



Puerto Vallarta Offers New Discoveries, Old Favorites

DESTINATION & TOURISM | SCOTT LAIRD | APRIL 02, 2021



Xinalani, Cabo Corrientes, Puerto Vallarta (photo by Scott Laird)

Almost exactly [one year after leaving Puerto Vallarta](#) while the pre-pandemic world gasped its last breath, I was back.

Aside from good mask habits by local residents (visitors, unfortunately, tended to be less vigilant), the Puerto Vallarta that has captured the imaginations of leisure travelers in the decades since the John Houston film *Night of the Iguana* put it on the map remains largely unchanged.

Residents and visitors still enjoy leisurely walks down the oceanfront Malecon, stopping to take in the whimsical sculpture art or buy a cup of tuba, a refreshing drink made from fermented palm sap mixed with peanuts and fresh apple chunks.

<https://www.travelpulse.com/news/destinations/puerto-vallarta-offers-new-discoveries-old-favorites.html>

They might perhaps climb the steep hills to Gringo Gulch to seek out the two houses Richard Burton acquired and built a sky bridge between so Elizabeth Taylor wouldn't have to cross the street to meet him. Or they might book a table at La Capella to take in spectacular views of Banderas Bay over the historic church steeple while strolling musicians coax out the 50 Most Romantic Songs for Violin Trios.

Visitors who've long loved Puerto Vallarta and keep going back to the city to revisit treasured favorite haunts will find their time well-spent, for the pace of change here is deliciously languid—yet at the same time curiously steady.

There always seems to be another resort tower added to the sprawling all-inclusive resorts, or another big box store added to accommodate the area's growing population. There was plenty of excited chatter about the new freeway to Guadalajara, cutting overland travel time to just over two hours—little more than ten years ago, it took more than eight.

The city seemed oddly calm for a Spring Break season. While populated, the streets and attractions were by no means crowded, no doubt aided by the lack of cruise ships. The modern facility that would normally see calls by 2,000+ passenger cruise liners served only day boat departures and sunset booze cruises.



Even the day boats were about half full, although some of that's attributable to social distancing rules implemented by the operators. Our [Vallarta Adventures](#) excursion catamaran to Las Caletas was roughly half full, which made for a comfortable ride along the waterfront before arriving close alongside "The Arches" or Los Arcos de Mismaloya—a national park and sanctuary for nesting birds—before trooping onward to the former beachside home of director John Huston.

This is the type of excursion beloved by Puerto Vallarta visitors for decades. We arrived to the idyllic spot where we and a hundred and fifty of our new friends could swim, laze in hammocks or beach chairs, take cooking classes, sample mezcal and chapulines (toasted grasshoppers), have a massage, dive, snorkel or hang out with resident parrots and flamingos, all moved along by outgoing staff and free-flowing tippie from the open bar.

Less well known, even for the Puerto Vallarta acolyte, is the growing eco resort scene. While Puerto Vallarta's tourism facilities have expanded outward across Banderas Bay into areas north and south of the city, the southern peninsula of Cabo Corrientes (Cape Currents) remains relatively untouched past the point where the road turns inland.

Quite near Las Caletas, is Quimixto (both are only accessible via water) a town of around 400 on a beach with a boat pier where burros still carry loads up bucolic streets fronted by fruit and drink stands. This quiet, picturesque town is the nearest settlement to the eco resort [Xinalani Retreat](#), which appears almost carved out of the jungle-blanketed mountainside that vaults

straight up from the sandy beach.

It feels almost a complete world away from the city's sprawling all-inclusive resorts. With just a handful of units ranging from shared dormitories to private villas, all of them are three-walled accommodations, allowing guests to take in the

sea air. The vibe is sort of European beach club meets yoga retreat, with day beds and recliners dotting the infinity pool and beachfront. Slightly up the hill are spa cabanas perched over the beach with windows propped open to allow the sound of the waves into the treatment sanctuary.

Yoga is definitely a primary activity here, with open-air studios further up the mountain offering spectacular views and fantastical environments for holding poses. Meals are included in the room rates; for luncheon we dined on fresh catch, roast chicken (the menu is vegetarian-friendly and avoids red meat), gazpacho, aguachile with shrimp and local mushrooms, brown rice pilaf tossed with local fruit and wine-poached pears.

Another delight to discover in town is the intimate [Casa Velas](#) in the Marina Vallarta neighborhood. An all-inclusive, adults-only sister property to the sprawling Velas Vallartas just a few blocks away, this charming property fronting a golf course is popular with repeat visitors seeking a lower-key Puerto Vallarta experience. Guests can still take in the Pelicanos beach at Tau Beach Club, to which the hotel offers a free shuttle. On-site, there's a sublime restaurant and serene plunge pool with swim-up bar.

Perhaps most important in the current environment, Casa Velas also maintains a certified COVID-19 test collection site on property, returning results within 24 hours. At the time of this writing, they had not had a guest or employee return a positive result, but guests who do test positive are offered significant discounts on accommodations for their quarantine period.

On balance, it was wholly satisfying to learn that [Puerto Vallarta](#) has returned to a relative semblance of normal just a year after the tourism industry turned upside down—both in the form of long-treasured attractions and excursions, plus newer, more modern options for the cosmopolitan traveler seeking new experiences.

Transportation, accommodations and activities were furnished by [Visit Puerto Vallarta](#) and partners in preparation for this story.