



## **Puerto Vallarta, México**

Puerto Vallarta is by far the best-known resort on Mexico's upper Pacific Coast. The late film director and sometime resident John Huston put the town on the map when he filmed Tennessee William's play *The Night of the Iguana* on the outskirts of the village in 1963. Elizabeth Taylor came to keep Richard Burton company during the filming, and the gossip about their romance – both were married at the time, but not to each other – brought this quaint Mexican fishing village, with its cobblestone lanes and whitewashed, tile-roof houses, to the public's attention. Before long, travel agents were deluged with queries about Puerto Vallarta.

Despite the growing popularity every attempt has been made to keep the town's character and image intact. Even the parking lot at the local Gigante supermarket is cobblestone, and by law, any house built in town must be painted white. When you visit, you'll still see houses with red-tile roofs on palm-covered hills overlooking glistening blue water. Pack mules clop down the steep cobblestone streets. Within 16 km (10 mi) of town are peaceful covers, rushing rivers, and steep mountain roads that curve and twist through jungles of pines and palms.

### **Getting Around**

#### **Arriving & Departing By Air**

U.S. carriers serve Puerto Vallarta:

- Aeromexico
- Alaska Airlines
- American
- America West
- Continental
- Delta
- Mexicana
- United Airlines

#### **Flying Time:**

- New York: 6 Hours
- Chicago: 6 Hours
- Los Angeles: 5 Hours



### **Getting Around By Bus:**

City buses serve downtown, the northern hotel zone, and the southern beaches. Bus stops marked by blue-and-white signs are located every two or three blocks along the highways.

### **Getting Around By Car:**

Several agencies in Puerto Vallarta rent Jeeps, open-air Volkswagen Beetles, and automatic-transmission sedans.

For day trips and local sightseeing, consider engaging a car and driver (who often acts as a guide) for a day. This can be a hassle-free, more economical way to travel than renting a car and driving yourself. They usually charge approximately \$40 an hour within town, with a three-hour minimum requirement. Rates for out-of-town trips are higher.

### **Car Rentals:**

During the high season, rentals start at approximately \$60 per day, including insurance and mileage; off season, they start approximately at \$45 per day. Most major car-rental agencies have desks at the airport.

### **Driving Requirements:**

In Mexico your own driver's license is acceptable. An International Driver's Permit is a good idea; it's available from the U.S. and Canadian automobile associations, and, in the United Kingdom, from the Automobile Association or Royal Automobile Club. These international permits are universally recognized, and having one in your wallet may save you a problem with local authorities.

### **Getting Around by Taxi:**

Many hotels post fares to common destinations; be sure to agree on a fare before the cab takes off. The ride from the north-side hotels to downtown costs approximately between \$6 and \$8 dollars.

## **Business Hours**

### **Banks & Offices**

Banks are generally open weekdays 9-4. Many of the larger banks keep a few branches open Saturday from 10 to 2:00, however, the extended hours are often for deposits or check cashing only. Closed Sunday.



Banks will give you cash advances in pesos (for a fee) if you have a major credit card. Government offices are usually open to the public 8-3; along with banks and most private offices, they are closed on national holidays.

### **Museums & Sights**

Along with theaters and most archaeological sights, museums are closed on Monday, with few exceptions. Museums across the country have free admission on Sunday. Hours are normally 9-5 or 6.

### **Shops**

Stores are generally open weekdays and Saturday from 9 or 10 a.m. to 7 or 8 p.m.; in resort areas, shops may also be open on Sunday. In some resort areas and small towns, shops may close for a two hour lunch brake about 2-4. Airport shops are open for business seven days a week.

### **Customs & Duties**

Upon entering Mexico, you will be given a baggage declaration form and asked to itemize what you're bringing into the country. You are allowed to bring in 2 liters of spirits or wine for personal use; 400 Cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco; a reasonable amount of perfume for personal use; one movie camera and one regular camera and 12 rolls of films for each; and gift items not to exceed a total of \$300. If driving across the U.S. border, gift items must not exceed \$50.

You are not allowed to bring firearms, meat, vegetables, plants, fruit, or flowers into the country.

### **Electricity**

#### **Electricity for U.S. and Canadian Travelers**

Electrical converters are not necessary because México operates on the 60-cycle, 120 volts system; however, many Mexican outlets have not been updated to accommodate three-prong and polarized plugs (those with larger prong), so to be safe bring an adapter plug.

**U.S. Embassy:** Paseo de la Reforma 305  
Col. Cuauhtemoc, Mexico City  
Phone: 55/5209-9100



**U.S. Consulate:** Calle Zaragoza 160,  
2nd floor Puerto Vallarta, México  
Phone: 322/222-00-69

## **Hospital Emergency Rooms**

**Hospital:** Plaza Neptuno, Marina Vallarta  
Phone: 322/226-20-80

## **Tours**

### **Guided Tours**

Tours may be arranged through your hotel or one of the many tour operators with offices at hotels and in town.

### **City Tours**

The five hour city tour is a good way to get the lay of the land, from Marina Vallarta and Gringo Gultch to the Rio Cuale and Playa Mismaloya, where *The Night of the Iguana* was filmed. City tours run about \$30. It's worth the few extra dollars to go on a private tour (small groups) in a van rather than with a large group on a tour bus.

### **Cruises, Air, and Tropical Tours**

Almost everyone goes on at least on daytime or sunset cruise around the bay, sighting scenic isolated covers and barren beaches from the deck of a sailboat or yacht. A full day excursion to Yelapa or Las Animas, seaside communities that can be reached only by boat, gives you a feeling of what life is like in a secluded tropical paradise.

Tours to Yelapa run about \$70 and tours to Las Animas and Quimixto cost approximately \$80.

Daytime cruises go to Los Arcos, Yelapa, Quimixto, and Playa Las Animas, and to Islas Marietas for whale watching (during winter months), snorkeling, swimming, and lunch.

Different tour companies offer a dinner cruise to movie directed John Huston's former home, on a private bay south of the city, with dancing on the return trip.

Charter airline tours fly to San Sebastian del Oeste, an interesting old mining town in the Sierra madre, 62 km (38 mi) from Puerto Vallarta.



Tropical tours visit mango and banana plantations in Nayarit and include stops in Nayarit's Capital, Tepic, and the small seaside town of San Blas for a boat ride on the Rio Tovar, through jungle thick with tropical plants and birds, with a stop for a refreshing swim in a natural spring. Other trips head south to Boca de Tomatlan, the mouth of the river that flows from the mountains into the sea.

## **Language**

Spanish is the official language of Mexico, although Indian languages are spoken by approximately 20% of the population and those people may well speak no Spanish at all. Basic English is widely understood by most people employed in tourism, less so in the less developed areas. At the very least, shopkeepers will know the numbers for bargaining purposes.

As in most other foreign countries, knowing the mother tongue has a way of opening doors, so learn some Spanish words and phrases. Mexicans welcome even the most halting attempts to use the language.

## **Money**

Mexico has a reputation for being inexpensive, particularly compared with other North American vacation spots such as the Caribbean. The devaluation of the peso, begun in late 1994, has made this especially true, though prices at the large chain hotels, calculated in dollars, have not gone down, and some restaurant owners and merchants have raised their prices to compensate for the devaluation. In general, cost will vary with the when, where, and how of your travel. Puerto Vallarta is one of the most expensive Mexican destinations, but it does offer some budget accommodations.

## **ATMs**

ATMs (cajas automaticas) are becoming commonplace in more and more Mexican towns and cities. Cirrus and Plus are the most commonly found networks in Mexico.

## **Currency**

Mexican currency comes in denominations of 20-, 50-, 100-, 500-, and 1,000-peso bills. Coins come in denomination of 20, 10 and 5 pesos and 20 centavos. Many of the coins and bills are very similar, so be careful.

Many tourist shops and market vendors as well as virtually all hotel service personnel accept dollars. However, you'll get your change in pesos.



## **Exchanging Money**

ATM transaction fees may be higher abroad than at home, but ATM currency exchange rates are your best bet because they are based on wholesale rates offered only by major banks. And if you take out a fair amount of cash per withdrawal, the transaction fee becomes less of a strike against the exchange rate (in percentage terms). However, most ATMs allow only up to approximately \$300 a transactions.

## **Taxes**

Mexico charges an airport departure tax of US \$20 or the peso equivalent for international and domestic flights. These rates are approximate, per person and may vary, depending on the rate of exchange. This tax is usually included in the price of your ticket, but check to be certain. Save a little cash for this transaction, as traveler's checks and credit cards are not accepted.

Many states are charging a 2% tax on accommodations, the funds from which are being used for tourism promotion.

Mexico has a value added tax of 15%, called I.V.A. (impuesto de valor agregado), which is occasionally (and illegally) waived for cash purchases. Other taxes and charges apply for phone calls made from your hotel room.

## **Passports & Visas**

### **Entering Mexico**

For stays of up to 180 days, U.S. citizens need a valid passport, a certified copy of a birth certificate, or a voter registration card (the last two must be accompanied by a government issue photo ID). Minors traveling with one parent need notarized permission from the absent parent, or parental permission if traveling alone.

For stays of more than 180 days, all U.S. citizens, even infants, need a valid passport.

If you are a Canadian citizen you must travel with a Canadian passport, or with a Canadian birth certificate and picture ID, of which a driver's license is most commonly used. A visa is not required for a tourist/transit stay of up to 180 days. A tourist card, issued by Mexican consulates and most airlines serving Mexico, is required. You will also have to fill out the free migration statistics form, FMT, which you will be given during your flight if you arrive by air.

U.K. citizens need only a valid passport to enter Mexico for stays of up to three months.



New Zealand and Australian citizens need a passport and multiple entry visa.

If you are from anywhere else in the World, you must have a valid passport and in some cases, as entrance visa and other requirements. Consult the Mexican embassy or consulate in your country.

Mexico has instituted a \$22 visitor fee that applies to all visitors except those entering by sea at Mexican port who stay less than 72 hours and those entering by land who do not stray past the 26-30 km (16-18 mil) checkpoint into the countries interior. For visitors arriving by air, the fee, which covers visits of more than 72 hours and up to 30 days, is usually tacked onto the airline-ticket price. You must pay the fee each time you extend your 30 day tourist visa.

## **Telephones**

The country code for Mexico is 52. When calling a Mexico number from abroad, dial the country code and then all of the numbers listed for the entry.

Toll free numbers in Mexico start with an 800 prefix. To reach them, you need to dial 01 before the number. Mexico only toll free numbers appear as follows: 04-800/123-456.

Directory assistance is 040 nationwide. For international assistance, dial 00 first for an international operator and most likely you'll get one that speaks English; tell her in what city, state, and country you require directory assistance and she will connect you with directory assistance there.

## **International Calls**

To make a call to the United States or Canada, dial 001 before the area code and number; to call Europe, Latin America, or Japan, dial 00 before the country and city codes. When calling home, the country code for the U.S. and Canada is 1, the U.K. 44, Australia 61, New Zealand 64, and South Africa 27.

## **Visitor Information & Tourist Offices**

### **In Puerto Vallarta**

The municipal tourist office (Independencia 123, phone: 322/223-25-00 Ext. 230 or 231) and or 322/226-80-80, open weekdays 9-8, is on the Plaza Principal.

The State Tourism Office (Plaza Marina, phone: 322/221-26-27 or 322/221-26-77) is open weekdays 9-5.



## **In the United States**

Contact the Puerto Vallarta Convention & Visitors Bureau for tourist information:

Nationwide: phone: 1-888/384-6822

## **When to Go**

October through May are generally the driest months; during the peak of the rainy season (June-September), it may rain for a few hours daily. But the sun often shines for the rest of the day, and the off season rates may well compensate for the deducted tanning time.

Mexican resorts - where the vast majority of tourist go - are the most crowded (and therefore the most expensive) from December through the second week after Easter. This also holds true for July and August, school vacation months, when Mexican families crowd hotels.

To avoid the masses, the highest prices, and the worst rains, consider a visit during October, November, April, or May, just not during the traditional holiday periods. Hotel rates at the beach resorts can fall as much as 30% in the shoulder season, and 50% in the off season.

Mexicans travel during traditional holiday periods: Christmas through January 6 (Three Kings Day), Semana Santa (holy week, the week before Easter), the week after Easter, and summertime school vacations as well as over extended national holiday weekends, called puentes (bridges). Festivals play a big role in Mexican national life. If you plan to travel during a major national event, reserve both lodgings and transportations well in advance.

México's coasts are often very hot if now actually tropical, with temperatures ranging from 17°C to 31°C (63°F to 88°F) in winter and well above 32°C (90°F) in summer.

## **Weather Chart**

The following are the normal daily temperature ranges for Puerto Vallarta:

January: 72-88°F (22-31°C)  
February: 72-88°F (22-31°C)  
March: 72-88°F (22-31°C)  
April: 73-90°F (23-32°C)  
May: 75-90°F (24-32°C)  
June: 77-90°F (25-32°C)



July: 77-90°F (25-32°C)  
August: 77-90°F (25-32°C)  
September: 75-90°F (24-32°C)  
October: 75-90°F (24-32°C)  
November: 73-90°F (23-32°C)  
December: 71-88°F (22-31°C)

## **Holidays**

Banks and government offices close during Holy Week (the week leading up to Easter Sunday) and on Cinco de Mayo (May 5), Dia de la Raza (October 12), and Day of the Dead (October 31 – November 2). Government offices usually have reduced hours and staff from Christmas through New Year's Day.