

**SUNNY SIDE UP – PUERTO VALLARTA GLOWS AS MEXICO’S  
SPARKLING WEST COAST GEM**

Posted by Michael J. Solender | Columns, Dining, Editor’s Picks, Epicure, Food Tours, Luxury Hotels, Mexico, Off Road, Resorts |

★★★★★



Luxe winter escapes calling for cultural flavor, historic exploration, soft adventure, and mile after mile of sultry beaches find Puerto Vallarta high atop the list.

Here in Jalisco, Mexico, the once remote sunny beach town was made famous by Hollywood A-listers in the 60’s and 70’s after Richard Burton and Ava Gardner starred in the John Houston directed thriller **Night of the Iguana**. The film, based upon the Tennessee Williams play, was filmed in Puerto Vallarta, where Burton became so enamored with the sweeping ocean vistas, scarlet sunsets, and carefree vibe, he acquired a romantic hideaway home – Casa Kimberly – here with Elizabeth Taylor.

Today, “la buena vida” calls year-round with warm hospitality, a sophisticated culinary scene, and diversions both active and relaxing depending upon one’s mood. Here’s what to have on your list:

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## STAY

**Casa Velas.** This boutique adults-only all-inclusive property is an oasis of serenity that delivers high touch service and plush amenities for guests serious about enjoying sun-soaked comfort. Visitors find 80 rooms, many with their own outdoor plunge pools or Jacuzzis, surrounded by finely manicured gardens, an oversized pool with private cabanas, and plenty of shady outdoor hideaways for quiet contemplation or simply catching up on the latest beach read.



Casa Velas is an intimate boutique adults-only resort and spa in Puerto Vallarta's waterfront Marina District. Photo courtesy: Casa Velas.

**Emiliano**, the resort's signature AAA Four-Diamond restaurant, features Mexican specialties, a large al fresco patio, and attentive staff. Handcrafted cocktails allow local fruits and herbs to shine through in creative preparations. Their Tamarind Margarita, sweet, sour, and smoky, is a standout.

A stay here allows guests access to **Tau Beach Club** mere minutes away by shuttle. Tau's beachfront bar, restaurant, pool, loungers, and high staff to guest ratio make a day at the beach extra special.

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## PLAY

For those fancying a close by round of golf, Casa Velas will gladly make a connection at the [Marina Vallarta Golf Club](#). The course is just adjacent to the property and offers a test for low and high handicappers alike. With views of the imposing Sierra Madre mountains and the oft frothy Bay of Banderas, golfers might get distracted by the scenery, though demanding approach shots and tricky to read greens are sure to capture players' attention.



*Premium golf at Marina Vallarta Golf Course is right next door to Casa Velas. Photo courtesy: Casa Velas.*

[Vallarta Botanical Garden \(VBG\)](#) has achieved global recognition as one of the top botanical gardens in North America just 20 years after emerging from acres of prior life as cattle grazing pastures and hillside. In 2022, the garden won the Garden Excellence Award, awarded by the American Public Gardens Association. This made VBG the first garden outside the U.S. to ever win this prestigious recognition. Guests enjoy miles of hiking trails, exotic orchids, an expansive vanilla plantation, self-guided and curator-led tours, and access to the crystalline Los Horcones River for swimming, bird watching, or simply enjoying a picnic lunch. Hearty Mexican fare beckons at the garden's full service restaurant, [Hacienda de Oro](#) and a well-stocked gift shop is the place to secure plantation-grown vanilla beans and other treats for foodies back home.

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Vallarta Botanical Garden offers visitors hiking trails, river access, guided vanilla plantation tours and stunning orchid collection. Photo courtesy: [visitpuertovallarta.com](http://visitpuertovallarta.com)

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Get out on the open water with a day tour of **Banderas Bay**. Captain Dave at **Ol Salty's Ranch** is the skipper you want to navigate your crew out on the Bay as you head for Los Arcos (the arches) de Mismaloya, a natural rock formation 30 minutes out from Los Muertos Beach Pier. Here snorkeling, sight-seeing and kicking back is the order of the day where sparkly marine life give visitors a sideshow and welcome to remember. Arrange for an in-water guide like **Tatiana at Mexico Real Tours** who's certain to safely steer your group to the best sites for spying the underwater sea life. She'll be sure to take you to **Playa Colomitos**, the tiniest and most Instagram worthy beach in all of Mexico.



*Los Arcos de Mismaloya is a breathtaking rock formation off the shores of Puerto Vallarta. Photo courtesy: [visitpuertovallarta.com](http://visitpuertovallarta.com).*

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Stroll the **Malecon**, Puerto Vallarta's fabled Boardwalk. Navigate more than 12 blocks of prime esplanade traversing Puerto Vallarta's El Centro and Zona Romantica for some of the city's best people watching, street vendors, ocean views, and cultural flavor. The Malecon is buzzing night or day and features some of Puerto Vallarta's most notable landmarks such as **El Caballito** (the boy on the seahorse) sculpture by Rafael Zamarripa. The sculpture fronts the **Letras Puerto Vallarta**, the most photographed landmark in the city.



*Puerto Vallarta has a vibrant entertainment scene with nightly happenings year-round. Photo courtesy: [visitpuertovallarta.com](http://visitpuertovallarta.com)*

#### **Eat**

There's no better way to get immersed in the street food culture here than exploring the [Street Taco Tour](#). This evening crawl of no less than half a dozen stands, popups, street stalls, and authentic eateries delights with tacos of every variety from smoked marlin and mahi mahi, to tacos chili rellenos, beef cheek, octopus, and the king of tacos – El pastor. Throw in freshly made churros and a nightcap at a Raicilla (a type of agave spirit) bar and the taco crawl is 4 hours to be savored.

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Tacos tell a wonderful cultural story and are ubiquitous in Puerto Vallarta. Photo courtesy: Michael J. Solender.

**Tinquote.** Named one of the 120 best restaurants in Mexico by Culinaria Mexicana, this bastion to innovative contemporary Mexican cuisine delights with their 8-10 course tasting menu and culinary tour. Technique, top ingredients, and passion infused dishes such as the 36 hour tomato stuffed with goat cheese and crab tartlet with herbal haydari and peanut adobe, leave diners delighted and anxious to return.

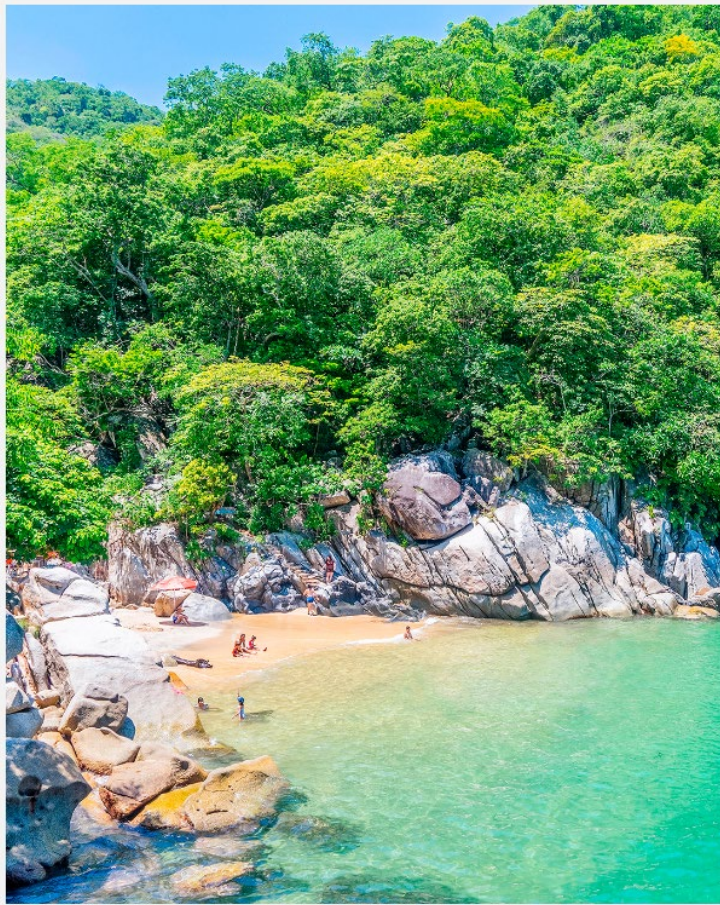
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*Makal is part of the burgeoning culinary scene that is putting fresh twists on traditional Mexican fare. Photo courtesy Michael J. Solender.*

Makal. Wickedly creative cocktails like the Quetzal (Mexican gin, cucumber, coconut water, basil, and celery bitters) tip off diners early on they're in for a special treat. Regional Mexican specialties like Molotes – stuffed plantains in a poblano mole and a stellar Oxtail Terrine with adobo and parsnip puree show off the serious kitchen chop at Makal and deliver an evening out that simply rocks.

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Playa Colomitos is Mexico's tiniest beach. Photo courtesy: [visitpuertovallarta.com](http://visitpuertovallarta.com).

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