



Cincinnati's Kelly is on his way to Notre Dame

The Fighting Irish opt for coach who helped transform Bearcats, 1, 10C

Brian Kelly: 34-6 record at Cincinnati.

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The 'king of the world' rolls dice on new 3-D vista

Director on *Avatar*: 'I've been thinking about this movie since I was 8,' 1D

James Cameron: \$500M sci-fi epic opens Dec. 18.

Fri/Sat/Sun, December 11-13, 2009

People



Liz doing 'fantastic'

Taylor sends an e-mail, touching on her health, her iPod, her Tweets, 3D

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WEEKLY FEATURES

Celebrity Heat Index

Our weekly list tracks pop culture's movers and shakers.

Who is No. 1 this week?

Tiger Woods: The golfer remains a tabloid target with more accusations of extra-marital relationships.

See the full list at life.usatoday.com.

AP Photo/Thomas

Life on Vacation



On the Riviera Nayarit
Second homes on coastline north of Puerto Vallarta, 6D

New movies this weekend, 2D

The *Lovely Bones* alternately light, heavy
A clear-eyed, graceful *Single Man*
Also in theaters:
Clint Eastwood's victorious *Invictus*

10 Great Places, 7D

Where grandparents, grandkids connect

Traveling with the Stars, 8D

In China, Africa with Blair Underwood

Today's puzzles, 7B

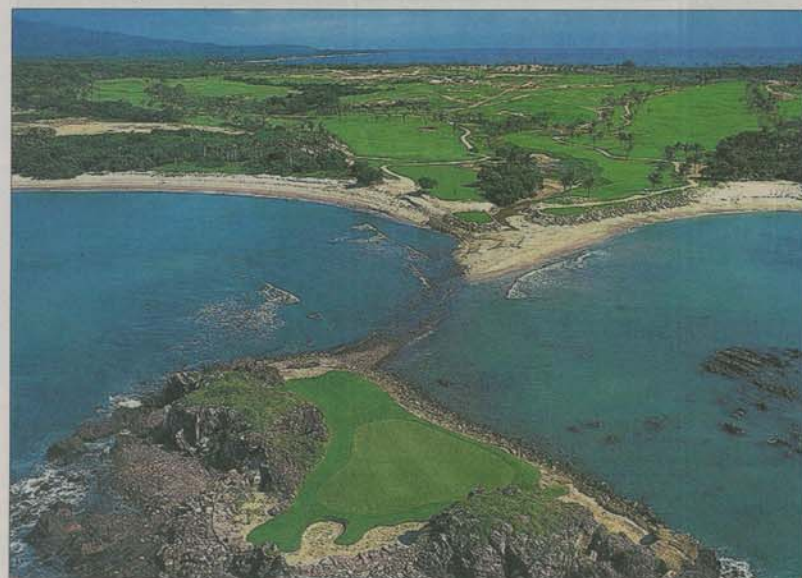


Walter photo by Willard/News & Cool Report

Riviera Nayarit

Life on Vacation

A weekly look at the second-home market



Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita

Putter there: The Pacifico golf course has a unique 19-hole layout that includes the Tail of the Whale hole, the only natural offshore-island green in the world.

Mexican Riviera migrates north



By Larry Olmstead
Special for USA TODAY

You might not find the Riviera Nayarit on a map, because the name was coined just three years ago to describe the 190-mile coastline north of Puerto Vallarta. But development began a decade earlier, and this is now one of the hottest vacation home destinations in Mexico.

Puerto Vallarta sits on the Bay of Banderas, one of the largest bays in Mexico, at the northern tip of the state of Jalisco. A popular cruise port, the city is heavily developed for tourism and day visitors. But just north across the border in the state of Nayarit, more than 30 miles of less-developed beaches line the bay.

Essentially a suburb of Puerto Vallarta, Nieve Vallarta is the first community over the border in Nayarit, and as you head north things quickly become more rural. The bay ends with the Punta Mita peninsula, home to Mexico's premier luxury residential community but the Riviera Nayarit continues north for more than 100 miles.

While many developments are stalled or on hold these days, Punta Mita just celebrated its 10th anniversary and continues to expand, also fueling growth in surrounding areas. The 1,500-acre gated community has almost 10 miles of continuous beach, with ocean on three sides of the narrow peninsula. It opened in the late 1990s with

homes and condos, a Four Seasons hotel and a Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course. This year Punta Mita got its second luxury hotel, a St. Regis, and its second Nicklaus course. Throughout are a broad mix of condos, townhomes and single-family homes, from \$450,000 to more than \$20 million.

"This newly minted Riviera is not just spas and luxury resorts. A half-hour drive north takes you to the funky clothing boutiques and beachfront surf shacks of Sayulita," says Mike Stevens of *Endless Vacation* magazine, who has covered the region extensively. "If you drive a little farther north, you'll need good suspension. Most beaches are reached only by dirt roads — for now."

The beachfront town of Sayulita, with its cobblestone streets and taco stands, boasts one of the best surf breaks in Mexico, and it has a relaxed, almost hippy vibe. It also has become a popular day and night destination for the entire region, thanks to a broad array of good restaurants and artisan boutiques.

"As an American, if your budget is in the \$200,000-\$300,000 range, your best bet is to buy in Sayulita or San Pancho," says Gary Pepin, vice president of sales for Punta Mita Properties. San Pancho is a less developed beach town 15 minutes farther north. Beyond it lies more than 100 miles of dirt roads and empty beaches, the future of Riviera Nayarit.

A look at three Riviera Nayarit neighborhoods:

- **Nuevo Vallarta:** Just across the state line from Puerto Vallarta and Marina Vallarta, the appeal is proximity to the airport and the many shops and restaurants of Puerto Vallarta, plus a beachfront setting on the Bay of Banderas. While some pay a premium for the location, others are put off by it, an extension of the city with several all-inclusive resorts. Recent upscale development includes the new Villa La Estancia luxury condo-style hotel with apartments from \$900,000 to more than \$5 million (villalaestancia.com).
- **Punta Mita:** The 800-pound gorilla of the Riviera Nayarit, this community has driven much of the surrounding development. About 70% of the buyers are American, and while you can easily spend eight figures on mansions here, luxury condos start at \$450,000. You can get a very large three-bedroom in the complex with private pool and beach club for \$750,000. In addition to facilities such as spas, gyms, a large tennis center and beach clubs, buyers have access to the spas and restaurants of the two resort hotels (puntamita.com).
- **Sayulita:** The first destination in Nayarit to be discovered by Americans, Sayulita has long attracted surfers. More recently it has become mainstream, while preserving its authentic old-Mexico flare. Viable second-home options start around \$200,000. Early adapters can look north to San Pancho or even farther up the coast, where prices have not yet risen as much.



Courtesy of Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita

On the market: Residencia La Mareta is a luxury home within the gated El Encanto community of Punta Mita.

Midrange price: \$450,000

- Bedrooms: 2
- Bathrooms: 2
- Size: 1,500 square feet (plus 800-square-foot terrace)
- Features: Kitchen with SubZero fridge, SS appliances, granite counters. Floor-to-ceiling windows, large patio, custom walk-in closets, master bedroom with walk-in shower and second private patio, washer/dryer, office. Common facilities include pool, gym, spa, tennis and beach club.



Courtesy of Ayia Puntos, USA Today

On the market: This condo is in the Ayia development within Punta Mita.

High price: \$2,100,000

- Price: \$2,100,000
- Bedrooms: 4
- Bathrooms: 4 1/2
- Size: 4,000 square feet (plus 3,290 square feet of terraces, patios)
- Features: Gourmet kitchen with Wolf and SubZero appliances, master bedroom with outdoor shower, dual walk-in closets. All bedrooms have patios or terraces. Outdoor living area with infinity pool, kitchen, fireplace and shower.

Best for

Golfers, surfers, beach lovers.

Claim to fame

The Pacifico golf course has the only natural offshore-island hole in the world, a legendary par-3.

Don't miss

The Bay of Banderas is a top whale-watching spot, in the heart of the humpback migration route. Whales are easily viewed from shore or boats from December to April.

Getting there

The Puerto Vallarta airport is modern and well-appointed and actually closer to Nuevo Vallarta, less than 5 minutes. It's about 45 minutes to Punta Mita.

Tourism information

rivieranayarit.com

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