

Mexico's Best Under-the-Radar Spring Break Destinations

Sun and sand and surf without bumping into a single coed.

By [Andrea Bartz](#) Mar 5, 2020

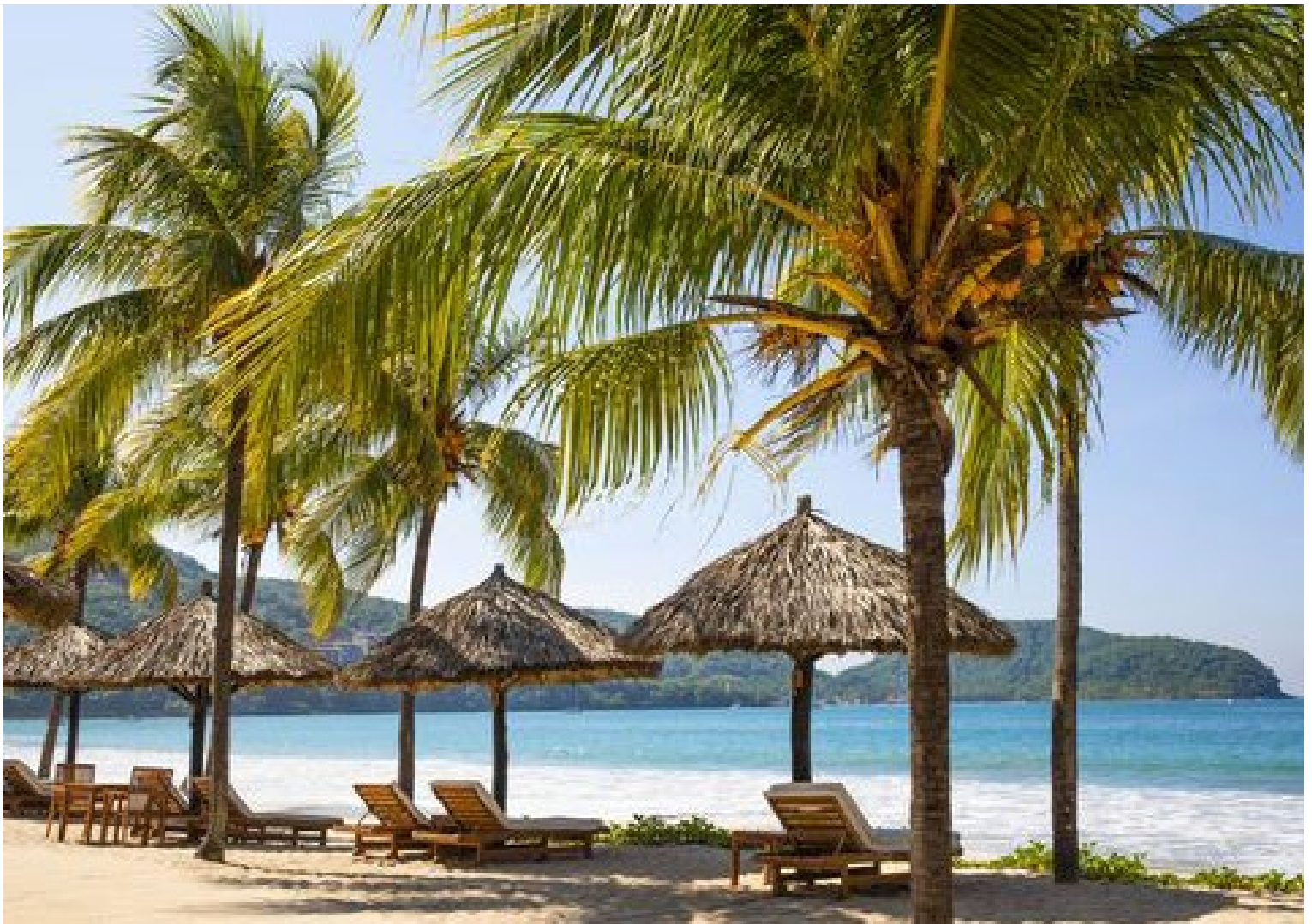


COURTESY OF THOMPSON ZIHUATANEJO, IMANTA, THE CAPE A THOMPSON HOTEL

Spring break is practically synonymous with *Mexico*, and this time of year, popular Caribbean destinations Cancun, Tulum, and Cozumel are super-saturated with coeds (and sunburned Americans who refuse to learn a couple words of Spanish). For a sophisticated escape from the cold, instead head to the country's west coast, studded with safe and gorgeous destinations that offer a mix of luxury and authenticity. Check out these locales, perfect for the culturally adventurous traveler who still wants a stunningly beautiful vacation.

Zihuatanejo, Guerrero

Zihua, as the locals call it, feels a bit untouched by time: Fishing boats pull into the bay at dawn to hawk their freshest catches, and the cheery historic downtown pulses with fruit sellers, taco stands, seafood restaurants, and bustling markets. Sea turtles and dolphins are frequently spotted along the mostly undeveloped coastline and, unlike the neighboring town of Ixtapa, Zihuatanejo isn't packed with hulking hotels—just laid-back, sun-splashed properties sprinkled across the hills overlooking the Pacific. The Thompson Zihuatanejo (which opened last year) is the region's only hotel directly on the beach, giving it major curb appeal. Its interiors are just as beautiful, spotlighting work by local artisans, including mosaic tiling, handwoven rugs, and stonework from native rocks.



Palapas on the beach at the Thompson Zihuatanejo.

Julie Soefer

Costalegre, Jalisco

This 130-mile swath of perfect Pacific coastline isn't easy to get to; it's a three-hour drive south of Puerto Vallarta on a windy road cut into the Jurassic-Park-esque jungle. (Of course, you can also show up via helicopter or yacht, if that's your thing.) That means it's a dream come true for tourists craving a boho-chic vibe sans crowds. Costalegre (which means "happy coast") is largely unpopulated, with a few fishing villages, small towns, and estates dotting the cliffs, beaches, and bays. Consider renting a villa or condo at [Careyes](#), a sprawling private compound with pristine coastline (whales, dolphins, and turtles are a common sight) and architecture that'll make any design-lover drool, including colorful cliffside palaces that quite literally defined upscale Mexican-Pacific architecture: Its eccentric founder, Gian Franco Brignone, broke the mold on Mexican resort aesthetics when he built it in the '60s (think bold jewel tones, beautiful thatched roofs, open-air living rooms, and Moroccan-style finishes).



The zigzag pool of the Casa Mi Ojo at Careyes.

Guadalajara, Jalisco

If you're more of a city girl, consider booking a flight to Mexico's second-largest city. Guadalajara is to Mexico City what San Francisco is to L.A. or Melbourne is to Sydney—it's smaller (1.5 million people to Mexico City's 8.9), but it's bursting with energy and charm. Don't miss the punchy political murals of famed Mexican artist José Clemente Orozco inside the Hospicio Cabañas (an orphanage-turned-art-museum) and the Palacio de Gobierno (the painting over the staircase will haunt your dreams). Also worth a visit: the delicious cafes known for their coffees and tasty breakfasts in the La Americana neighborhood, and the craft beer bars on main nightlife drag, Chapultepec. For a comfortable and arty-chic stay, book a room at [Casa Habita](#), in Guadalajara's trendy Lafayette neighborhood. Its striking decor blends minimalism with Mexican flair, and its spa, pool, and cafe will make you happy to come home after a long day of exploring.



The bar at Casa Habita.

Punta de Mita, Nayarit

Lured to the Riviera Nayarit—a stretch of stunning beach towns just north of Puerto Vallarta—by a groundswell of high-end resorts, picture-perfect white-sand beaches, and jungle-covered mountains, celebrities have made this luxe resort town their vacation destination of late. So head there now, before it becomes the next Tulum. We're obsessed with Imanta Resort (where Kourtney Kardashian brought her boyfriend in 2018), a secluded 250-acre property ~~with 12 villas (private plunge pools and ocean- or jungle-view included)~~ and an open-air spa. If the nightly rate of \$750 is out of your price range, consider popping in with a day pass: For 2,500 pesos (about \$125), you get a daybed or lounge chair on the beach from noon to six, plus all-you-can-eat orders from the beachfront restaurant and unlimited drinks.



You don't have to be a guest at Imanta to enjoy this gorgeous stretch of the Riviera Nayarit.

Courtesy

San Pancho, Nayarit

This funky little beach town is a bohemian dream: Picture yoga classes, outdoor cafes, hip boutiques, and surf schools on every corner, and a cobblestoned downtown flanked by buildings more colorful than a bag of Skittles. Book a palapa at the mural-strewn Maraica, a boutique hotel built and run by three millennial sisters. The property is eco-friendly in the coolest ways: It runs on solar power, treats wastewater and uses it to irrigate the gardens, steers clear of all single-use plastic and Styrofoam, cleans with ecological supplies, and offers local, earth-friendly, totally biodegradable soap, shampoo, and lotion in reusable glass bottles. (The products are so pure, you could drink them! But you shouldn't.) At Maraica, you'll enjoy a breezy, thatch-roofed, beautifully minimalist room with a balcony overlooking the ocean (hammock included), plus free breakfast and a pool with a view.



Monuments Beach, Baja California Sur

So you still kind of want to do the sexy Mexican nightlife thing, without the teeming mass of undergrads at Señor Frog's. May we introduce you to Monuments Beach, technically a part of Los Cabos but a few miles from the hubbub of downtown Cabo San Lucas. The tranquil portion of the Sea of Cortez (typically only visited by hardcore surfers) features a quieter beach than Medano, the main Cabo beach along which most hotels are clustered, and it's home to the famed El Arco—a natural granite arch carved by hundreds of years' worth of wind and sea. The Cape, a Thompson Hotel, offers an elevated take on Cabo's party scene, with a craft beer garden, a rooftop lounge, badass DJ sets, and a foodie experience worth traveling for (hi, a signature restaurant from world-famous chef Enrique Olvera).



Enjoy dinner and drinks with a view at The Cape.

Maureen Evans