

Town & Country TRAVEL

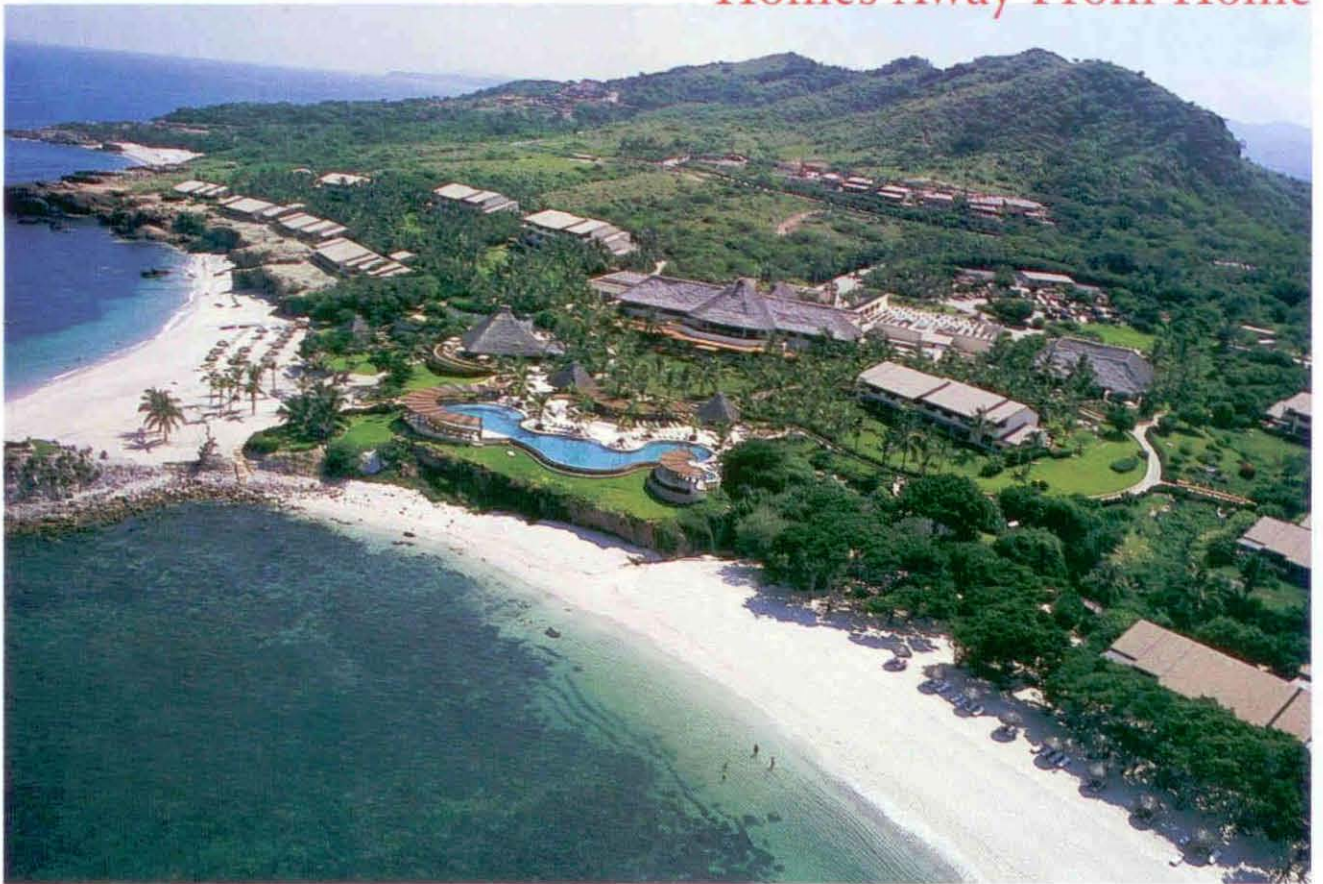
WINTER 2007

GET LOST IN
LAOS
FLORENCE
JAIPUR
DRESDEN



U.S. \$4.95 CANADA \$5.95
FOREIGN \$5.95





An aerial view
of the Four
Seasons Resort
Punta Mita.

Point of Many Returns

Seeking a beachfront retreat of your very own? The up-and-coming Punta Mita peninsula is Mexico's latest, greatest destination. BY DAVID HOCHMAN

MOST VISITORS FIRST ENCOUNTER THE MAGIC OF PUNTA Mita, Mexico, around the pool at the Four Seasons. Against a backdrop of crystal skies and sugary white beaches, a beaming attendant arrives at your lounge chair offering a chilled towel, a spritz from an Evian mister or a coconut-mango sorbet. The natural reaction is that it would be nice to live like this forever.

Preposterous? Not at all. In fact, Americans in search of a lasting escape are discovering the many ways to call this luxe 1,500-acre peninsula, just forty-five minutes north of Puerto Vallarta, home. Though some of the developments (such as La Solana and Kupuri) are currently little more than cleared beachfront lots, when construction is complete, around 2011, Punta Mita will have some 500 hotel rooms at four resorts and about 750 residences—divided into twelve gated communities—available for full or partial ownership. There will be attached condominiums and townhomes ranging from \$650,000 to \$1.6 million; private single-family villas (totaling fifty-seven), serviced by the Four Seasons, will start at \$1 million and jump to \$14 million for a sprawling hacienda with several dwellings.

Overall, Punta Mita, with nine-and-a-half miles of glittering shoreline, two Jack Nicklaus Signature golf courses and new ventures planned by some of the biggest names in hospitality and real estate, is the picture of potential. Demand is only likely to grow next year, when the St. Regis Resort & Residences opens with approximately sixty-five luxury villas for both fractional and whole ownership. "Our buyers know we have better weather than Hawaii and less density than Los Cabos, and the surroundings, service and privacy are unparalleled," says Santiago Ortiz, general director for Punta Mita Properties, the region's chief real estate company. "And that's not easy to keep under wraps."

LAY OF THE LAND

Situated on the northern edge of the Mexican Riviera and backed by the Sierra Madre range, Punta Mita looks from the air like a designer shoe stepping into the Pacific. After you pass through the peninsula's main gate, the road forks right to the Four Seasons hotel and left to most of the resort's residences and rentals. A project of Dine, one of the premier real estate

Homes Away From Home

development companies in Mexico, the planned community of Punta Mita called for \$150 million of infrastructure even before the first building went up, in 1999. The living options are as plentiful as the sunny days (more than 300 a year), and nowhere are you more than a tippy-toed glance from the sea.

WHO YOU'LL MEET

Residents come primarily from California, and many have professional ties to the worlds of computing, entertainment and finance. What unites regular renters and buyers is the desire to unwind in unexpected ways—which is why the golf courses are usually empty.

WHERE TO STAY

The **Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita**, with 173 rooms in tile-roofed casitas overlooking the Pacific, is one of the most popular Four Seasons among North American travelers, for good reason. Most accommodations have expansive water views. There are separate infinity pools for families and adults, a spa, four restaurants and a lazy river. *Double rooms from \$495. 800-819-5053; fourseasons.com.*

Each of the 120 rooms at the **St. Regis Resort & Residences** (set to open early in 2008) will have the hotel's signature butler service and its own outdoor shower and lounge area. The resort may also be the entry point for a championship-golf course, a 10,000-square-foot spa and fitness facility, and a poolside grill and bar. *Room rates not yet available. 888-625-5144; starwoodhotels.com.*

When the likes of Bill and Melinda or Gwyneth comes to Punta Mita, they usually take over a private villa. Rental guests have preferred access to Punta Mita's golf facilities, concierge services

and the private Residence Beach Club, a tranquil palapa-dotted oasis with quiet pools and restaurants. A wide range of villas and homes is available from \$900 a night (mitaresidential.com). **The top of the crop is Palmasola, with 25,000 square feet of indoor-outdoor living areas, a staff of fifteen and the finest beachfront location on all of Punta Mita. From \$15,000 a night. Contact palmasola.net.**

WHERE TO EAT

The unusual cuisine at **Aramara**, the Four Seasons' fine-dining restaurant, combines Mexican flavors with Asian and Indian sophistication. Entrées include tandoori marinated salmon and *chat masala* confit with avocados and green-tomato sauce. *Four Seasons Resort; 800-819-5053.*

Rental guests and owners can kick back in the open-air beachfront palapa at the **Residence Beach Club**. Specialties of the house reflect whatever is fresh, such as Pacific dorado in banana leaf with saffron rice. *877-561-2893.*

Don Pedro's is the perfect people-watching spot in Sayulita, a sweet surfing and shopping town fifteen minutes from Punta Mita's gates. Lunch and dinner, presented on two levels under thatched roofs, showcase *alta cocina* dishes such as a braised fillet of mahimahi with fresh mussels and clams served over a bed of fettuccine doused in pesto sauce and yellow-pepper salsa. *2 Calle Marlin, Sayulita; 011-52-329-291-3090.*

WHERE TO PLAY GOLF

The much-lauded nineteen-hole championship **Jack Nicklaus Signature Course** features an optional par 3 that plays 199 yards on a rather whimsical natural island green—it's accessible at high tide by a chauffeured amphibious golf cart. The second, eighteen-hole Nicklaus course opens in 2008. *Greens fees \$195.*

SUPER AGENTS

Because Dine operates most sites in the area, the company's partner, **Punta Mita Properties**, is the agent for many homes on the peninsula. *Contact Lynne Bairstow; 888-647-0979.*

La Punta Realty (a Christie's Great Estates affiliate) has a smaller toehold on the market, but at least it offers an option in terms of personalities. The two essential players to know are Alexis Burwell (alexis@lapuntarealty.com; 011-52-329-291-6420) and Marc Sinanian (marc@lapuntarealty.com; 011-52-329-291-6420). ❧

ON THE MARKET



Las Palmas No. 17 (01a) \$1.42 MILLION

In the community of Las Palmas, buyers receive family memberships to the golf course and access to the Residence Beach Club and concierge services. With three bedrooms, three baths and a backyard dominated by an infinity plunge pool, 01a offers 3,917 square feet of indoor-outdoor living space. Doors are hand-carved wood; the kitchen is loaded with gourmet touches. *CONTACT: Lynne Bairstow, Punta Mita Properties; 888-647-0979.*



Lagos del Mar, Casa Cariza \$3.975 MILLION

With 10,500 square feet for lounging, swimming and entertaining, this five-bedroom, seven-bath hacienda under thatched ceilings is the jewel of the development. Its infinity pool, with views of the Bay of Banderas, cascades over two levels. Courtyards are paved with walkways of inlaid river rocks, and the master suite has its own outdoor bathtub. *CONTACT: Lynne Bairstow, Punta Mita Properties; 888-647-0979.*



Four Seasons Private Villa No. 26 \$3.95 MILLION

Set high on a hilltop above the hotel, this four-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bath residence on two floors has sweeping Pacific vistas and several plunge pools. Its architecture is modern Mexican, and it comes fully furnished with handpicked pieces that reflect its setting, as well as all the perks of living at the Four Seasons. *CONTACT: Lynne Bairstow, Punta Mita Properties; 888-647-0979.*