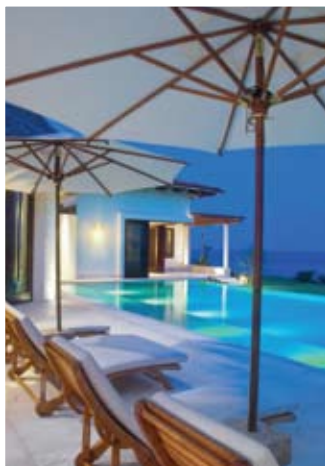
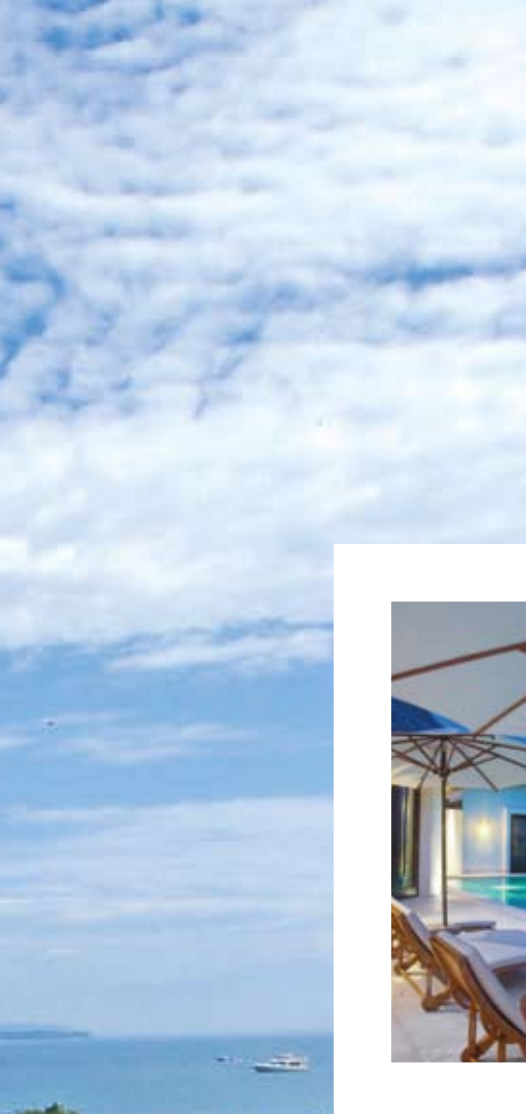


A Different Kind of Mexico

Punta Mita's Luxury Condos Offer Travelers the Lap of Luxury

Written by Carly Harrill



For young-blooded

Americans, especially those on the West Coast, Mexico is an all-too familiar getaway. As ripe collegiates, it's an enduring legend, where tedious lectures are temporarily pushed to the unconscious in light of 30 packs of Coronas and hard techno beats. As individuals become career-focused, however, a quick weekend dash across the border allows for some well-deserved R&R without wasting too many vacation days. Warm, daytime temperatures averaging in the 80s, plenty of sandy public beaches and enough tropical cocktails to make the world go round.

Enter the unmarked borders of Punta de Mita, a short drive from one of Mexico's most exclusive weekend hideaways, Punta Mita. Just 40 minutes northwest of Puerto Vallarta, Punta Mita is a quaint 1,500-acre luxury resort and master-planned residential community that resides on a spear-shaped peninsula surrounded by pristine beaches, ocean blue waters and a myriad of on- and off-shore activities. The private community shares an address with The Four Seasons Punta Mita Resort, a slew of exquisite villas and townhomes, and a world-renowned Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course. At Punta Mita, natural beauty is brought to life by modern, coastal architecture designed to enhance the discerning traveler's visit to Mexico.

Trump types from across the world have already claimed their stake in this exquisite setting, though

Punta Mita can be had — for the renting. The resort has opened its doors to jet setters and desperate vacation-seekers through a luxury rental program that provides access to Mexico's version of 90210. A small chunk of savings can garner anyone the key to a private luxury villa or condo that provides an entire laundry list of hotel-inspired incentives: at-your-service concierge, spa pampering, private chefs, housekeeping, a round of golf, water sports and activities, and access to the private Residents' Beach Club. (High-style homes go for \$750 to \$10,000 per night in low season, May-November, and \$1,200 to \$14,000 in high season; condo rates are \$500 to \$1,350 per night.)

While Mita's Residents' Beach Club is modest in size, it is one of the most tranquil, yet lively, backdrops of the community. Just a brief stroll from anywhere within the Punta Mita borders, the club boasts plush lounges shaded by canvas umbrellas, an oceanfront swimming pool, games of chess and a sandy beach. Spa treatments are performed in the comfort of chic, airy canopies perched where the Beach Club's grassy null meets the white sands. One tip of advice: Though in America, one typically indulges in massages in nothing but the silky skin our mothers blessed us with, in Mexico, it's not common tradition. (Not only did Rosa get a little more than she bargained for, but the little boys building sandcastles right outside the free-flowing drapes of my cabana sure learned about the birds and bees a bit sooner than their school teachers would have hoped.)



Golf in the Sea

Just a bird's eye away from the Residents' Beach Club is one element of what Jack Nicklaus calls his greatest design — the only natural island golf hole in the world lying in the middle of the ocean — part of Mita's signature course. If tides are low, golfers opt for a golf cart to escort them down a strip of land to the hole; if tides are high, things get a bit riskier as they trek the rough waters on an amphibious, dune buggy-like contraption to their final destination.

From scuba diving and sailing to sea kayaking and windsurfing, visitors can live in the water. Make sure to take a trip via motorboat to the Marieta Islands with the famous personal tour guide, Rudi. His legendary status among tourists lives up to that of Prince ... no need for a last name. A man who belongs to the sea, Rudi is a German of origin, but a true Mexican at heart — going off-course in lieu of a school of dolphins, teaching the history of blue-footed boobies, dropping his guests off for a brief swim through hidden ocean caves, and even proving to that some jellyfish are absolutely harmless (long story).

On-shore, there are more exotic territories to explore. Glide along a series of zip lines in a private eco-reserve of the Sierra Madre's tropical forest or take a drive in a specially designed Mercedes-Benz SUV through the Mexican desert for Punta Mita's version of a jeep safari. For the faint of heart, there's always horseback riding through the hillsides, valleys, beaches and rainforests.

When the sun goes down, Punta Mita is still full of life. Dining at sunset in the Residents' Beach Club or indulging in a romantic escapade via candlelight in the privacy of the villa are always options. But, for those who want to fine dine with the locals, Mita's newest claim to fame is the swanky white, Miami-style setting of Café des Artistes del Mar. The brainchild of celebrated restaurateur Thierry Blouet, the restaurant mirrors its sister bistro in Puerto Vallarta to bring guests fresh catch and seafood with Mediterranean flair met by oceanfront breezes. A signature cigar lounge, floor-to-ceiling glass and light piano jazz complement the exemplary cuisine (the tuna sashimi salad is the ideal way to start the evening).

After Sundown

When dinner is over and it's time to let that hair down, the nightlife is only a short taxi ride away. While Puerto Vallarta has some of the best after-dark hotspots in Mexico, be prepared to lose some beauty sleep — the locals here don't call it a night until close to 4 a.m. If opting to stay close to home, the sleepy beach town

of Sayulita is only a 20-minute hail and offers casual drinking holes for chugging cheap tequila while listening to live music. Calypso and Don Pedro's are where most of the action resides.

Over the next five years, Punta Mita will only increase its value with several luxury developments mapped out, including the elegant St. Regis Resort & Residences (scheduled for Fall 2008), a second Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course (October 2008), the La Solana Resort (2010) and a Mii amo destination spa and residences (2010).

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Also on the horizon is the luxury residential and resort community of Porta Fortuna, set on 14 acres of oceanfront real estate, slated for relaxation in November of 2008. Yet another brilliant development of Los Angeles/Punta Mita-based Inspired Resorts, Porta Fortuna will cater to hip jet-setters with "Mediterranean" design that blends the tranquility of Zen style and Mexican architecture in an ultra-luxe beach environment. Porta Fortuna is crafted around an enclave of 14 highly sought-after Zen Casitas, beachfront estates, three-bedroom luxury condominiums, a private resident beach club called Playa Fortuna and the Porta Fortuna Yacht Club located on the outskirts of the Bay of Banderas. Father-and-son duo Fred and Cliff Damavandi have balanced one's collective experience and fine taste with the other's cultured knowledge of budding entertainment hubs to create Porta Fortuna for both wealthy single families and young, urban dwellers.

Another project to keep eyes peeled for is the re-launch of luxury condominium project, Ayia Punta Mita, formerly known as Las Terrazas. Originally designed as strictly a condo/residential development opening its doors in 2007, Ayia Punta Mita is undergoing a facelift to offer trend-savvy travelers and maturing investors a boutique-inspired experience, available through ownership and a unique rental program. The focus will be on lifestyle, entertainment and a modern ambiance, with highlights described as "community amenities" in the form of a lounge-style bar, an Italian coffee shop and a sleek fitness facility which features a yoga area. Ayia Punta Mita will re-open in the fall of 2008.

Say bienvenido to luxurious Punta Mita at www.puntamita.com