

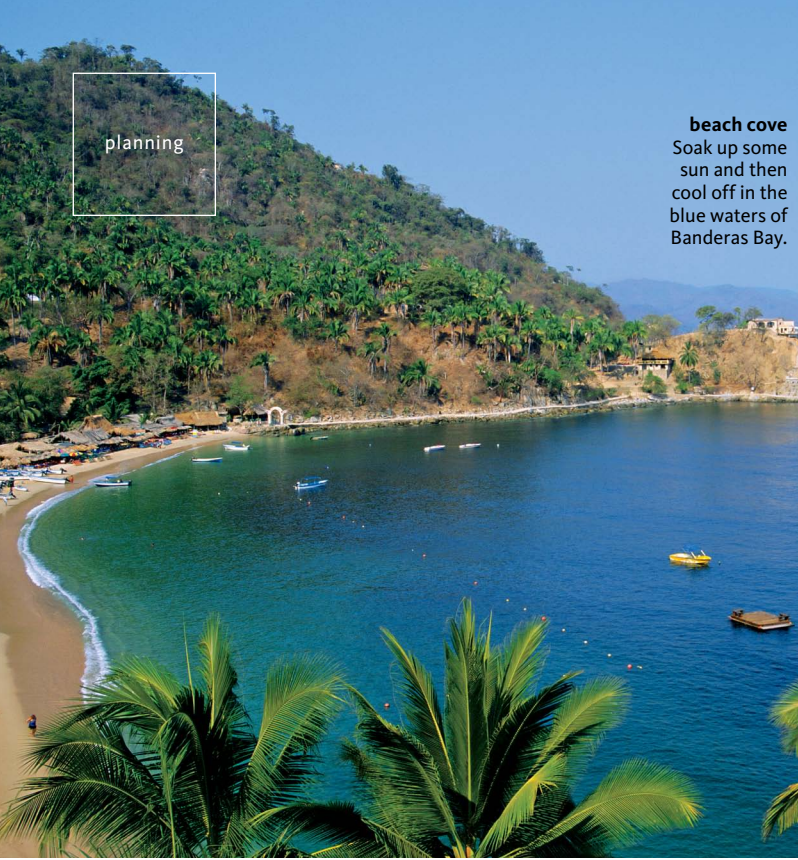
scenic sunset
Shades of orange
and red take
over the sky in
Puerto Vallarta.

south of the border

These three Mexico locales will make you feel a million miles
away—without the long flight. BY CAITLIN MOSCATELLO

planning

beach cove
Soak up some sun and then cool off in the blue waters of Banderas Bay.



puerto vallarta



TRAVEL TIME

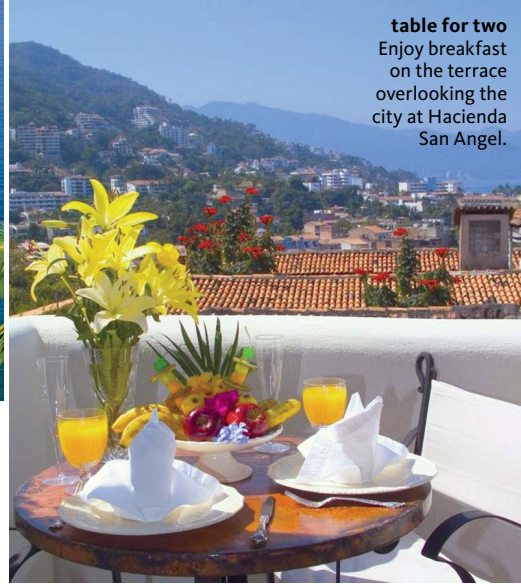
Direct flights (from Dallas and Houston only) are about 2 hours, 30 minutes

LOCATION LOWDOWN This popular resort town sits along the scenic Banderas Bay and is known for its beautiful beaches, fine art galleries and top-notch restaurants. There's plenty to keep sporty types busy (including golfing on championship courses), but you might also want to mellow out with a drink while watching a Pacific sunset.

WHERE TO STAY If you don't mind having a stairway between you and the beach, stay at Hacienda San Angel, a downtown boutique hotel with a villa that was once the home of famous actor Richard Burton (he gave it to his wife as a present—so there's a history of romance there too!). The hotel, which is made up of five colonial villas, also has three heated pools and a sexy rooftop Jacuzzi (from \$485, [HaciendaSanAngel.com](#)). For a less expensive option, check out Villa Amor, a beachfront hotel that has 33 luxury villas with ocean views (from \$55, [VillaAmor.com](#)).

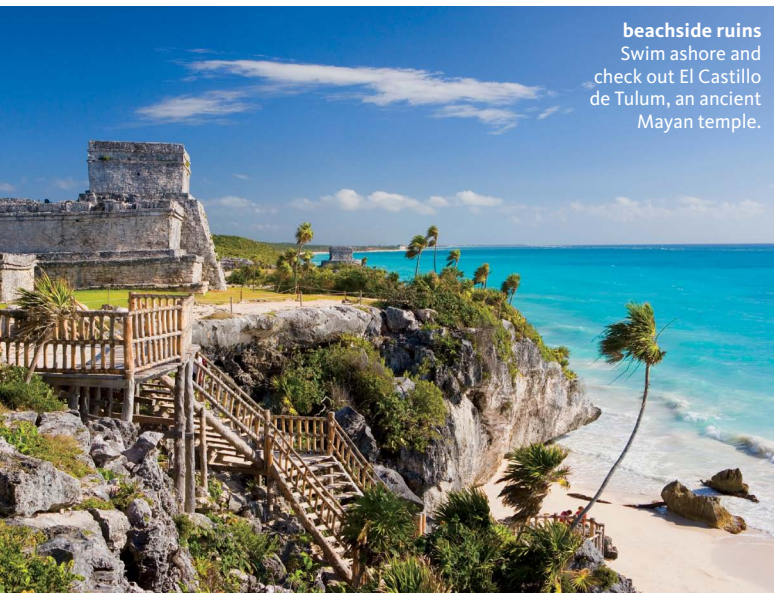
WHAT TO DO Choose from dozens of restaurants in El Malecon, the very center of town, then take a stroll while listening to mariachi bands on the street. If you're not in a rush to get back to your hotel, break a sweat dancing at Bebotero. Music doesn't start until after 10 p.m. at this posh nightclub, but the live music is worth it (52-322-113-0099). June through November, lend a hand to some of the original "locals"—the Olive Ridley sea turtles—by helping them hatch and make it to the ocean safely (many hotels participate, so ask the concierge). Snorkeling, scuba diving (you might even run into a few dolphins in Banderas Bay) and sailing are all popular activities as well. >>

table for two
Enjoy breakfast on the terrace overlooking the city at Hacienda San Angel.



old meets new
Modern resorts haven't erased Puerto Vallarta's colonial charm.





beachside ruins
Swim ashore and check out El Castillo de Tulum, an ancient Mayan temple.



the high life Lounge by the private plunge pool overlooking the Caribbean Sea outside your suite at Rosewood Mayakoba Resort.

riviera maya



TRAVEL TIME

Direct flights (from Dallas and Houston only) to Cancun are about 2 hours, 15 minutes

LOCATION LOWDOWN Just south of Cancun, this stretch of beach along the Caribbean Sea has become one of the hottest destinations in Mexico. And if the upscale resorts and miles of sand aren't enough, here's another draw: This coastal town is also near ancient Mayan ruins, including Chichen Itza (one of the new Seven Wonders of the World).

WHERE TO STAY Check into the Rosewood Mayakoba and you'll see why everyone can't stop talking about it. The 128 suites have lagoon or ocean views, and some come with a private plunge pool (from \$590, RosewoodMayakoba.com). Or sleep under a thatched-roof suite on the beach at the luxe El Dorado Royale, then have a pool waiter serve you breakfast while sunning in your bathing suits. Rates are all-inclusive, so you don't have to hesitate to order another drink (from \$186 per person, per night, ElDoradoSpaResorts.com).

WHAT TO DO For a walking history lesson, head to the coastline and visit the Tulum Ruins, which date back to about 564 A.D. Spend a day snorkeling, swimming with dolphins and exploring underground rivers at Xcaret, a natural park (basic admission is \$69, but book online to get 10 percent off, Xcaret.com). If you like to golf, tee up at El Camaleón, which is part of the PGA Tour (a full round is \$240, Mayakoba.com). Of course, the most popular activity is to lounge on the beach. Just walk outside your hotel and hit the sand. Or head over to Kantelah Beach—a hideaway of uncrowded sand—for more privacy. >>

spanish love speak

9 key honeymoon phrases en español

"MÁS CHAMPAÑA, POR FAVOR"

More champagne, please

"¡NOS ACABAMOS DE CASAR!"

We just got married!

"NO MOLESTE, POR FAVOR"

Do not disturb

"LA COMIDA PARA DOS, POR FAVOR"

Dinner for two, please

"TE QUIERO"

I love you

"¿HAS TRAÍDO EL ACEITE DE MASAJE?"

Did you bring the massage oil?

"PERMÍTANOS UN BRINDIS"

Let's make a toast

"QUIERO ARRANCARTE LA ROPA"

I want to rip your clothes off

"¡VAMOS A HACERLO OTRA VEZ!"

Let's do it again!





a work of art
Local painters display their work along the streets in the Artist's Quarter.

puebla



TRAVEL TIME

Direct flights (from Houston only) are 2 hours

LOCATION LOWDOWN This wealthy colonial city dates back to 1531 and is located between Veracruz and Mexico City. Here you won't find beaches, but rather an Aztec pyramid, a 45,000-person soccer stadium and a historic center full of quaint cafes and restaurants.

WHERE TO STAY Book a room at La Purificadora, a contemporary hotel that was once an ice factory. Sip cocktails in the plush lounge chairs outside the lobby and watch swimmers underwater in the glass-sided pool (from \$155, LaPurificadora.com). For an old-world experience, stay at Camino Real Puebla Centro; it's housed in a former sixteenth-century convent. Rooms open up to a courtyard and, unlike many older hotels, there's air-conditioning (from \$80, CaminoReal.com).

WHAT TO DO Stroll through the Mercado de Cholula, an outdoor food market lined with stands selling fresh produce and spices. This is one of two cities where mole poblano—a chocolatey sauce made of more than 30 ingredients—is said to have originated. Fill up on authentic tacos, and then visit the towering Catedral de Puebla (be sure to check out the crypt—it's filled with expensive details). Also climb the nearby Aztec pyramid, which is larger than the Great Pyramids in Egypt.

drive it!
Road-tripping from San Antonio or Austin takes about 17.5 hours.

crossing over

Driving? Read these three important tips before you head for the border.

1

If you're going to drive your own car and plan to stay in Mexico for 72 hours or more, you'll need to get a Mexican tourist card, otherwise known as an "FM-T." These are available from immigration officers at the border, take just a few minutes to fill out and cost about \$19.

2

As of 2009, all US citizens are required to show a valid US passport when driving back from Mexico (you used to be able to get away with just a valid driver's license and birth certificate). If you don't have one already, you can start by filling out a DS-11 form at Travel.state.gov, gathering two listed forms of identification and having passport photos taken before submitting your application in person at a passport agency or acceptance facility (your local post office might even do it). It'll cost \$120 each in total and takes four to six weeks (unless you pay a \$60 fee to rush it).

3

You'll also need a temporary vehicle importation permit for your car, which you can apply for online at Banjercito.com.mx and pick up at a Banjercito office at the border (it's your cheapest option). It takes about 24 hours after your online registration for the permit to be ready, and you should pick it up within 15 days. Total cost: \$30.

GOOD NEWS Your valid US driver's license is fair game in Mexico—so no, you won't have to take any tests to make sure you can handle the roads!

—Jacqueline Scott



See 150+ honeymoon hot spots at TheKnot.com/honeymoon