

Puerto Vallarta

Best Beach in the Zona Romantica (Old Town / Centro)

[Playa De Los Muertos](#): This is our favorite beach in the [Zona Romantica](#) area. Most of the beaches in Centro Puerto Vallarta are very rocky and the surf is pretty rough. This beach is right below the landmark [Muelle de Playa Los Muertos](#). The water is much more accessible here. It is very popular with the locals. I don't have the courage but many people jump into the water from atop the muelle.

Where to Stay

There are literally thousands of places to stay in Puerto Vallarta. The prices vary widely. The closer you are to the beach, the more expensive the accommodations. However, if you are willing to be a few blocks from the beach, the prices drop quickly. The best deals are found using Airbnb or some other online venue, though there are also good deals to be had in the hundreds of hotels. Two of our favorite hotels are [Playa Los Arcos](#) and [Casa Doña Susana](#). They are sister hotels and just a half block from one another right in the heart of the Zona Romantica around the corner from Badilio Badillo (see below). Playa Los Arcos is right on the beach and has beach amenities. Their prices used to be very reasonable but since the pandemic, their prices have risen dramatically so we haven't stayed there in a couple of years.

Restaurants – By no means is this list exhaustive. There are just too many to enumerate.

[Martini en Fuego](#): This is our favorite restaurant. It is closed on Thursdays. The food is out of this world. It is a bit pricey for Puerto Vallarta but worth every peso! My wife and I walked by one evening after we had already eaten and stopped to look at the menu as the mesero was doing his best to usher us in. We told him that we had already eaten dinner but would be very interested in reading the menu. I was looking for a pulpo dish. As I commented to the mesero that, alas, they didn't have pulpo on the menu, the chef, Roberto, came bounding out of the restaurant and said, "You come back tomorrow for dinner and we will make you a pulpo dinner!" It's a deal! The pulpo was fabulous! So now when we go, we stop by a day before and ask them if they can prepare pulpo the next day. Everything is awesome. Anita loves the Huachinango Roberto, one of the chef's specialties. When pulpo is not in season, Roberto won't serve it. When that happens, I order the mejillones. Yummm!

[Mariscos El Guero](#): This family-run seafood restaurant is just down the block from Martini en Fuego. This was the restaurant we had just eaten at before we passed by Martini en Fuego for that fateful encounter. The seafood is good and reasonably priced. It has a very down home atmosphere.

[Ocean Grill Vallarta](#): The restaurant is great but the reason to go is the location which is exceptional. It is located overlooking the water near a small, secluded, beautiful beach called [Playa Los Colomitos](#). Getting there is an adventure. You make reservations and they will come

to pick you up in their own water taxi from [Boca de Tomatlan](#). (There is an added charge for the water taxi. You might be able to take a water taxi directly from the Muelle de Playa Los Muertos in Puerto Vallarta. I don't know.) You can also walk to Los Colomitos from Boca de Tomatlan. However, it is a fairly hefty hike up one side of a tall hill and then down again. I walked and arrived at 11:00 am when they opened and which was the designated time for the reservation which I made in advance. The gate was locked. I had to wait until the water taxi arrived and then flag them down. Also, if the idea of a big friendly dog (Winston) who makes himself at home at your table is not your cup of tea, then be forewarned. Once situated, the place is a dream come true and the owner is living it. His home is right next door. Again, once you are situated, it is a dining experience you will never forget.

[El Campanario](#): This restaurant is right across the street from the church by the [Plaza de Armas](#) and the [Malecon](#). It is very popular with the locals. The food is authentic Mexican cuisine and very reasonably priced. We love the sweet tamales and the atole.

[Cocina De Lola](#): This is our favorite go-to local restaurant for inexpensive, authentic Mexican fare. We have been going here for breakfast and lunch for many years. It is in the [Mercado Emiliano Zapata](#) which has some excellent fruit and vegetable stands.

[Una Familia](#): This is another awesome inexpensive, authentic Mexican restaurant. It is a few blocks from the [church](#) and Plaza de Armas on Calle Libertad.

[Fonda El Cucon](#): Close to the Mercado Emiliano Zapata, they have very good soups and enchiladas.

[El Brujo](#): Also fairly close to the Mercado Emiliano Zapata, they have excellent Mexican dishes.

The typical restaurants on the beach and along the Malecon: Well, you are paying extra for the ambiance and location. Some are okay. We usually don't go to these places except for one, [Cuates y Cuetes](#). This place is on the Malecon right in front of the Muelle de Playa Los Muertos. They usually have excellent musicians and the food is not fantastic but good and not way overpriced. We usually go mostly to listen to the music.

Many Italian Restaurants: For whatever reason, there are just dozens of Italian restaurants. Pizza and pasta are everywhere. We usually don't do Italian when we are in Puerto Vallarta but we have tried a few including [El Bodegón de Pastas](#), [Il Pesce Cucina Di Mare](#), and [La Dolce Vita](#). El Bodegón and Il Pesce were especially excellent.

[Rico India](#): If you are in the mood for Indian food, this place is actually pretty good. It is located on the [Isla Cuale](#) which is a wonderful place to walk.

[Restaurante Pajaritos](#): Very good seafood at good prices. I loved the soups.

[Mi Cafe Restaurant and Coffee Shop](#): Great breakfasts and lunches. Very popular with the locals.

[Pancho's Takos](#): This is a bizarre taco restaurant. People start lining up two hours before the place opens. The line gets huge. I don't understand. The tacos are good. The salsas are great. But it ain't worth spending the better part of several hours, in my humble opinion. I think part of the attraction is to see and be seen in the line. Go figure. I once went very late at night just before they were going to close. Eh, the tacos were good and the salsas were great. Oh, well. It is something to see when you are in Puerto Vallarta. But if you want great street tacos, go to ...

[The Taco Stands by the Farmacia Guadalajara](#): Just a few blocks from Pancho's Takos is a corner in front of the Farmacia Guadalajara with several taco stands. It is mostly visited by locals but there are many tourists there, also. But in reality, there are dozens and dozens of street food vendors everywhere. Some are great.

The restaurants in and around [Basilio Badillo](#): Basilio Badillo is the heart of the tourist district in the Zona Romantica. There are dozens and dozens of restaurants. We usually don't patronize them except for maybe [Café Olla](#) where the food is just okay but one plate feeds two people. Pancho's Takos is on this street. However, some friends have told us that they really liked [Joe Jack's Fish Shack](#). [Margarita Grill](#) is always unbelievably crowded so it is something to see in the evening. For breakfast, [Fredy's Tucan](#) is excellent. Around the corner is [Kaiser Maximilian](#) which is pricey but very good food. We sometimes go there for breakfast.

The restaurants in and around [Gay Vallarta](#): Just south of Basilio Badillo is Gay Vallarta. There are dozens of awesome restaurants here, too. Most are on the more expensive side but the food is generally excellent. I splurged and went to [Azafrán](#) once. It was not cheap but the special-order vegetarian plate they made for me was wonderful.

[Ofe's Shack](#): As mentioned, there are just too many restaurants to cover. Although some restaurants stand out and are noteworthy, we really have never had a bad experience except for one small local restaurant, Ofe' Shack. The food tasted really bad, as if it were cooked in the dishwater. But they have been in business for many years so maybe we just caught them on a bad day. Personally, I would stay away from this place.

Events

[Xiutla](#): Xiutla is a Ballet Folkloric dance group that performs on Friday nights starting at 7 pm during the tourist season. They perform at [Parque Lazaro Cardenas](#) which is in the Zona Romantica along the southern end of the Malecon. It is a good idea to get there early because the folding seats get taken quickly. If you don't get a folding seat, you can sit on the concrete but bring a cushion or a towel because the concrete seats are not comfortable. This is Anita's favorite thing to do and see in Puerto Vallarta.

Music and dancing in the [Plaza de Armas](#) by the church: Every Sunday and then sometimes on Thursdays or Fridays, there is a local brass band that plays traditional Mexican and other latina music. The locals come to listen and dance. The time is fuzzy. Sometimes, they start around 5 pm and sometimes later.

[Art Walk](#) on Wednesday nights: In and around the Zona Romantica and the Malecon, there is a self-guided art walk. Some of the galleries sometimes have treats. Anita's favorite gallery is the [Galeria Colectika](#). Of course, you can do the walk pretty much any time of the day or night. But there will be more folks out and about on Wednesday nights.

[Walking tours:](#) There are numerous walking tours during the day in both Spanish and English. They can be found along the Malecon and in the Plaza de Armas close to the church.

[Saturday Morning Gringo Market:](#) On Saturday mornings in the Parque Lazaro Cardenas, there is a vibrant market with plenty of great food, art, music, and other sundry groups offering their goods and services. The food is not inexpensive but it is very good. There are several bakeries that offer fabulous breads, cinnamon rolls, pretzels, and other baked goods. Yummy!

Day Trips / Overnight Trips

[Mismaloya](#) and [Boca de Tomatlan](#): These villages are south of Puerto Vallarta and are kinda' interesting. The beach in Mismaloya is okay. Mismaloya was where the movie *Night of the Iguana* was filmed. The very popular and crowded bus leaves from the [Oxxo on Basilio Badillo](#).

[Yelapa](#): There is no road to Yelapa and the locals want to keep it that way. Yelapa is about an hour by boat from the Los Muertos pier in the Zona Romantica part of Puerto Vallarta. We normally take the bus going south to Boca de Tomatlan where the boat ride is only about 30 minutes. There are two waterfalls. One is a short 10-minute walk while the other is about a 1½-hour walk. If you decide to go on the longer walk, bring plenty of mosquito repellant. The beach at Yelapa is also quite nice. We have never spent the night.

[Playa Las Animas](#): This beach is on the way to Yelapa. You can actually hike here from Boca de Tomatlan. I did the hike once and then took the water taxi back. It's beautiful.

[Playa Los Colomitos](#): Much smaller beach than Las Animas but much closer to Boca de Tomatlan. The hike there and back is not too hard. The water taxi from Boca de Tomatlan is less than 10 minutes. Again, it's beautiful.

[Puerto Vallarta Botanical Gardens](#): Bring mosquito repellant! This is a breathtaking location about 45 minutes by bus. The hikes are wonderful. There is also a great restaurant with an awesome view. The restaurant is a bit pricey but the food is very good.

[Jorullo Bridge](#): For those who are not terrified of high heights, this is something to see. Personally, I don't want to get anywhere close to the wretched thing!

[Marietas Islands](#): This is supposed to be a great day trip but Anita and I get seasick easily. The 30 minutes to Yelapa is enough for us, thank you very much.

[San Sebastián del Oeste](#): This quaint village in the mountains is absolutely gorgeous. If you want to do a day trip here, renting a car is probably your best bet. The bus would be good if you were going to stay overnight. If you stay overnight, there is a wonderful hotel and the sky at night is spectacular.

[Sayulita](#) / [San Pancho](#): These two beach villages are now very popular and kinda' trendy. If you go to San Pancho, ask for directions to the hospital as there is a local restaurant that is wonderful. (I think it is called [Restaurant Emiliano](#).) As for the restaurants on the main street, eh. They are now very high end and expensive. We haven't been to Sayulita in many years and remember it then as being very crowded and overhyped. But both villages have beautiful beaches and scenery.

Other Popular Areas

Nuevo Vallarta, Bucerias, Marina Vallarta, Punta Mita, Etc.: Littered with luxury resorts. No thanks.