

FREE FAMILY TRAVEL GUIDE · 2026 / 2027

Puerto Vallarta in 3 Days, Our Easy Plan

The Malecón, the Romantic Zone, a day on the water and a trip up the coast to Sayulita or Bucerías. Simple, relaxed and made for families.

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Welcome to Puerto Vallarta

Three days is not much time, but in Puerto Vallarta it goes a long way. The town is easy to walk, the bay is right there in front of you, and some of the nicest beach towns in Mexico are a short ride up the coast. This plan keeps things simple: one area per day, plenty of time to eat, and a sunset every evening.

You don't need to follow it to the minute. Swap days around, skip what doesn't suit your family, and stay longer wherever you're having fun. That's how Vallarta works best.

> "The heart and soul of this once sleepy fishing village" is still right there, on its cobblestone streets.



Day 1

The Malecón, downtown and the Romantic Zone, ending with sunset by the pier.



Day 2

A day on the water: Los Arcos, a water taxi to the south shore beaches, or whales in season.



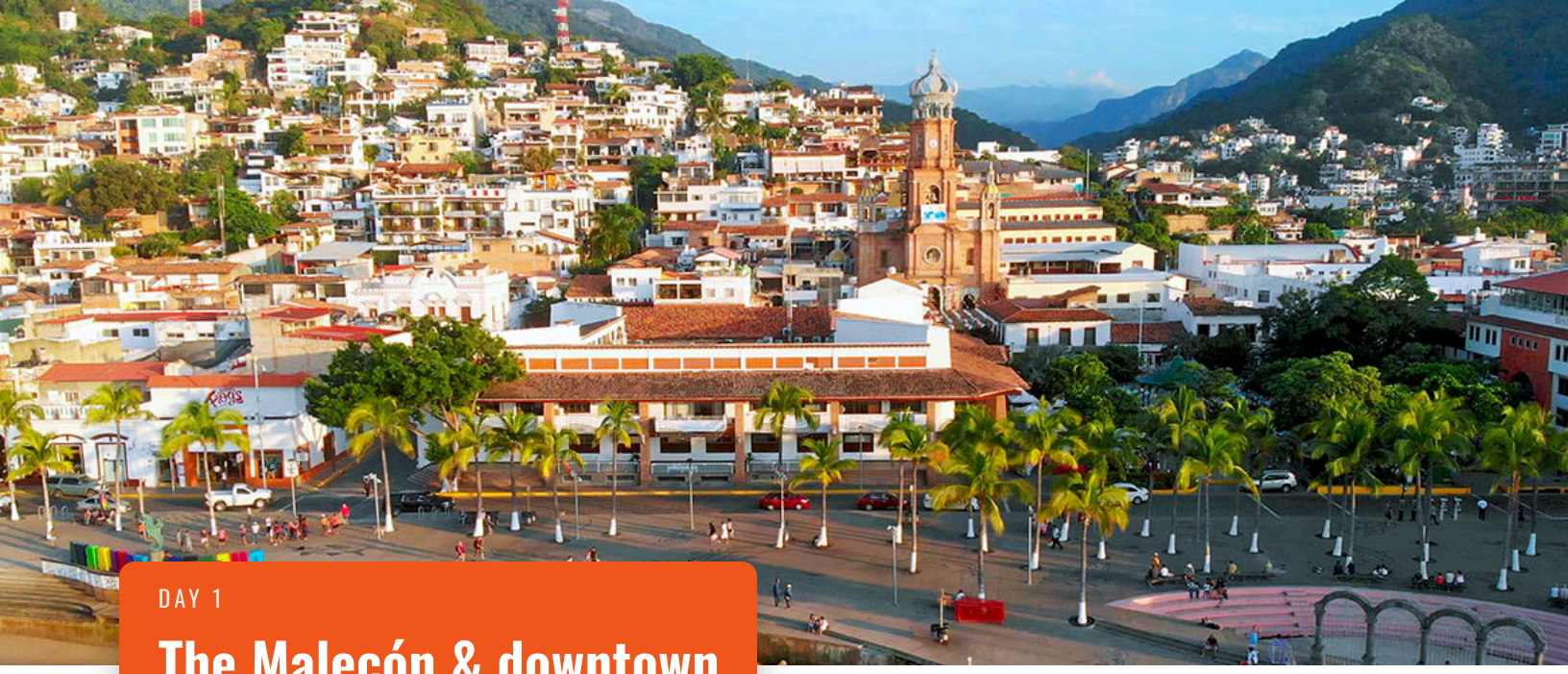
Day 3

Up the coast to Sayulita or Bucerías, with a long, lazy lunch by the sea.

A good year to come

Readers of Condé Nast Traveler voted Puerto Vallarta the best small city in Latin America and the second best small city in the world in the 2026 Readers' Choice Awards, the second year in a row at No. 2. They pointed to the cobblestone Historic Center, the Romantic Zone, the food and the nature around Banderas Bay. Everything this guide is built around.

Facts checked in November 2026. Prices and schedules change, so confirm on the day. Sources are listed on the last page.



DAY 1

The Malecón & downtown

Morning: the Malecón

Start where everybody starts, and for good reason. The Malecón is Puerto Vallarta's seaside boardwalk, right in downtown (el Centro). It is closed to cars, so you can wander past sculptures, cafés, shops and street artists with the bay on one side and the Sierra Madre on the other.

The original stretch runs about 800 m (2,500 ft) from Hotel Rosita to the Arches by the main square. The full official walk now continues south across the Cuale River to Lázaro Cárdenas Park in the Romantic Zone, about 1,540 m (5,050 ft) in all.

What to look for

- The bronze sculptures, almost one on every corner. Our sculpture guide tells you who made each one.
- The Puerto Vallarta letters, the classic family photo.
- The Voladores de Papantla, who perform regularly during the day.
- The parish church of Our Lady of Guadalupe with its crown, a block up from the main square.

9:00 a.m.
Breakfast near the north end of the Malecón.

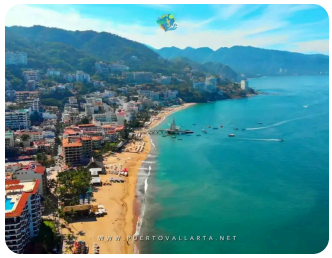
10:00 a.m.
Walk south, stop at the sculptures and the letters.

11:30 a.m.
Plaza de Armas, the main square, and the church.

12:30 p.m.
Cross the Cuale River to Isla Río Cuale for souvenirs.

2:00 p.m.
Lunch in the Romantic Zone (page 4).



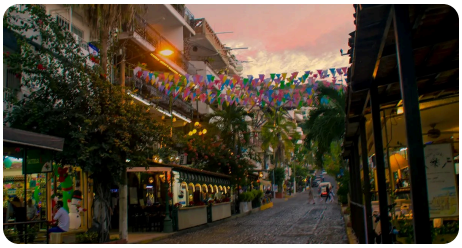


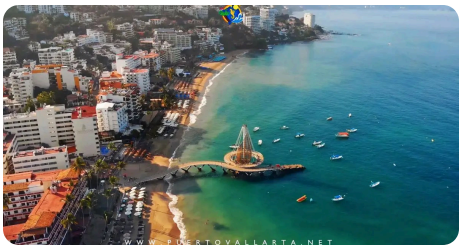
Good to know

The small beach along the Malecón is for sitting and resting, not swimming, and it isn't a good spot for children. For a swim, keep walking to Los Muertos Beach.

Afternoon: the Romantic Zone







Olas Altas Street after the rain, a small square on Olas Altas at night, and the Los Muertos pier from above.

Cross the bridges over the Cuale River and you're in the Romantic Zone, also called Old Town, the South Side or Viejo Vallarta. The streets are smaller and there are more cafés, bars, shops and restaurants per square foot than almost anywhere else in town.

Walk Olas Altas and Basilio Badillo, peek into the galleries, and treat the kids to an ice cream. La Michoacana's lemon (lime) ice cream is a long time favorite of ours. Sidewalks can be uneven in places, so bring comfortable shoes.

Los Muertos Beach and the pier

This is the busiest beach in town, which is half the fun: people watching, vendors, food, a cold drink and small waves for a swim. The pier, designed by architect José de Jesús Torres Vega, is also where the water taxis leave from tomorrow.

> **Stay for sunset. Grab a spot on the sand or the pier around 6 p.m. and watch the sky go orange over the bay.**

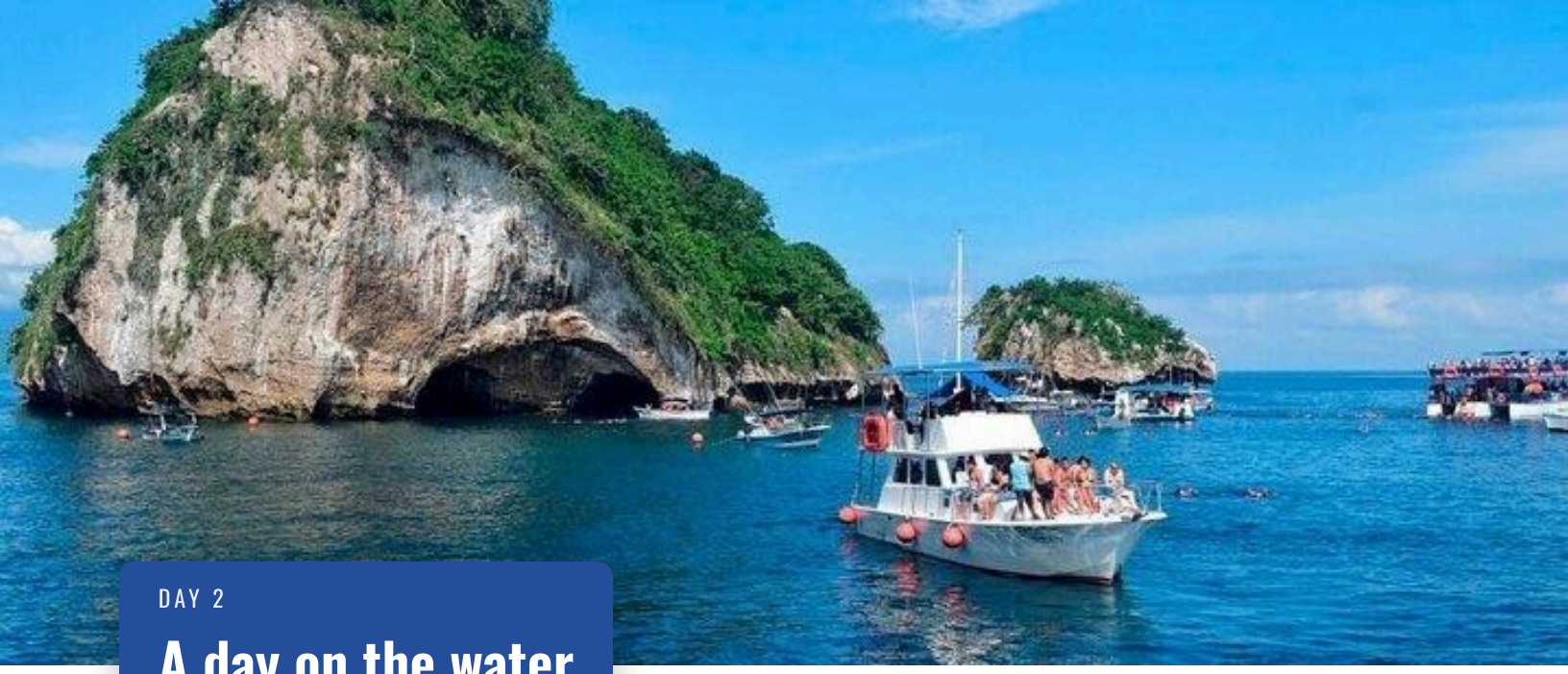
Sunset times approx.

Mid month	Sunset
November, December	about 6:20 p.m.
January	about 6:40 p.m.
February	about 7:00 p.m.
March	about 7:10 p.m.

Calculated for Puerto Vallarta, Central time, NOAA method.

Evening

Dinner on Olas Altas, then a slow walk back along the water. The Malecón really comes alive at night.



DAY 2

A day on the water

Option A: Los Arcos

Los Arcos, “the Arches”, are three big rock formations on the way to Mismaloya and one of the best known sights of the bay. It is a protected marine area, so anchoring and fishing aren’t allowed, and that’s exactly why the snorkeling is so good. Look for angelfish and pufferfish around the reefs and sea caves.

Small group snorkel tours with life jackets and gear are a nice, calm option for families with children.

Option B: water taxi to the south shore

Some of the prettiest beaches in the bay can’t be reached by road. The water taxis (pangas) are small boats run by local fishermen, leaving from the Los Muertos pier. Agree on the price and the return time before you board.

From Los Muertos pier	One way*	Time
Las Ánimas Beach	$210 MXN	35 min
Quimixto	$230 MXN	40 min
Majahuitas	$240 MXN	45 min
Yelapa	$270 MXN	55 min

*Last published PuertoVallarta.net prices (2022). Unconfirmed for 2026, so ask before you get on.





Yelapa: the waterfall pool and the beach.

> In Yelapa, walk up to the waterfall, cool off, then lunch with your toes in the sand.

In winter? Go see the whales

Every winter humpback whales come to Banderas Bay to mate, give birth and raise their calves. Watching a mother and her calf breathe and roll next to your boat is something the kids (and you) won't forget.

Official 2026 / 2027 season

December 8, 2026 to March 23, 2027

Set by Mexico's environment ministry (Semarnat) in the Diario Oficial de la Federación on October 30, 2026, for both the Jalisco and Nayarit sides of the bay.

Choose a permitted tour. Good ones carry a guide or marine biologist and some even bring hydrophones so you can hear the whales sing. To protect mothers and calves, boats keep out of two areas: around the Islas Marietas and a coastal strip from Punta Mita to the mouth of the Ameca River.



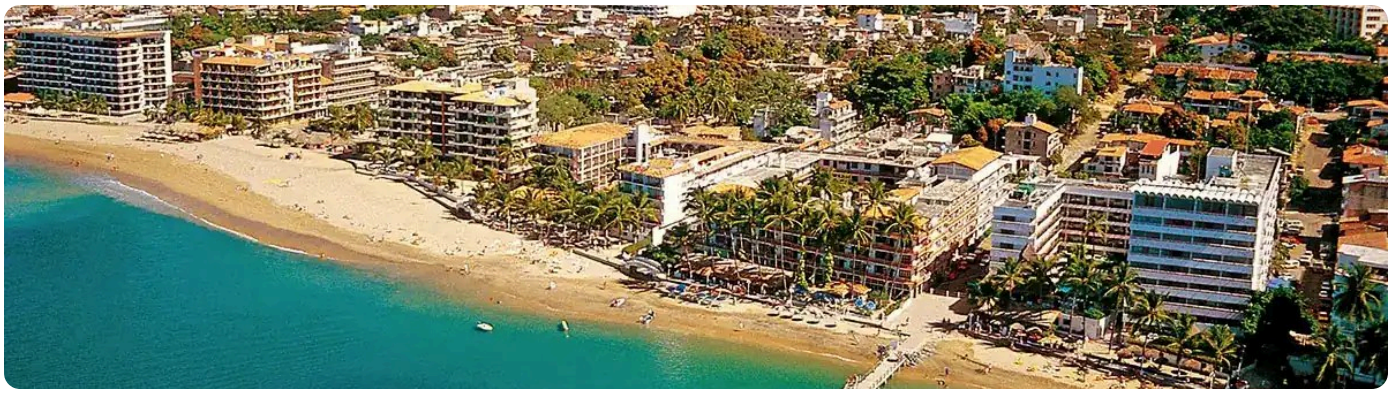
A humpback's tail in Banderas Bay.

Bring along

- Biodegradable sunscreen and a hat
- Sunglasses and a light jacket for the early boat
- A camera, and some patience
- Cash for tips and the marina fee

Not a boat family? Try a beach day

Los Muertos is lively, with gentle waves. South of it, Las Amapas and Conchas Chinas are quieter, with rocks and tide pools to explore. Our beach guide lists them all, with notes on which suit small children.





DAY 3

Up the coast: Sayulita

Sayulita, in the state of Nayarit north of the bay, is the colorful, laid back surf town everybody talks about. Think papel picado over the streets, little shops, beach bars and rows of umbrellas on the sand.

It has a brand new title too. Visit Nayarit announced that Sayulita would become Mexico's first official Surf City on November 2, 2026, during the Day of the Dead celebrations, and part of the World Surf Cities Network.

What to do

- Take a beginner surf lesson. The town is known for its friendly waves and surf schools.
- Browse the shops and the Huichol (Wixárika) crafts.
- Stay for a long lunch on the beach.
- Pop over to San Pancho, next door, quieter and full of art.



Plan it well

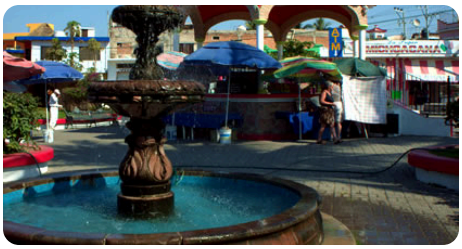
Weekends and holidays get busy and parking is limited, so go early or take a tour with transport. Surf changes with the season and the swell, so ask a surf school which beach is best that day.

> Go early, eat late, and let the town set the pace.

Or keep it easy: Bucerías







Bucerías is a small, friendly town on the bay in Nayarit, between Nuevo Vallarta and La Cruz de Huanacaxtle. It's about 17 miles from Puerto Vallarta's main square, roughly 40 to 60 minutes on Federal Highway 200 depending on traffic.

The beach is long, around 5 miles of soft sand with calm waves, which makes it a great pick for younger kids. Many say the name means "place of divers". We're not so sure. The word doesn't quite work in Spanish, so take that story with a pinch of salt.

What to do

- Visit Our Lady of Peace Church and the main plaza.
- Walk the beach, or ride a horse along it in the afternoon.
- Let the kids loose at the Wibit floating water park off the beach, with slides, trampolines and climbing towers.

Your food stop

Make lunch the main event. Pull up a plastic chair at a beachfront restaurant and order whatever came off the boat that morning: shrimp, grilled fish, or fresh oysters. Bucerías even hosts a National Oyster Festival. Then walk it off on the sand.

9:30 a.m.
Head north on Highway 200.

10:30 a.m.
Church, plaza and a walk on the beach.

1:30 p.m.
Long seafood lunch by the water.

4:00 p.m.
Water park or a swim.

Sunset
Watch it over the bay before heading back.

Practical tips

Money

The Mexican peso is the national currency. US dollars are widely accepted in town, and Visa, Mastercard and American Express are standard in most places. Carry some pesos for taxis, water taxis, tips and taco stands, where cash is king.

Getting around

- **Walking:** downtown, the Malecón and the Romantic Zone are easy on foot.
- **Taxis:** fares are set by zone. Check our taxi guide and agree on the price before you go.
- **Airport taxis** are a special service with their own rates.
- **Water taxis** leave from the Los Muertos pier and Boca de Tomatlán.
- **Car or tour** is easiest for Sayulita. Bucerías is 40 to 60 minutes by road.

Business hours

Malls usually open 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Some downtown shops close for lunch, roughly 2 to 4 p.m.

Weather

Warm all year, with average daytime temperatures around 80°F (27°C). Winter evenings are cooler, so pack a light sweater. Summer is hot and humid with some afternoon rain.

Family packing list

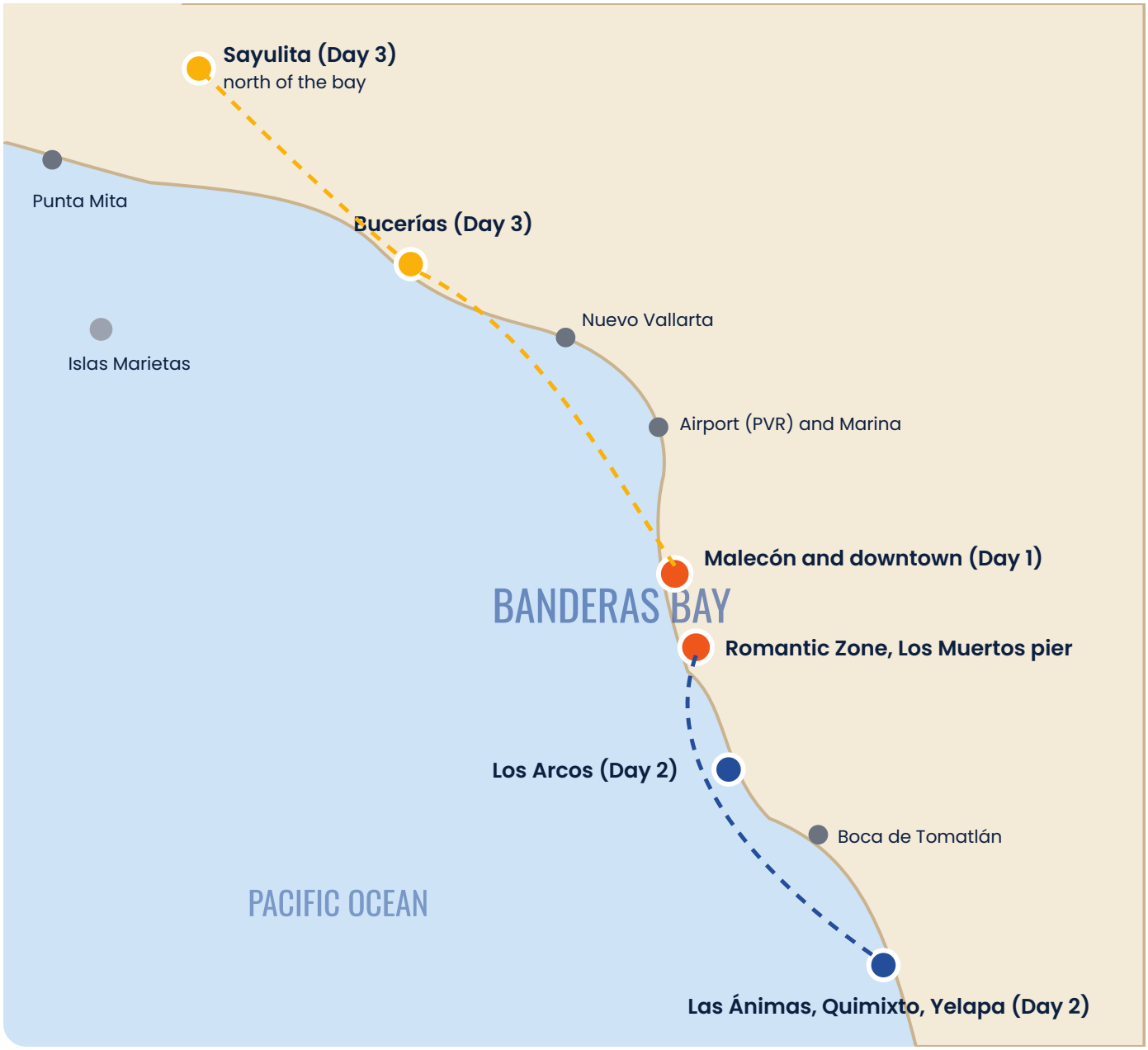
- Comfortable walking shoes for the cobblestones
- Swimsuits, hats and biodegradable sunscreen
- A light layer for evenings and early boats
- A refillable water bottle
- Some small bills and coins in pesos

Get more ideas

Our free newsletter brings news, events and tips from Puerto Vallarta a couple of times a month. Find it at puertovallarta.net/news/our-newsletter/

Your 3 days on one map

A simple sketch of Banderas Bay, not to scale. For detailed maps see puertovallarta.net/maps/



- Day 1, on foot
- Day 2, by boat
- Day 3, by road

Sources and credits

PuertoVallarta.net guides (read November 2, 2026)
Puerto Vallarta Malecón Guide · Romantic Zone guide · Water taxis from Los Muertos pier · Bucerías, Nayarit · Fast Facts · Taxis · Sculptures and statues · Los Arcos snorkeling · Whale Watch on the Bay · Sayulita and San Pancho

News
Whale watching season Dec 8 to Mar 23 (Semarnat notice, Diario Oficial de la Federación, Oct 30, 2026; Vallarta Daily)
Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards 2026 (Jalisco.gob.mx, PRNewswire)
Sayulita, Mexico's first Surf City (VisitNayarit.travel)

Sunset times calculated with the NOAA solar equations for Puerto Vallarta (20.65 N, 105.23 W), Central time (UTC-6, no daylight saving time).

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Please note Prices, hours and schedules change. Water taxi prices are the last ones we published (2022) and may have gone up. Always confirm on the day.

Put together with AI help and checked by the PuertoVallarta.net team.

