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## 3 perfect days in Puerto Vallarta

 By Kristin Braswell • Dec 21, 2023 • 7 minutes read



Los Muertos Beach • Image: Westend61/Getty Images

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Hugging Mexico's Pacific Coast and framed by the Sierra Madre Mountains, beautiful [Puerto Vallarta](#) is a mashup of beach retreat meets party town. The turquoise waters draw crowds of vacationers, especially in the winter and spring break high seasons.

There are multiple neighborhoods to explore here, each with its own unique personality. In the historic Old Town, also called "Zona Romántica (The Romantic Quarter), terracotta roofed-homes and centuries-old churches are just steps away from buzzing bars. Head to the coast to discover some of Mexico's most intimate beaches and coves, including the remote fishing villages of Yelapa and Sayulita. And join the crowds of both locals and tourists sipping tequila and strolling the Malecon boardwalk along Banderas Bay.

This 3-day itinerary will help you make the most of your time in Puerto Vallarta. We've included Tripadvisor reviews and ratings so that you can be sure to visit the places that other travelers have loved, too.

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## DAY ONE



Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe • Image: Alan Serna/Unsplash

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## MORNING: Explore the city, from street to sea

El Centro is the heart of downtown Puerto Vallarta and includes the iconic [Malecon](#), a pedestrian boardwalk that rolls along the coast for 12 full blocks along the Bay of Banderas. It's where both locals and travelers come to eat and be entertained. Although it's a popular nightlife spot, mornings are quiet and a great time to stroll and look at the outdoor art without the crowds. Start with breakfast at Mi Querenica, where there's all day dining and the morning menu includes Motuleños eggs, molcajetes with meat, and chilaquiles.

Then head to the nearby [Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe](#) (La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe), a pink-hued neo-Baroque structure that is the city's most important Catholic attraction. There's a lovely courtyard and Renaissance-style tower to explore here, too. Then stroll to [Cuale River Island](#), an island accessible via footbridges in Old Town, that's lined with art and restaurants along the Cuale River.

## AFTERNOON: Discover a vibrant art scene

For lunch in Zona Romantica, [MAKAL](#) offers fusion flavors like seared ribeye with tomatillos and roasted zucchini with pipian and cotija cheese from Chef Diego Guerrero, who was named one of the "Best New Chefs in 2023" by Food & Wine en Español.

Afterward, roam through Puerto Vallarta's art galleries and check out the street mural art. [Galleria Dante](#) features more than 60 artists whose art spans three decades in a hacienda-style villa.

**Travelers say:** "Galleria Dante is a huge, comprehensive gallery with a roster of the most important and finest artists in Mexico. Claire the owner is a lovely and knowledgeable dealer. a must visit for any art lover." -@Peter M

At [Peyote People](#), yarn paintings and beadwork created by Huichol Indians are available to view and purchase, in addition to pieces from indigenous tribes in Oaxaca. Puerto Vallarta's street mural art – many of which can be viewed on the Malecon – includes works like "Search of Reason" by Sergio Bustamante, or the iconic "Boy on the Seahorse" by Rafael Zamarripa.

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## **EVENING: Delve into an impressive gastronomic scene and entertainment**

At Café des Artistes, Chef Thierry Blouet has created haute cuisine for more than 30 years in a historic downtown home. The French and Mexican influenced restaurant serves gourmet dishes such as confit of suckling pig and ravioli with poblano peppers, all set in a room with mountainside views.

After dinner, The Palm Cabaret in the Zona Romantica is the place to go for live entertainment, including fun drag shows.

## **MALECÓN AREA TOUR OPTIONS**

- The evening street taco tour with Vallarta Food Tours highlights street vendors and restaurants owned by Mexican families with recipes typically passed down through generations.
- Get a taste of the depth of flavor in Mexican cuisine with this Market Visit and Cooking Lesson tour, where you'll be able to shop for ingredients at a market and make dishes like shrimp ceviche and red snapper.
- Explore the Malecón on two wheels on this fun private bicycle tour (there's even a stop for ice cream with views of Banderas Bay).

## **DAY TWO**



La Palapa • Image: Management/Tripadvisor

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## MORNING: Explore the diversity of beaches

Hit the beach early and spend time at downtown's Los Muertos Beach, including an energetic pier where a number of boats depart for day excursions. Enjoy a snack from a number of vendors like salted cucumbers and fresh Tehua oysters on the family-friendly beach.

**Travelers say:** *"This beach is at the heart of holiday life in Puerto Vallarta. It has many restaurants fronting it with seat service in many places. There are a few clubs that provide extra service for a price. To the south end of the beach is the extremely popular area for the LGBTQ community, with lots of seating, eating and drinking options."* -@StephenP

## AFTERNOON

Have lunch on the beach at Mar y Vino and nosh on bites of seared tuna and grilled oysters, then catch a panga (water taxi) to discover the beaches south of Puerto Vallarta, which are only accessible by boat. These include Colomitos, with such a compact stretch of sand that it's often referred to as the smallest beach in the Pacific Ocean. There, you can swim in the clear waters or hike a number of trails.

Another fishing village accessible by boat, Yelapa, is known for its "pie ladies" who sell baked goods on the beach. There's one in particular that you'll want to seek out, and that's Chelly Rodriguez, who has been baking pies for three decades, a tradition originated by her mother. Just ask anyone on the beach to direct you to her— and be sure to order the banana cream pie.

For snorkeling, take a 30-minute boat ride from Los Muertos Pier to Los Arcos de Mismaloya. Here, a protected national park is visited by snorkelers looking to discover its rich marine life.

## TOUR OPTIONS

- [Vallarta Adventures](#) offers a range of outings to explore Banderas Bay, including swimming with dolphins and ziplines.
- [Mega Yacht All-Inclusive Yelapa Waterfall and Snorkeling Adventure](#) cruises Banderas Bay in style and includes an onboard masseuse at no extra charge.
- Spend a whole day on the water with a [Full-Day Experience in Banderas Bay](#) that includes snorkeling and sightseeing.

## EVENING

Head to family-owned [La Palapa](#) for dinner at a prime location on Los Muertos Beach. Dishes here are Mexican recipes with Asian and French influences like tuna tataki and al pastor potstickers. This is also a prime location to view turtle releases from August to December, or see whales in the bay from December to March.

## DAY THREE



Vallarta Botanical Garden • Image: Management/Tripadvisor

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## MORNING/AFTERNOON: Find solace in the foliage

Take a 40-minute drive from the city center to [Vallarta Botanical Garden](#), where you can easily spend the whole morning and afternoon immersing yourself in greenery that follows a meandering river (bring a bathing suit and you can even take a dip). Spanning over 70 acres of land, the garden recently achieved status as a Protected Natural Area under the category “Voluntarily Destined Area for Conservation.” Here, you can discover Mexico’s native plant and wildlife species.

Plan to have lunch at [Hacienda de Oro](#) which overlooks the gardens. Specialties include a vanilla bean mojito with vanilla from the gardens, plus a number of taco varieties from fried fish to grilled beef.

***Travelers say:** “Beautiful garden!!! The best part was hiking the puma(?) trail and swimming in the river! So don’t forget your bikinis and if you have water shoes that’ll help you cross the river. After the hike, you’ll need to hydrate and you’re in luck! The restaurant inside has incredible views over the garden and one of the best cocktails I’ve had made with Vanilla!” -@lbylove*

## EVENING: Get glammed up for dinner

For a special evening out, it’s hard to go wrong at [The Iguana Restaurant & Tequila Bar](#). The open-air restaurant is located at Casa Kimberley, a boutique hotel that was once the home of Elizabeth Taylor when she and Richard Burton filmed “Night of the Iguana” (thus that restaurant name). The menu is filled with contemporary Mexican cuisine like poblano peppers in a puff pastry, plus mezcal flights and rare tequilas. The views here are stunning, and there’s a 13-piece mariachi band that keeps the atmosphere lively. (Note: Be sure to follow the dress code.)

## TOUR OPTIONS

- [This six-hour tour](#) includes a tequila tasting at Rancho Los Veranos and visit to the Botanical Gardens
- Dine on an authentic Mexican lunch and then explore the gardens on a guided tour with the [Botanical Delights Tour & Culinary Adventure](#)
- For a totally different take on the Botanical Gardens, try a [Sun Buggy tour](#) where you’ll bump along the cobblestones and the coast.