

THE RETURN OF PUERTO VALLARTA

The Mexican resort town is flourishing again, thanks to a crop of intriguing openings and novel perspectives. By Bruce Wallin

Local architectural tradition influenced the design of Four Seasons Resort Tamarindo



THE TALE OF Puerto Vallarta is a story made for – and by – Hollywood. The former fishing village on Mexico’s Banderas Bay exploded into a tourist destination following the well-documented affair between Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor while on location for John Huston’s *Night of the Iguana* in 1963. An overnight sensation, the city eventually saw its star power dim, as all-inclusive and cruise-ship crowds supplanted the international jet set. But Puerto Vallarta has since turned the page, and the city today is pulsing with a new energy where classic Mexico, Old Hollywood and a dynamic contemporary scene all converge.

“It’s an incredible mosaic where you can find a fine-dining restaurant next to a

high-fashion boutique next to an *abuela* cooking at a taco stand she’s had for 25 years,” says Elliot Kimelman, a 22-year-old Canadian entrepreneur who moved to Puerto Vallarta in 2020 to open Maxwell Residences (maxwellpv.com). “There are always surprises, always something new around every corner.”

New upscale properties like Maxwell Residences – a hybrid hotel concept with 14 multibedroom apartments and a rooftop restaurant perched high above the Romantic Zone and Pacific Ocean – are helping Puerto Vallarta recapture its former glory. The modern-day destination, however, encompasses much more than the city itself. Its international airport is a hub

for travellers visiting everything from the Costa Alegre – running south from Puerto Vallarta to Manzanillo – all the way north into the Riviera Nayarit, home to the resort community of Punta Mita and the gringo surf town of Sayulita.

The region’s boundaries keep expanding, most recently with the opening last November of the One&Only Mandarinina (oneandonlyresorts.com) north of Sayulita. Also new in the Riviera Nayarit are the soon-to-open Susurros del Corazón (aubergeresorts.com) and the Conrad Punta de Mita (conradpuntademita.com), which debuted last September off Banderas Bay’s northern tip. To the south, the Costa Alegre’s sublime Careyes ([careyes](http://careyes.com)).

com) – where accommodations range from casitas to clifftop “castles” – and the recently refurbished Las Alamandas (alamandas.com) will soon be joined by the Four Seasons Resort Tamarindo (fourseasons.com).

Still, the storied city at the centre of it all remains the region’s beating heart. “Puerto Vallarta has always had the history, but now there’s a new generation,” Kimelman says. “People who have high expectations can stay here again, because there are actually nice places to stay.”

In addition to Maxwell Residences, new options include the adults-only South Tower at Hotel Mousai (hotelmousai.com) and a 100-room tower that debuted last December at the Sunset Plaza Beach Resort (hotelsunsetplaza.com). The Almar Resort Luxury LGBT Beach Front Experience (almarresort.com) – Puerto Vallarta has long been Mexico’s most LGBT-friendly destination – also added a 50-room tower in March.

The city’s ultimate Hollywood-heyday experience can be had at Casa Kimberly (casakimberly.com), a nine-suite retreat set in a villa that Burton purchased for Taylor. Converted into a hotel in 2010, the property is a milieu of murals, antiques, painted tiles, clawfoot tubs and an open-air restaurant that looks out to the city, Sierra Madres and Banderas Bay.

Puerto Vallarta’s fine-dining scene has traditionally been led by international establishments like Thierry Blouet’s Café des Artistes (cafesdesartistes.com), which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. Newer options including Tintoque (tintoque.com.mx) – helmed by Vallartense chef Joel



The rooftop terrace at Careyes’ Casa Mi Ojo villa *below*: the oceanfront Casa Isabel villa at Las Alamandas

Ornelas – emphasise contemporary Mexican cuisine rooted in the region’s considerable bounty.

“This is a fisherman’s place: tuna, red snapper, shrimp from the sea and the rivers,” says Victor Palma, executive chef at the Conrad Punta de Mita. “But you also have organic farms, cheeses from local villages, and beef, pork and venison from Ixtlán del Río.” Palma’s Árbol restaurant highlights these and another cherished local ingredient – agave – in tasting menus featuring Jalisco’s famed spirits, tequila and raicilla.

That a city in tequila’s home state is known for its nightlife comes as no surprise. But the party in Puerto Vallarta begins long before the sun sets, and perhaps nowhere is the city’s energy more apparent than at its beach clubs. At the new Majahuitas (majahuitas.mx), the experience is as much about nature – exploring underwater caves and jungle trails – as it is cocktails and live entertainment. Also new are Táu (taubeachclub.com.mx) in Marina Vallarta and the Eden Pool & Lounge Garden at Almar Resort.

The action in Puerto Vallarta, of course, extends well beyond its clubs and bars. The coastline and rugged interior offer every watersport imaginable, hiking trails to hidden beaches, and even a new butterfly sanctuary, Mariposario Jardin Magico (jardinmagico.mx). Whatever your pleasure, says Kimelman, “You will never be bored in Puerto Vallarta.” ♦

PUNTA DEL ESTE PROMISE

The beau monde of Latin America have found respite in Punta del Este since the 1950s, but they have never seen anything quite like the forthcoming project from Cipriani, the family-owned hospitality group with a distinguished history of its own, beginning with Harry’s Bar in Venice. The extraordinarily ambitious hotel is about to break ground and eventually rise above the former San Rafael hotel, which was the town’s original gilt-edged draw and will be incorporated into the grounds. The two new towers present panoramas of the Atlantic, along with a smorgasbord of amenities (spa, restaurants, cinema, auditoriums and shopping, among much else) – all designed by Uruguayan architect Rafael Viñoly, whose global projects range from residential standouts like 277 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan to the multiple award-winning Tokyo International Forum. cipriani.com –BN

