hour facility located near the hospital, and CMQ Farmacia is on the main street, Tercer Mundo, in central San Pancho.

Other than the hospital staff, you will need to make short trips to nearby towns for medical and dental care. Clínica Santa Rosa, 15 miles south of San Pancho in Bucerías, is a full-service family medicine practice with 24-hour emergency care, and there is another general practice physician, Doctora Clara Seijo, in Nuevo Vallarta, another five miles farther south.

Puerto Vallarta, 45 minutes south of San Pancho, is home to over 200 physicians and several modern, fully-equipped hospitals and clinics. Diagnostic labs, chiropractors and physical therapists are also available in Puerto Vallarta, as are alternative medicine and holistic practitioners. Ambulance service, medical evacuation and air transport from Puerto Vallarta International Airport to the States and other destinations is provided by six companies

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San Pancho has a SMILE Clinic offering free dental care to local residents. The program is run in conjunction with the Camosun College Dental Program out of Victoria B.C. in Canada, and is one of many not-for-profit projects serving the community.

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The nearest dentist, Dr. Abraham López Sánchez, is located seventeen miles north of San Pancho in Peñita de Jaltemba. His practice includes orthodontics, endodontics, pediatrics and implants. A wide selection of dentists and dental clinics is available in Puerto Vallarta.

*¡Buena salud y buena suerte!*

## Health Care in Mexico

Anyone who travels abroad is well advised to familiarize themselves with the health care resources in the countries they are visiting, and Mexico is no exception. Most cities of any size in Mexico have good-to-excellent medical facilities with competent physicians and support staff. You're likely to be pleased with both the quality of the care and its cost. But when you venture off the beaten path, it's good to know where to go for help if you need it. The information here is current as of publication, but with the growth of tourism, expat communities, and Mexico's ongoing commitment to improving accessibility of health care services, you may well find resources that aren't listed. Your hotel staff should be able to offer assistance in tracking down the sort of care you need, and consulates, if available, are also good sources for local information. Many larger hotels and resorts even have medical services available in-house.

There are a couple of things to check before you venture outside your home country, regardless of your destination. First, does your health insurance cover expenses incurred abroad? Medicaid, for instance, only covers care in the U.S. Many private insurers cover "reasonable and customary" foreign costs, but many others don't. If your policy does cover you, be sure to take your ID card and a claim form with you. It's a good idea to take the policy itself, too, so if any questions arise, you'll have it to consult. If your health insurance does not cover costs outside your home country, look into purchasing a supplemental policy that does. Your own carrier might offer one, or you may have to buy from another source. Ask your agent for advice before you buy because there are many choices available, some better than others.

One important item to consider is medical evacuation insurance because even policies that cover customary costs may not cover the expense of getting you back home if the need arises, and it can be quite expensive, especially if an air ambulance is required.

You may also find that the facility you go to does not accept foreign insurance. Some doctors and clinics in Mexico require payment in cash or, sometimes, credit card. If your insurance covers your costs but is not accepted by the facility you're at, be sure to keep receipts for reimbursement. Even if you're not covered, having the receipts will at least allow you to deduct the expenses at tax time.

U.S. citizens who rely on Medicare generally plan on trips back to the U.S. for routine care, but Mexico's national health insurance (similar to Medicare) is available for purchase for only around three hundred dollars per year. It's an economical and viable substitute if you're comfortable with the care available in the area you are staying.

Private insurance is also available, and it's considerably less expensive than in the U.S. Just be aware that if you allow your U.S. policy to lapse, you may find that you face waiting periods for reinstatement and even denial of coverage for pre-existing conditions. ✖

by Gail Mitchell

# A Place We

## Four expats discover that sharing is the way to belong

Tucked into the stunning coastline north of Puerto Vallarta is the charming village of San Francisco, Nayarit, affectionately known as San Pancho.

Within an hour's drive from Vallarta on Highway 200, this once sleepy fishing village has become a popular vacation and retirement destination, part of the new Riviera Nayarit.

What do expats who retire to San Pancho do all day? The easy answer, of course, is “whatever they want.” What some folks want is to make a contribution to the community where they live. Here are the stories of four expats who found ways to share their skills and resources with neighbors, both Mexican and American, in the village of San Pancho.

### A beach town where the kids couldn't swim

An escape from wintry Connecticut brought Nancy Brown and Skip Weldon to Puerto Vallarta in 1993. They bought a timeshare and for their next five winters vacationed there. But by 1998 life in the resort hotel seemed too sheltered, so the next year they rented a home for a week in San Pancho.

“If we were infatuated with Mexico at the timeshare, were falling in love then,” Nancy says. Eventually they retired, purchased property in San Pancho and built a house in the middle of the pueblo.

Shortly after they moved in the small face of a Mexican boy appeared at the Cyclone fence surrounding their backyard pool. “¿Puedo bañarme? Can I swim?” Abram asked.

“How could we say ‘No’ to Abram’s polite request?” Nancy asks rhetorically. Moments later, the number of swimmers increased to five, plus one mother. Swimming days in San Pancho at *La Casa de Skip y Nancy* had begun.

# San Pancho: Call Home.

Then three summers ago, Nicole Swedlow talked with Skip and Nancy about using their pool to teach San Pancho children how to swim. “Do you know that most of the kids in the pueblo don’t know how to swim?” she asked.

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The ocean has powerful waves and a dangerous undertow. It's a challenge for even experienced swimmers

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As the founder of *entreAmigos*, a non-profit that provides learning opportunities for San Pancho children, Nicole wanted to remedy this problem.. Will Nancy and Skip lend their pool for summer swimming lessons? It was easy for them to say “Yes.”

Now, every Tuesday and Friday the sign hanging on their gate reads (in Spanish), “Children: Swimming Today, 4:30.” In an orderly line the children wait for the gate to open and for swim time to begin. Skip is the lifeguard, maintaining safety among the splashing, jumping, shouting crowd. The rules are clear: no running, no fighting, no food or gum, no peeing in the pool.

Nancy describes what many expats feel, “We like being in the middle of the action. Chances to be involved with Mexicans, like the pool kids, pop up, and that helps us feel we’re part of the community. We’re not just on a long vacation here. San Pancho is our second hometown.”

## Too many cats and dogs!

Nearly twenty years ago Judith Anderson came to San Pancho because of her interest in Huichol art. The brightly colored woven “paintings” of these indigenous people are found throughout the State of Nayarit. Rich in stylized symbols based in nature—suns, moons, animals—and themes of fertility and birth, they depict the Huicholes’ deeply spiritual belief system.

“The first thing I noticed was the town had an overwhelming number of unhealthy cats and dogs,” Judith says. “There were dog fights in the streets, and litters of unwanted animals. I couldn’t ignore the problem.” She and San Pancho friend Betty McIntyre share a passion for animals. They agreed they had to do something.

Betty and Judith organized the first Spay-Neuter Clinic in San Pancho. “If neutering is free and done in a safe and clean environment, we believe that over time the village will see a healthier animal population,” Judith says.

That makes sense, but resistance from town residents was immediate. “What they told us,” Judith says, “was that if you neuter a male dog, he will lose his desire to guard the house.” She and Betty persisted and sponsored veterinary students from the state university in Tepic to run the clinic. Then they hit on the idea of a financial incentive: Betty personally paid people the equivalent of \$10.00 US for every cat and

dog they brought to the clinic. Suddenly, the clinic got busy! It was their first success.

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The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.—Mahatma Gandhi

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Since then the Spay-Neuter Clinic is a bi-annual event with major community support. Both locals and expats join to coordinate, fundraise, feed volunteers, lodge the visiting vets, monitor recovery and deliver animals back to their homes. During the clinic held in November 2008, seventy animals were neutered over three days, and eighty or more have been processed at other times.

Judith tells me, “Gandhi said that you can tell a lot about a country by how the animals look. In San Pancho our cats and dogs are looking pretty good.”

### **Pulse on the weather**

Two years ago Cele and Curt Hahn decided to spend Christmas in San Pancho instead of in San Miguel de Allende, where they had lived for five years. It was just a short trip to enjoy some beach time. The Hahns planned a leisurely week on Mexico’s west coast exploring a new town. San Pancho’s charm caught them by surprise. “That very week,” Curt explains, “we bought our house here.”

Cele is a former State Representative from Westfield, Massachusetts. Curt has a background in broadcasting and they bring their public service experience with them. Curt’s enthusiasm for [weatherunderground.com](http://weatherunderground.com) led him to purchase a personal weather station. Installed on the roof of their house is the measuring equipment which sends information to Curt’s computer every few seconds. Curt designed an attractive, easy-to-navigate website, [www.sanpanchoweather.com](http://www.sanpanchoweather.com), so that anyone

interested can have access to the information.

“Even in warm and sunny San Pancho,” Curt says, “people want weather information. They talk about heat and humidity, but it’s rainfall that generates the most conversation.” Rainfall totals are critical, since they determine how much water will be supplied to the entire town. Less rain can mean water shortages and rationing before the next rainy season begins.

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Connecting to the website is connecting to the village no matter how far away you are

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The weather information is valuable to everyone who lives in the village. Recently, Curt added a Yahoo forum to the website where questions and answers about living in San Pancho can be posted. But a lot of expats check the website when they’re not in San Pancho. Connecting to the website is connecting to the village. It’s a way of being there, no matter how far away you are.

### **Building a library**

Nine years ago, my husband Bill and I discovered San Pancho by our usual method—traveling by bus and choosing destinations randomly from signs above our heads in bus stations. This trip was no exception.

When we arrived, we wandered down the main street, Tercer Mundo, and found a small restaurant near the beach serving breakfast. As we consulted our guide book, a voice from a table in the corner boomed, “You aren’t going to find this place in that book.”

“You’ve just arrived at the most beautiful town in Mexico.” He came over, towering at 6’7”, and extended his hand. “Dar Peters,” he said, “Welcome to San Pancho.”

Through the friendship with Dar we bought a small piece of land. Later, Dar helped us design and build our house. During this time Dar and I talked often about the public health clinic in Chicago where I worked. The Mexican families who received care there were often from small villages, just like San Pancho.

“Improving literacy and providing free books is the best part of my job” I explained to Dar. I described the English as a Second Language classes for parents and the books we gave the children at clinic visits. “Most of the families have never been to a library,” I added.

“Maybe you’ll start a library here when you retire,” Dar suggested.

“Maybe I will,” I agreed. But the idea was on hold; six years passed before retirement became a reality. Then I met Nicole. She doesn’t just organize swimming lessons. Three years ago I found her in the center of a group of children and a table-full of art supplies.

“Hi,” she called out to me, “Do you want to help the kids make paper flowers?”

“Not me,” I answered, “I’m terrible at art.”

Nicole laughed, “That’s okay, I’m sure I can find something else for you to do. Let me tell you about entreAmigos.”

Do I speak Spanish? Yes, some. Will I be willing to tutor students? I can try. Can I help organize a library? She had me. I immediately pictured books on rows of shelves, neatly labeled; a card catalog; children and adults with library cards; a circulation desk; the Dewey Decimal system!

On the second floor of the building, the library consisted of two small, brightly painted rooms. Volunteers built shelves and donated small tables and chairs. Books were sorted and organized in boxes. In time, the boxes were emptied and the library started to take shape.

One room now holds the Spanish and bilingual collection for children and adults. Picture books stretch along two low shelves. Brand new books mingle with those that are well worn. There is fiction and nonfiction; a reference book section with books on Mexico, literature, history, art and culture. In the second room, shelves overflow with books in English for children and adults. Here is “vacation” reading—best-seller paperbacks, mysteries and beach reads mixed with classics and poetry. There are travel and how-to books; magazines in crates.

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There may not be a card catalog,  
but the shelves are labeled and  
at times the books are in order

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Today, we have a library that the whole community uses. A narrow hallway holds a long table with benches for children to do homework. Gently-used computers are busy all day and provide free internet access for the community. Children come daily for art projects, English classes, reading circles and tutoring. Visitors and residents, Mexicans and foreigners borrow and donate books. Classrooms from the primary and elementary school visit weekly and community groups use the library as a meeting place. A large bulletin board outside announces yoga and Spanish classes, the bird-watching club and other activities.

There may not be a card catalog, but the shelves are labeled and at times the books are in order. There is no circulation desk. A large ledger records books borrowed and returned. But in San Pancho, entreAmigos and the library are part of the community.

Retiring in Mexico is an adventure that each of us embraces in our own way. For some, long years of work make long days of leisure seem appealing. For others, volunteering is a way of a life. But for all of us who are writing the next chapter of our lives in San Pancho, this is a place we can call home. ✨

# Beautiful Tastes from Beautiful Places

European and  
Asian influences  
combine with  
native cuisine to  
produce a meal  
that's totally  
San Pancho

A few years after landing on the shores of Mexico with her seafaring mother, Amandine Darmstaedter brought the tastes of her native Belgium and neighboring France to culinary school in Mexico City. There she blended the flavors of Mexico with them to create a unique palate for her two restaurants in San Pancho, MarPlata and Café del Mar, and her top-rated Malaysian eatery, El Malayo, in Mexico City.

She shares with us a dinner recipe that evokes both sides of the Pacific, a crisp aguachile of shrimp followed by mahi mahi wrapped in banana leaves. Wet your whistle with a red beer a la Mexicana and finish with strawberries in cream and you'll have a meal that takes you back to San Pancho no matter where it's served.



Ice

1 tbsp of Maggi  
seasoning sauce

1 tbsp of Worcestershire  
sauce

1 tbsp of Tabasco sauce

Juice of 1 green lime

½ cup of clamato juice  
(clam & tomato)

Salt and pepper to taste

1 beer (Corona or  
Pacífico)

## Cielo rojo

### (clamato con cerveza)

In a very tall glass with lime and salt on the edge put some ice and the sauces all together with the lime juice and the clamato. Season with salt and pepper, add the beer. Garnish with celery or cucumber.

150 grams (5¼ oz.) very fresh and raw shrimp, cut in halves horizontally

½ cup of lime juice

2 fresh serrano chiles

1 small piece of cucumber, peeled

1 garlic clove

1 small piece of ginger

1 handful of cilantro

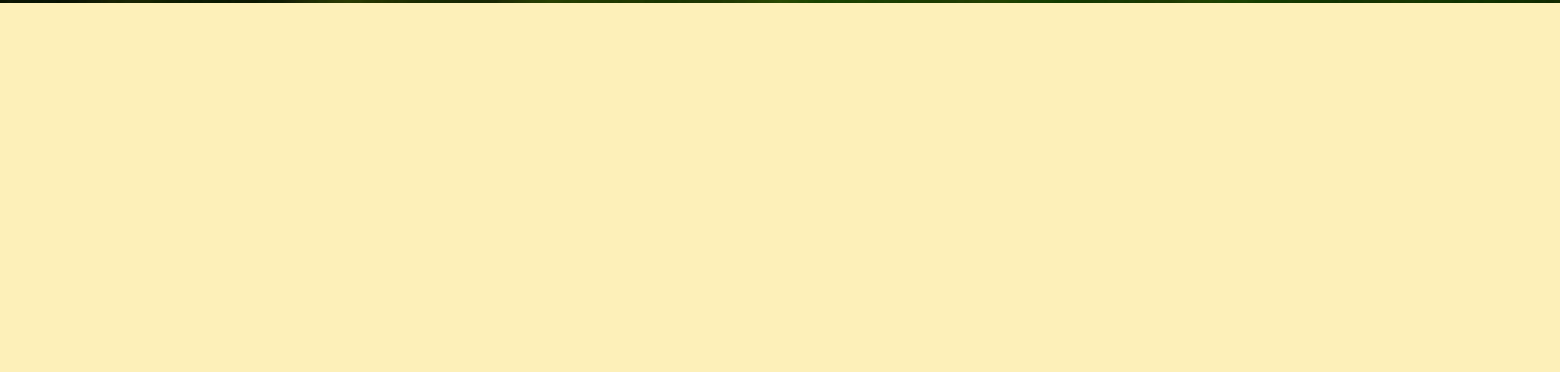
Salt and pepper to taste



### **Aguachile de Camarón “La Perla”**

Blend the lime juice with the chiles, cucumber, garlic, ginger and cilantro. Place the shrimp in a bowl and add the blended juice, season with salt and pepper.

Serve after 5 minutes on a plate. Garnish with cilantro and sliced tomato and cucumber.





### **Strawberries with cream:**

Blend the strawberries with the cream, sugar and vanilla. Pour in a glass cup and place in the freezer for 30 minutes. Garnish with the whipped cream before serving.

½ cup fresh and clean strawberries

2 tbsp sour cream

1 tbsp sugar

A few drops of vanilla essence

Whipped cream for garnish



1 mahi mahi filet, about 200 grams (7 oz.)

1 tbsp of axiote paste

2 tbsp of orange juice

2 tbsp of sour cream

Salt, pepper, cumin to taste

Banana leaf, enough to wrap the filet

### **Mahi Mahi Filet Wrapped in Banana Leaf with Axiote**

Mix the axiote with the juice and the cream, season with salt, pepper and a little bit of cumin. Marinate the mahi mahi in this mixture for 30 minutes.

Wrap the filet in the banana leaf and then in aluminum foil and cook on the grill for 5 minutes each side.

Serve with white rice and a deep fried plantain banana.

# Eme

by Ellen Greene

## Eme's Coconut Flan

### Ingredients

- ½ cup white sugar
- 1 can of condensed milk
- 1 can of evaporated milk
- 1 cup of whole milk
- 5 eggs
- 1 generous handful of sweetened coconut

When “Eme” has flan, the whole town shows up

Emerita García Cervantes makes the best flan in San Pancho, we all say.

“Eme” owns and runs Los Delfines Restaurant, a block up from the beach on the town’s main drag and open for supper. When she has a fresh batch of flan for sale, she props a Styrofoam plate against a small potted cactus that sits on a counter. “Hay flan,” the plate reads (There is flan.). Passers-by spread the word.

Eme turns out flan de coco (coconut), de queso (cheese), de café (coffee), and de vainilla (vanilla). Flan de coco seems to be the favorite, given the number of mentions it gets. All of the flans are rich and dense, the batter poured into cunning little tin pans called flaneras (yours for \$8 in Mexican supermarkets and houseware stores), then steamed in a pressure cooker for an hour.

Eme is one of the hardest-working women in town; her day job is janitor at the local middle school. She’s a widow who raised two daughters alone, one of whom is just finishing up a university degree program.

Eme is generous, too. She’d be happy to share her flan recipe, she said, when approached by two of my house guests. She suggested we come watch her make it one Saturday morning. Afterward, we paid for her time without her asking. She could offer Mexican cooking classes, one of us enthused. She smiled but didn’t answer. Sure thing, I thought, what with all that extra time you’ve got.

# Flan



1. Melt the sugar in the flanera, stirring as it liquefies. Coat the sides and bottom of the flanera.
2. Blend the condensed milk, evaporated milk, eggs, and coconut in a blender.
3. Pour the blender mix and the whole milk into the flanera simultaneously (don't stir together).
4. Seal the flanera with foil; snap on its lid; place in a pressure cooker, and add water to reach half way up the side of the flanera.
5. Put the lid on the pressure cooker; over low flame, cook for 1 hour; remove from the cooker.
6. Cool at room temperature; refrigerate for a day before serving. ✨

# El Chololo

Simple elegance blends naturally with the jungle in this beautiful expat home

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San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato.

A man and a woman are walking hand-in-hand on a sandy beach. They are both wearing white shirts. The woman is wearing a white long-sleeved top and a white skirt. The man is wearing a white short-sleeved shirt and khaki pants. They are walking towards the left side of the frame. The ocean is to their right, and the sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is romantic and serene.

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