

New go-to eats in Puerto Vallarta



Burrata and Tuna at Tintoque. Photo Credit: Meagan Drillingier

If you're heading to Puerto Vallarta and plan to eat exclusively on the beach, you're doing it wrong. Granted, Puerto Vallarta has many memorable dining locations along its sandy shoreline, but if you want to discover what's really cooking in its kitchens, head inland.

Foodie stories about Mexico are not new, especially when we're talking about Puerto Vallarta. The city is home to restaurants that have topped the charts for years -- Cafe des Artistes, anyone? And it isn't just haute cuisine. Puerto Vallarta scores major points for its street food and beach eats, as well.

But as the city grows, so do its culinary offerings, including in its neighborhoods that are becoming hot spots. I recently revised my entire list of foodie favorites when I was exposed to what's stewing, bubbling, grilling and broiling on the streets of P.V.

A good place to start

I must begin with Tintoque, a fine dining restaurant serving dishes that tell the story of Puerto Vallarta's history in an elevated yet understated setting. Its chef, Joel Ornelas, is a Puerto Vallarta native. The restaurant isn't new, but its location is. Previously, the restaurant was situated in the marina, but it has since relocated to the Zona Romantica, overlooking the Rio Cuale. Tip: Opt for a seat out on the patio for shaded, foliage-shrouded views and the sounds of the babbling river.

It's difficult to recommend dishes at Tintoque because its creative menu changes regularly, depending on the season and what ingredients are available. I can tell you, however, that it's best to order a little bit of everything and expect to leave completely stuffed.

From tuna sashimi with capers, sliced duck and fresh burrata to a short rib off the bone that would make any caveman bang his chest in delight, you can't go wrong at Tintoque. It's also known for its sexy cocktails and mixology, though I always opt for the Mexican wine list. With this particular meal, we enjoyed a bottle of 2018 Mariatinto, a winery in Ensenada.

Dining in



Breakfast at Casa Kimberly. Photo Credit: Meagan Drillingier

Another highlight? The room service at **Casa Kimberly**. The entire boutique hotel is a work of art in its own right, and the main eatery, the Iguana Restaurant & Tequila Bar, hardly needs any help gathering fans. But the room service is reason enough for me to book a stay at this luxury villa hotel.

Maybe it's the sweeping views from the European-style wraparound balconies, or maybe it's the white, floor-to-ceiling curtains that billow through the French doors. Add to these the amazing quality of the food and what you have is a dreamy, unforgettable experience.

Upon check-in, my traveling partner and I ordered a fantastic lunch of grilled octopus in a fragrant garlic sauce as well as a Caesar salad. A Caesar salad may be the obvious choice for room service, but sometimes you just want something comfortable, and Casa Kimberly definitely dialed it up a notch with fresh anchovies and Parmesan crisps.

Of course, there's nothing quite like breakfast alfresco on your Casa Kimberly terrace. I was partial to the huevos a la Mexicana with a side of fresh fruit and, of course, the early-morning views over the Zona Romantica.

Tour de force



A pork belly taco El Puerco de Oro. Photo Credit: Meagan Drilling

But perhaps the most memorable dining experience was my Vallarta Food Tour adventure through the lesser-known **Versalles neighborhood**.

Versalles is a residential area across the main highway from the Hotel Zone, a neighborhood I never even considered exploring (you can usually find me in Centro or the Zona Romantica). But by sticking to my routine when visiting the city, it is now clear I was depriving myself of some of the city's hidden culinary gems.

The three-hour walking tour took us to roughly six places within a short distance of each other. We started on Calle Espana with, of course, tacos. But not just any tacos. Here we were visiting El Puerco de Oro, a small, hole-in-the-wall restaurant that serves pork belly tacos -- and only pork belly tacos. The tender, juicy meat is served

as simply as possible; a table filled with toppings, garnishes and sauces offers ample opportunity to customize.

From there, we headed to Abulon, an alfresco seafood restaurant that serves incredible snack favorites but with its own innovative stamp. Here, it's all about the tacos de camaron al pastor. Traditionally, al pastor tacos are made with pork, but Abulon uses the spice blend on shrimp for a lighter, more refreshing taco. And yes, the pineapple is included. The tuna tostada was also absolutely decadent, heaped with plump morsels of fresh fish.

Other stops that stuck out were Barra y Lena, an open-front bar and seafood grill with bang-on grilled octopus tacos and bone marrow topped with jalapeno salsa. The tacos stuffed with shrimp, molten-hot cheese and bacon are worth the price of your plane ticket alone.

And if you still have room (though at this point, it's doubtful), you'll want to stop into Lamara, a beach-themed ceviche restaurant serving a Mexican and Asian flavor mash-up in their excellent creations. I somehow managed to find room for the tartar ceviche, which included tuna, cucumber, onion, peanuts, soy sauce, ginger and sesame seeds.

Of course, you don't have to hit all of Versailles' highlights in one day, and maybe you shouldn't; spreading them out will enable you to enjoy each one to the max.

But take it from me: Even if you're the most seasoned Puerto Vallarta foodie, you're sure to discover something you have never tried before when you hit the pavement and venture away from your comfort zone. And who knows? Maybe you'll be revising your master list, too.