

TRAVELPULSE

Best Things to Do Off the Resort in Puerto Vallarta



by Meagan Drillinger

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View of Los Muertos Pier in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. (Photo Credit: Meagan Drillinger)

Puerto Vallarta is one of Mexico's greatest beach destinations. Except these days, it is so much more than just a great beach town.

What was once a sleepy fishing village has transformed into a world-class city by the sea. One of the rare combinations of coastal getaway and amenity-packed city, the energy in Puerto Vallarta is unlike anywhere else in Mexico.

Packed with restaurants, bars, beach clubs, and activities, there is never a shortage of activity in this Pacific Coast jewel. It also happens to have some of the best resorts in Mexico. But if travelers come to Puerto Vallarta and opt to never leave their hotel, they may be missing out on what makes Puerto Vallarta so special.

One of the safest cities in Mexico, the allure of Puerto Vallarta is what waits to be discovered along its cobblestone streets, up its mountain roadways, or down along the coastline. Get ready to discover the best of Puerto Vallarta with this roundup of the best things to do off the resort.

Puerto Vallarta's Best Neighborhoods

Puerto Vallarta is a fairly large place these days, especially when you remember that it started as a small fishing village and beach town. If you're venturing off of the resort, these are the neighborhoods that you may want to know.



Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. (Photo Credit: Meagan Drillinger)

The Marina: Home to several hotels and resorts, and the place where all the cruise ships come in, Puerto Vallarta's Marina is well-stocked with restaurants, shops, and tour operators. It's a very safe and walkable area, but because its primary focus is tourism you may be paying a lot more for food and activities in the marina.

Las Glorias and Versalles: These two neighborhoods are just a few minutes away from the Marina, but have a much more local vibe. Separated by the main road, Las Glorias is the neighborhood directly on the beach, while Versalles is a bit more residential. Las Glorias is essentially Puerto Vallarta's Hotel Zone. Both, however, have been expanding their offerings at a rapid rate to include some of the best restaurants and bars in Puerto Vallarta that are outside the resort walls.

Cinco de Diciembre: This beachfront neighborhood is known for its cobblestone streets, toes-in-the-sand restaurants, and a mix of local and expat residents. "Cinco," as it's known, is the beginning of the original Puerto Vallarta. It's here you'll find the start of the historic homes that climb up the mountainsides, funky restaurants, and lots of shopping.

Centro: Centro is where the world-famous Malecon begins. It's also where you will find Puerto Vallarta's main square and its most famous church, Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. The Malecon is lined with art sculptures and has some of the city's most iconic views.

Zona Romantica: Finally, at the end of the malecon you will arrive at Zona Romantica, or the historic downtown of Puerto Vallarta. The oldest part of the city, and certainly its most beautiful, Zona Romantica has the iconic cobblestone streets, the iconic Los Muertos Pier, and the most famous beaches in Puerto Vallarta. It's also the most popular neighborhood in Puerto Vallarta for dining and nightlife.

Best Activities in Puerto Vallarta

Being a full-fledged city on the sea means Puerto Vallarta has so many fantastic things to do. Of course, you'll find lovely beaches but chances are your resort has one of those. If you want to venture off of the resort, these are the best activities in Puerto Vallarta.

The Malecon

One of Puerto Vallarta's most important attractions is the Malecon. The pedestrian-only walkway hugs the coastline from Centro all the way down to the Zona Romantica. Along the way, you'll have the best views of the Bay of Banderas, as well as the jungle-covered mountains, historic homes, and colorful street art. The Malecon is the buzzy heart of Puerto Vallarta and has something happening at all hours of the day (and night).

Bay of Banderas

Central to the identity of Puerto Vallarta is the massive Bay of Banderas. The entire essence of the city thrives on this gorgeous body of water. One of the best things to do off of the resort in Puerto Vallarta is to get out on the water, whether it's a water taxi from Los Muertos Pier down to the more isolated beaches, a sunset cruise, or an adventure visit to Islas Marietas, a group of protected islands.

If you're visiting between December and March, keep your eyes peeled for whale sightings.



Visitors will want to get out on the water. (Photo Credit: Photo via: Fideicomiso Puerto Vallarta)

Mirador Cerro de La Cruz

If you want a little bit of exercise that pays out in spectacular views, consider a hike to the Mirador Cerro de La Cruz. High above Centro, this bird's-eye perch has sweeping views of the city, bay, and across the bay to Punta Mita.

Magical Towns

Puerto Vallarta has several Magical Towns that are within an easy driving distance for a day trip. If you don't want to drive yourself, plenty of local tour operators offer day trips. The most popular is San Sebastian del Oeste, an old mining town up in the mountains.

The temperature here is much cooler, the tops of the trees blanketed in fog, and a landscape of beautiful churches, ranches, and abandoned mines. Travelers can also explore Talpa de Allende, known for its famous church, and Mascota, a Sierra Madre village shrouded in pine and oak trees.

Another option is to head north to the neighboring state of Nayarit to visit the now world-famous Sayulita. This Magical Town has long been a favorite among surfers and backpackers, but in the past few years has exploded to have art galleries, restaurants, and bars. It can get crowded, especially on weekends, but it is one of the top attractions near Puerto Vallarta.



View of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. (Photo Credit: Meagan Drilling)

Yelapa

One of Puerto Vallarta's best beaches is one that can't be seen from town. You'll have to hop a water taxi and take a 45-minute boat trip south to the tiny village of Yelapa. This beachfront town is only accessible by boat and is home to rustic restaurants, guesthouses, and a crescent-shaped beach with gentle, blue-green water.

Zona Romantica

A trip down to the Zona Romantica is a must for any visit to Puerto Vallarta. The most beautiful neighborhood in the city, this is the spot to visit for the best Instagrammable photos of cobblestone streets, white historic buildings and red terracotta roofs.

Many of the city's top restaurants and bars are here, and it has some of Puerto Vallarta's most popular beaches.

Food Tours

One of the top reasons to come to Puerto Vallarta is to try the food. Local specialties include seafood, birria, ceviche, and much more. Several tour companies offer local food tours to many different restaurants and street carts. One of the best foodie experiences is Vallarta Food Tours' Versailles Tour.



Tostada de Ceviche Bahía. (Photo Credit: Visita Puerto Vallarta)

Islas Marietas

The government-protected Islas Marietas is a group of uninhabited islands known for its rare wildlife. Local tour operators, like Boca Chicca or Vallarta Adventures, can arrange snorkel trips, paddle boarding, or even a visit to the hidden beach located inside one of the islands.

Getting Around Puerto Vallarta

Puerto Vallarta is a very easy city to get around, and one of the safest in Mexico. Taxis are abundant and offer rates that are calculated by neighborhood zones. Uber is also available in Puerto Vallarta, and usually for a much lower rate than local taxis.

Once you're in any neighborhood, it's very easy to walk around. If you're feeling ambitious, you can even walk from neighborhood to neighborhood and get a feel for them all.