



Why the Costalegre Should Be Your Next Mexico Vacation



Written by [Meagan Drillinger](#)

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For me, Mexico will always be one of the most magical places on the planet. But it seems these days that I often have to look a little bit harder to find that magic — at least in its tourist destinations. Make no mistake, I love the tourist destinations in Mexico, but things are changing, and changing quickly.



Late afternoon sun on Playa Las Rosadas| Photo Copyright: Meagan Drillinger

Development is part of any country's tourism strategy, and Mexico's is no different. But it feels like this development, in some parts of Mexico, is pushing a lot of the magic further and further away.

However, Mexico's Costalegre is one area of the country where I have never had to look hard to find magic. This sprawling stretch of coastline is one idyllic landscape unfolding after another. It is towering, jungle-covered mountains that tumble down to a salty, cobalt-colored sea. It is **miles of golden-sand beaches, thick groves of palm trees, sleepy fishing villages**, and the smell of seafood roasting over open coals. It is everything that made me fall in love with Mexico years ago when I set off with little more than a backpack and a dog-eared guidebook. It is toes in the sand, sun-crisped shoulders, and a perpetual smile.

I absolutely adore Costalegre and consider it to be [one of the best places in Mexico](#). If there's one place you need to visit in Mexico, I highly suggest you make it the Costalegre.

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Where Is the Costalegre?



Sunbeds at El Cayeres overlooking the ocean on the Costalegre | Photo Copyright: Meagan Drillinger

The Costalegre is a stretch of nearly undeveloped coastline between [Puerto Vallarta](#) and Manzanillo on the Pacific Coast of Mexico. It's rare in a place like Mexico to find such vast stretches of beach that are completely untouched. But that is what makes the Costalegre so special — it was designed to be undesigned.

Many of the tens of thousands of acres along the Costalegre are **owned by roughly five families of developers who have agreed to keep the area protected in reserves**. While these expansive stretches of acreage do have hotels, resorts, restaurants, and beach clubs hidden within their midst, the majority of the land has been sealed from development in order to promote reforestation, preservation of local wildlife, and sustainability for the people who have called this part of Mexico home for centuries. And as far as these hotels go, you'd never know from the highway that they were there unless you were looking for them.

How to Get to the Costalegre



Sunset on the Costalegre | Photo Copyright: Meagan Drillinger

Part of the magic of the Costalegre is its remoteness. It is accessible to those who want to put in the effort to visit. The majority of people **fly into Puerto Vallarta and make the two-to three-hour journey** south to start discovering its many villages, coves, bays, and some of the [best beaches in Mexico](#).

Others opt to fly into **Manzanillo, which is a much smaller airport than Puerto Vallarta**, with far fewer direct flights from the U.S. or Canada.

An airport has been in development along the Costalegre for many years and is currently open to private aircraft. It is not yet ready for commercial airlines and it will probably be many more years before that is an option.

So, for now, you have to have a sense of adventure to reach the Costalegre. But in truth, that's just how the residents of the area prefer it.

Things to do in the Costalegre



Las Rosadas | Photo Copyright: Meagan Drillinger

For those who do make the trip to Costalegre, what they will discover is a truly remarkable stretch of Mexico. It's a place frozen in time in some ways, and in other ways, it is the new face of luxury for the country.

Thanks to resort openings like the new [Four Seasons Tamarindo](#), Costalegre has splashed across international travel magazines. But in reality, those who know the Costalegre know that there have been luxury properties here for years — they've just catered to a crowd that has been "in the know."

Those who come to the Costalegre come for the quiet, the raw and unspoiled nature, the outdoor adventure, and the interaction with the local communities. It is, in my opinion, one of the best spots in the entire country where you can still find true harmony between tourists and residents. It's a place where people see, understand, and appreciate Mexico and do not want to simply overbuild it or turn a profit.



View from the Four Seasons Tamarindo | Photo Copyright: Meagan Drillinger

With that in mind, the best things to do in the Costalegre are often the best things you'll love about Mexico. Discover miles upon miles of **unspoiled beaches**, many of which are only accessible by boat. My favorites are Playa Mayto, Playa Chalacatepec, and Playa Las Rosadas — among many others.

Visit the **fishing villages** like Perula, Melaque, La Manzanilla, Barra de Navidad, and Tehuamixtle. Here you'll find restaurants on the beach, a crowd mixed with locals, expats, and employees who work in the nearby resorts all mixing together. It's a group that loves to be away from the fray, close to nature, and takes life slowly, with intention.

Along the Costalegre you can visit the **sea turtle sanctuaries in the Careyes community** to help release baby sea turtles back into the sea. You can also take an **ecology walk** through the 3,000 acres of protected forest at Four Seasons Tamarindo to learn about the native plants and trees.

And the **gastronomy along the Costalegre** showcases the very best of grassroots Mexican cuisine. Eat decadent enchiladas for dinner by torchlight on the beaches of Las Rosadas as the sun sinks with fiery colors into the Pacific. But the region also boasts restaurants serving impossibly fresh sushi, handmade pasta, steaks, fresh fish, and everything in between.



Author Meagan Drilling in the Costalegre

You'll find **surfing in Barra de Navidad**, or hire *lanchas* in La Manzanilla to take you cove-hopping or diving. **Fishing charters** are all the rage down here, as well. The only things you won't find in Costalegre are sprawling all-inclusive resorts, nightclubs, or, frankly, many other tourists. The Costalegre is paradise. It is everything that made me fall in love with Mexico.

But that is changing. While the area is certainly protected from over-development and mega tourism sprawl, things rarely stay the same forever, especially when it comes to tourism. That airport will open eventually. New hotel projects will wave their flags. Things will change. Eventually.

For now, however, the Costalegre is one of the most special spots, where you won't have to look so hard to find all the magic of Mexico.