

Puerto Vallarta Vacation

Many Gringos like me refer to Puerto Vallarta as PV, because it is so hard to pronounce it just like the Mexicans with the right amount of staccato at just the right place. And of course you're supposed to replace the double L sound completely with a rolling Y sound.

PV has a population of about 300,000 and several thousand hotels and resorts. Tourism, construction and agriculture are its big industries. In the 50s it was still a small town but Hollywood stars bought villas and Richard Burton filmed *Night of the Iguana* here, which opened the floodgates of tourism. California still sends the largest bunch of tourists.



PV is just one of many towns along a 40 mile coastline of the Bay of Banderas, the largest bay in Mexico. AAA estimates two million tourists arrive each year, mostly from the US and Canada. Two States border the bay, Jalisco in which PV resides and Nayarit taking up everything north of PV. The Jalisco tourism website estimates nearly 20,000 tourist units available in their part of the PV coastline alone. During the winter there might be as many as 50,000 tourists per day including about 7,000 per day off cruise ships. Each day brings 2 or 3 giant cruise ships into the PV harbor, on top of hundreds of private yachts.



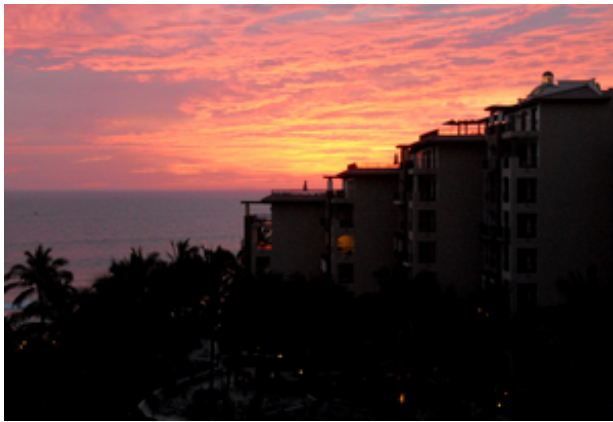
The old part of PV sits mostly on a hillside ending at boardwalk along the southern piece of PV. (See above photo; photo on right was taken from the hill.) Mostly this old section contains large, expensive villas with many bedrooms that rent out for as much as \$1,000 a day including meals. (We prefer to spend one tenth that, which is why we bought timesharing in Mexico.)



Perhaps the most infamous tourist attraction in PV is the bridge that Richard Burton had built across a narrow street between his house and the house where Elizabeth Taylor stayed while he filmed the Iguana movie. They were both still married to other people, so the bridge has become a symbol of propriety of sorts. The funny thing about the bridge is that it has fallen down four times in the last 50 years, which also says something about the quality of Mexican construction.

Speaking of construction, new hotel/resort high-rises are going up everywhere. They litter the landscape wherever vacant lots remain. I was amazed how many hotels and resorts already are in place, many of them very luxurious. It reminds me of Cabo except about 10 times denser.

The US economy may not be booming, but PV certainly is. Tens of thousands of workers are supported in the hospitality industry. The government has built thousands of one and two story townhouses that it sells to the workers for about \$40,000 and gives them very low interests rates. The houses are discounted to those who have worked for X number of years, as something of a retirement benefit.



Above you can see a sunset from our balcony and on the left is the entrance to Villa del Palmar, Flamingos. The timesharing-exchanged condo is tucked into the Flamingos area, which is part of Nuevo Vallarta, about 15 miles north of the older center section of PV called El Centro.

About miles north of Flamingos is a little village called Bucerias, which is a typical Mexican town except that its hotels and restaurants cater to tourists.



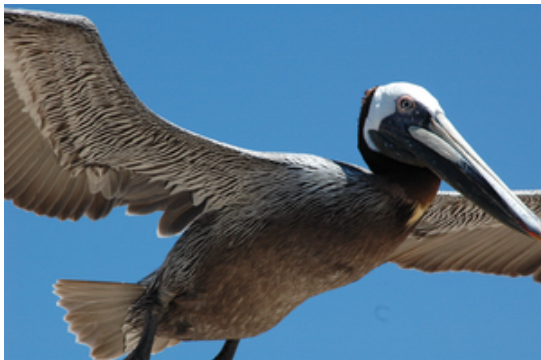
For us it was a nice walk up a dusty path (see picture above) or along the beach and a place to go to dinner or just to watch Mexicans in the village plaza. (See photo on the left.)



One of the anomalies of the local aviaries is the Magnificent Frigatebird (see left photo), large black and white birds with 8 feet wingspan. Along the coast we can almost always see several gliding in circles high in the sky. Unlike pelicans, who constantly dive into the water whenever they get a glimpse of fish, the frigatebirds don't touch the water, but instead steal fish from the other birds in flight.

The wise pelicans devour their meal while still floating in the water. This leaves the seagulls as the main victims of the magnificent frigatebirds. They are beautiful, graceful birds in flight, but up close they look more like ugly vultures.

Nancy captured the photo on the right of a frigatebird yawning.



Pelicans also differ in that they usually fly in groups of three or more, gliding just above the breakers so that they can see any schools of fish near the surface.

In PV Central the pelicans have gotten fearless and let people get as close as 5 feet away. They are such a strange looking bird especially when they squat to sleep or when they yawn exposing their strange cavities (see above). Nancy took these two pelican shots, by the way.



Along the PV boardwalk, which is called the Malecon, are many large metal sculptures. In addition, enterprising young Mexicans build gigantic sand sculptures. In front of the sand castle they place a jar for tips. Obviously there are worse occupations.



Here is Nancy posing beside one of the metal sculptures.

PV and Hawaii are equidistant from the North Pole, so it should not be surprising that we found many of the same flowers: hibiscus, red ginger flowers, and azaleas. Cabo is a few hundred miles further north, so compared to PV it is a bit cooler but also much less humidity. Cabo has the feel of desert with cacti, but the PV terrain looks like dusty jungle.

Compared to Hawaii, both places in Mexico have fewer clouds and less rain this time of year.

As we both needed relaxation more than stimulation this week, we took only one paid excursion and it was called the Pirate Ship dinner cruise. The idea was to view the sunset from the harbor and a leisurely dinner with a “pirate” show. Well, we enjoyed the sunset and the dinner was OK, but most of the time we were shivering because of a very cool ocean breeze. Two hundred people squeezed onto the small boat and for three hours watched a mostly silly bunch of guys pretending to be pirates. The ship was beautifully built of all wood, but the heavy drinking crowd didn’t notice. That’s the last “pirate ship” we will ride on. Here is Nancy riding away into the sunset captured on a pirate ship.



Sailboat race from Bucerias Village