



## This Exclusive Community Is a Favorite for Celebs. The Masses Are Finally Getting in on the Fun

Fodor's

Laura Kiniry | December 10, 2021

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF EL CAYARES CLUB &amp; RESIDENCES

With its remote locale and distinct European ethos (think dinners that start after 9 pm and ample cigarette smoking), Careyes has long attracted the rich and famous.



It's hard to know what to make of Careyes, an exclusive Mediterranean-style community along Mexico's Pacific Coast. Since its late-1960s beginnings, this enclave of laid-back luxury

has been drawing wealthy bohemians from around the globe. From its colorful cliffside castles and tucked-away villas, tourists come to relax, mingle, and partake in a New Agey vibe that has all the echoes of a soft cult. Each of Careyes' 700 homeowners (who hail from 43 different nationalities) has, by decree, already "committed most of the seven deadly sins"—most importantly, sloth—"felt the silence of spaces," and "possess a keen awareness of life's magic." In fact, these are three of the 27 conditions to buy property here: a list compiled by Italian entrepreneur, banker, and Careyes founder Gian Franco Brignone, who first settled his "dream community" more than 50 years ago.



Encompassing 7.4 ocean miles and more than 20,000-acres within Mexico's western state of Jalisco, roughly a three-hour drive south of Puerto Vallarta, Careyes is its own elite world. Circular-walled ocean castles—their exteriors painted in bold shades of yellow, green, pink, and blue and some with infinity pools—stand beside thatched-roof palapas that overlook the sea, ready to catch that perfect sunset moment. Equally as colorful villas and casitas draw the eye among Careyes' jungly setting, all framing nature with their perfect intertwining of indoor and outdoor space. The property's rugged, once-inaccessible landscape remains a mix of tropical dry forests, mangroves, and beaches that sits at the center of the Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve, a protected area brimming with hundreds of wildlife species, including the elusive jaguar. Careyes is home to seven al fresco restaurants, its own town square, and even a couple of Bermuda-grass polo fields.

With its remote locale and distinct European ethos (think dinners that start after 9 pm and ample cigarette smoking), Careyes has long attracted the rich and famous. Heidi Klum and Seal once owned a home here—and even married on a Careyes beach—and Mick Jagger, Francis Ford Coppola, and Uma Thurman have all spent time in this aptly-dubbed “Eden of the Pacific.” But a couple of newer Careyes festivals are attracting the likes of Naomi Campbell and Circus du Soleil founder Guy Laliberté, and increasing this private community's celebrity draw. These include the invitation-only Arte Careyes, which highlights the works of Mexican and Latin American talent—including filmmakers, artists, and musicians—each March. There's also the five-day Ondalinda, a festival of “music, art, and culture” that some have called a tropical high-end Burning Man, complete with Temazcal sweat huts, meditation workshops, and a bevy of music, parties, and illuminated (and illuminating) art installations.





Most outside visitors (myself included) come to Careyes by way of the beachfront [El Careyes Club & Residences](#), not quite a hotel but more of a series of rentable one-to-four-bedroom privately owned units. Over a plate of avocado toast and a glass of freshly pressed grapefruit juice at La Duna, an open-air eatery that looks out over one of the club's five infinity pools, you can get a sense of what life at Careyes is like: from daily morning yoga and early-afternoon paddle-boarding, to a swim at a secluded beach and a lazy afternoon at one of the colorful castles perched atop the cliff-sides, some of which are available for stays if you're willing to part with thousands of U.S. dollars a night.

Two of the best are the fully-staffed seven-bedroom Tigre del Mar, which features an expansive dining palapa, two infinitely pools, a (bat-filled) subterranean grotto, and the separate Casa del Tres Mil, recognizable by a towering wooden ladder in front of its entry that extends beyond the roof, beckoning otherworldly inhabitants with a bottle of tequila at its top. There's also founder Gian Franco Brignone's own Castillo Mi Ojo, complete with a



90-foot-high suspension bridge that connects over Pacific waters to a small private island, and a 360-degree swimming pool overlooking the sea. When in town, the now-nonagenarian still resides here. In fact, there's a framed photo of him with socialite Paris Hilton in his bedroom downstairs.



You'll find more affordable ventures in Careyes' [Plaza de Los Caballeros del Sol](#), including an eatery serving up vegetarian/vegan cuisine, shops selling rayon dresses and chunky necklaces, and the curated Careyes Art Space. The plaza is also home to the Careyes Foundation, a non-profit that gives back to the local Mexican communities as well as helps with the release of baby sea turtles on Careyes' protected beaches, where thousands of Olive Ridley, Black, Leatherback, and Hawksbill sea turtles come to nest each year. From June through February guests can assist with the program, aiding these tiny new hatchlings make their way back into the Pacific.

However, there's perhaps no better way to fully embrace Careyes' mythical vibe than a visit to Copa del Sol: a massive bowl-like concrete structure that sits on a thin strip of Careyes land over Pacific waters, and is meant to represent a woman bearing life. Here you can partake in a guided sound healing bath—a meditation that utilizes a range of musical instruments working in tandem with the bowl's natural surrounds, while rows of small diamond-shaped windows let light inside. It's a little occult-like for sure, but in Careyes it somehow feels perfectly in tune.