

Its biggest asset is the spectacular setting, between lofty, jungle-clad mountains and horseshoe-shaped Banderas Bay. The shoreline of one of Mexico's largest bays has absorbed waves of development — high-rise hotels, luxury villas, golf courses, marinas — yet, with about 60 miles of shoreline (half of it beach), the bay still harbors secluded coves and sleepy villages where fishermen beach their *pangas* to bring in the day's catch. With an average depth of 1,000 feet, the bay also has ample room for visiting humpback whales and other marine life.

Puerto Vallarta's diversity of op-

Whatever you've dreamed of doing on a Mexican getaway, you can find it here (along with things you never thought of).

tions for accommodations and adventure allows it to cater to every kind of traveler. Whatever you've dreamed of doing on a Mexican getaway, you can find it here. Take a water taxi to play castaway for a day on a beach past the reach of any road. Party with the cool crowd on a dance floor pulsing with big-city beats. Swoop through the jungle on a zip line. Surf or scuba dive (or learn how). Take a jeep safari or ride a horse into the Sierra Madre foothills. Savor refined Mexican dishes (and many international flavors) in elegant restaurants. Feast on marlin tacos and chilled *cerveza* in a seaside *palapa* (thatched-roof) eatery. Go on a whale-watching or sunset cocktail cruise. Yes, these are all very touristy things to do — but also undeniably great fun.

Of course, you might be happy to cocoon at a carefree resort, perhaps echoing the torrid romance between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, who first put Puerto Vallarta on the map in the early 1960s when Burton was here filming *The Night of the Iguana*. Once you're rested, head into town to explore the shops, galleries, and restaurants that line the cobblestone streets. Stroll along the Rio Cuale and the mile-long malecón, adorned with fanciful sculptures. Visit the city's favorite landmark, the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, known for its sonorous bells and queenly metal crown. And explore Marina Vallarta and Nuevo Vallarta, north-of-town developments that offer golf, sport-fishing charters, and more hotels, shops, and restaurants. Be sure to stop in the galleries,

GREAT LOCAL FLAVORS

Banderas Bay is full of good (and cheap) palapa beach eateries; there's much more to savor in a city with one of Mexico's most diverse dining scenes.

El Arrayan has a cozy atmosphere and award-winning Mexican food (try the duck carnitas). elarrayan.com.mx

Barcelona Tapas features traditional Spanish tapas and a rooftop patio with an alluring bay view. barcelonatapas.net

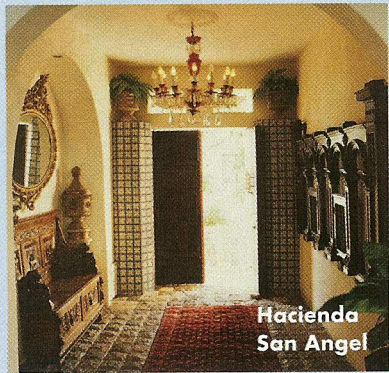
Long one of the city's best restaurants, **Cafe des Artistes** offers an exquisite French menu and a romantic garden setting. cafedesartistes.com

Mirrored walls give every table a sea view at the oceanfront **Vitea**, with creative dishes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Fresh seafood informs the menu. viteapv.com

Find Mexican classics like *chile con carne* and a tasty vegetarian menu at the bohemian **Red Cabbage Cafe**. redcabbagepv.com

where you can find stunning pieces of yarn and bead art created by Huichol Indians in the nearby Sierra Madre. Also known as the "people of the sun," the Huichol make up a twisting blend of bold colors that long predates the American style of psychedelic art.

It's easy to get out of town on a memorable day trip — or some days more. Banderas Bay's southern coast has quiet beaches accessible by road, but by water taxi or tour. Getting to them feels like an adventure — think *Gilligan's Island*, only you won't be left stranded. Las Arboledas, Quimixto, Majahuitas, and Y



Hacienda San Angel

STAY IN STYLE

Visitors will find many large-scale hotels, as well as more intimate properties like the following:

A walled oasis with a refined restaurant and superb views, **Hacienda San Angel** is Puerto Vallarta's best boutique hotel. haciendasanangel.com

Centrally located **Casa Amorita**, a boutique bed and breakfast, offers five ocean-view rooms, with a rooftop terrace bar and lush broadleaf tropical foliage gracing the grounds. casaamorita.com

On the beach just south of town, the **Quinta Maria Cortez** offers seven beachfront suites with a pool. quintamaria.com

For that shipwrecked-in-paradise feeling, opt for one of eight suites at **Verana** in remote Yelapa (no TV or phones, but pool, spa, yoga, and well-crafted cuisine using local ingredients). verana.com