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Escape From Puerto Vallarta (Part 2)

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Mismaloya bay and the small peninsula where "The Night of the Iguana" was filmed in the early 1950s. ... [+]
PHOTO BY JOE YOGERST

Puerto Vallarta has become one of Mexico's most popular destinations. And for good reason: awesome beaches and activities, amazing food and drink, and incredibly easy access from North America via the cruise port and international airport.

But that also means the west coast tropical resort city can get a little crowded at times.

The first story of this two-part series focused on escaping to the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains inland from Puerto Vallarta, in particular the charming old silver mining town of San Sebastián del Oeste.

For those who want to stick close to the coast, the focus of this story is a 140-mile (220-km) stretch of Highway 200 in Jalisco state that features both budget options and some of the poshest accommodation along Mexico's west coast.



Lagoon pool at the Hilton Vallarta Riviera resort. PHOTO BY JOE YODAKS

Mismaloya

Wedged between steep, jungle-covered mountains and the ocean, the first stretch of Highway 200 is a spectacular coast road that snakes its way down to Mismaloya via numerous twists and turns.

Along the way are pocket beaches like Playa Punta Negra and Playa Paredon, and various outdoor adventures ranging from snorkeling and sea kayaking to the canopy zipline course at Nogalito Ecopark.

Among the scores of overnight options are the all-inclusive Hilton Vallarta Riviera with its dreamy coastal views, oceanfront infinity pools and tasty cocktail bars to small, romantic, lower-cost options like Casitas Maraika boutique hotel.

Mismaloya was a small, backwater fishing village until 1963 when director John Huston chose it as the setting for *The Night of the Iguana*, a movie renowned for its steamy scenes both on and off camera between star Richard Burton and wife Elizabeth Taylor.

Hollywood returned in 2021 to film the hit sitcom *Acapulo* at the Barcelo Puerto Vallarta overlooking Playa Mismaloya.



Tostadas at Cecy restaurant near the main square in Pérula. PHOTO BY JOE YOGAKSI

Pérula and the Costa Alegre

Just south of Mismaloya, Highway 200 turns inland and climbs into the highlands of Cabo Corrientes. The countryside is a patchwork of cattle ranches, small farms and dry tropical forest that eventually descends to the top end of the [Costa Alegre](#).

Still largely undiscovered, the “Happy Coast” is the place to head for those who want to have a long white-sand beach almost all to themselves, savor margaritas and fish tacos in an uncrowded beach bar, kayak pristine coastal estuaries or hike remote trails in the Sierra Madre foothills that tumble down to the sea.

Inexpensive compared to much of Mexico’s Pacific shore, the Costa Alegre offers many low-cost overnight options, from beachfront camping and RV parks to budget hotels and short-term rentals.

Pérula is the first coastal town south of Mismaloya and the best place to base your stay along this northern stretch of the Costa Alegre.

A block up from the beach, the [Casa Tilmacalli](#) boutique hotel offers rooms with full kitchens and modern bathrooms, as well as a swimming pool, restaurant and convenience store right across the street.

The town's Plaza Principal comes alive after dark, as locals flock to alfresco eateries and food trucks like Nena for unique (and often spicy) Mexican-style frankfurters, Minni for fish and shrimp tacos, and Cecy for amazing tostadas.

Skippers are readily available along the Nuevo Malecón at the west end of town for journeys to the nearby Isla Cocinas, an uninhabited island and nature preserve that boasts both a secluded nude beach and a gorgeous white-sand strand on a turquoise bay that's ideal for swimming and snorkeling.



Brightly colored holiday home at the swank Costa Careyes resort community. 66/119

Costa Careyes and Tamarindo

Highway 200 continues along the shore to the posh Costa Careyes, an upscale resort community comprising castles, casitas and a single luxury hotel.

Founded by Italian tycoon Gian Franco Brignone in the late 1960s, the sprawling compound (20,000 acres) includes half a dozen beaches, several restaurants, and the architecturally distinctive Copa del Sol spa.

Inland from the shore, Costa Careyes oversees the Selva de Cuitzmala nature preserve, part of the Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve that protects the various plants and animals that inhabit the coastal forest — including indigenous big cats like the jaguar and puma.

Anchoring the bottom end of the Jalisco coast is another large, private super-lux property with a single hotel — the incredible Four Seasons Tamarindo.

Fourteen years in development and construction, the resort fully opened to rave reviews in the spring of 2022. The monumental architecture of La Mansión — the main dining, shopping and recreation hub built with stone imported from around Mexico — channels the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City.

Guests can explore Tamarindo's 3,000-acre forest reserve with the resident naturalist, take a guided tour of the Rancho Ortega organic farm, play a round of 18 on the golf course that hugs the top of precipitous sea cliffs or help baby sea turtles make their way into the sea.



Room with a view at the new Four Seasons Tamarindo. PHOTO BY JOE YOGERST



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