

GOURMET MEXICO

Culinary Experiences Beyond Your Imagination In PV

BY MICHAEL C. HIGGINS, PHD



Exploring the Puerto Vallarta culinary scene today, might make you feel as though you are in a San Francisco or New York restaurant... the chefs here are being outrageously creative and innovative with their cuisine.

PUERTO VALLARTA FROM THE AIR



THE BEGINNINGS OF TOURISM HERE

Back in the day, we remember the romance between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton from the 1964 movie *The Night of the Iguana* in Mismaloya, a small town just south of Puerto Vallarta. This affair livened the press into much publicity, putting Puerto Vallarta on the map for tourism.

The Mexican government was quick to invest significantly in transportation improvements to make Puerto Vallarta an easy travel destination... building a new international airport, ground transportation, roads, highways and utility infrastructure, along with a new harbor wharf and terminal... all leading to Puerto Vallarta experiencing tourist boom.

POPULATION

Tourism continued to grow rapidly through the years reaching today's 50% of the workforce being employed in tourism related businesses. Plus, of the 300,000 residents here, the government estimates that 35,000 are American and Canadian citizens, many of them retired, living very active social lives.

Puerto Vallarta was once named *The Friendliest City in the World*. Many expats say they have more friends living here than they ever did back home because PV, which they affectionately call Puerto Vallarta, is full of people just like them. And they feel safe, claiming their paradise has largely remained untouched by the drug violence in Mexico. One woman sites that she feels very safe going out alone for walks with her dog at midnight, a contrast to living in the United States and waking up every morning reading the news of the people killed overnight. She goes alone and doesn't worry about it.

With many interesting and diverse food options, water sports like sailing and diving, American stores like Costco and Home Depot, expats say they can enjoy the best of Mexico while still having access to many American products. And the US Dollar is spendable at almost any establishment in Puerto Vallarta.

IDEAL WEATHER

Puerto Vallarta's tropical climate is very attractive. The average daily high is 86° and average low is 70° with average humidity of 75%. The rainy season is from June to October, with most of the rain in July and September. The dry season is in the winter months of February, March and April. Winter is also when the temperatures are most mild.

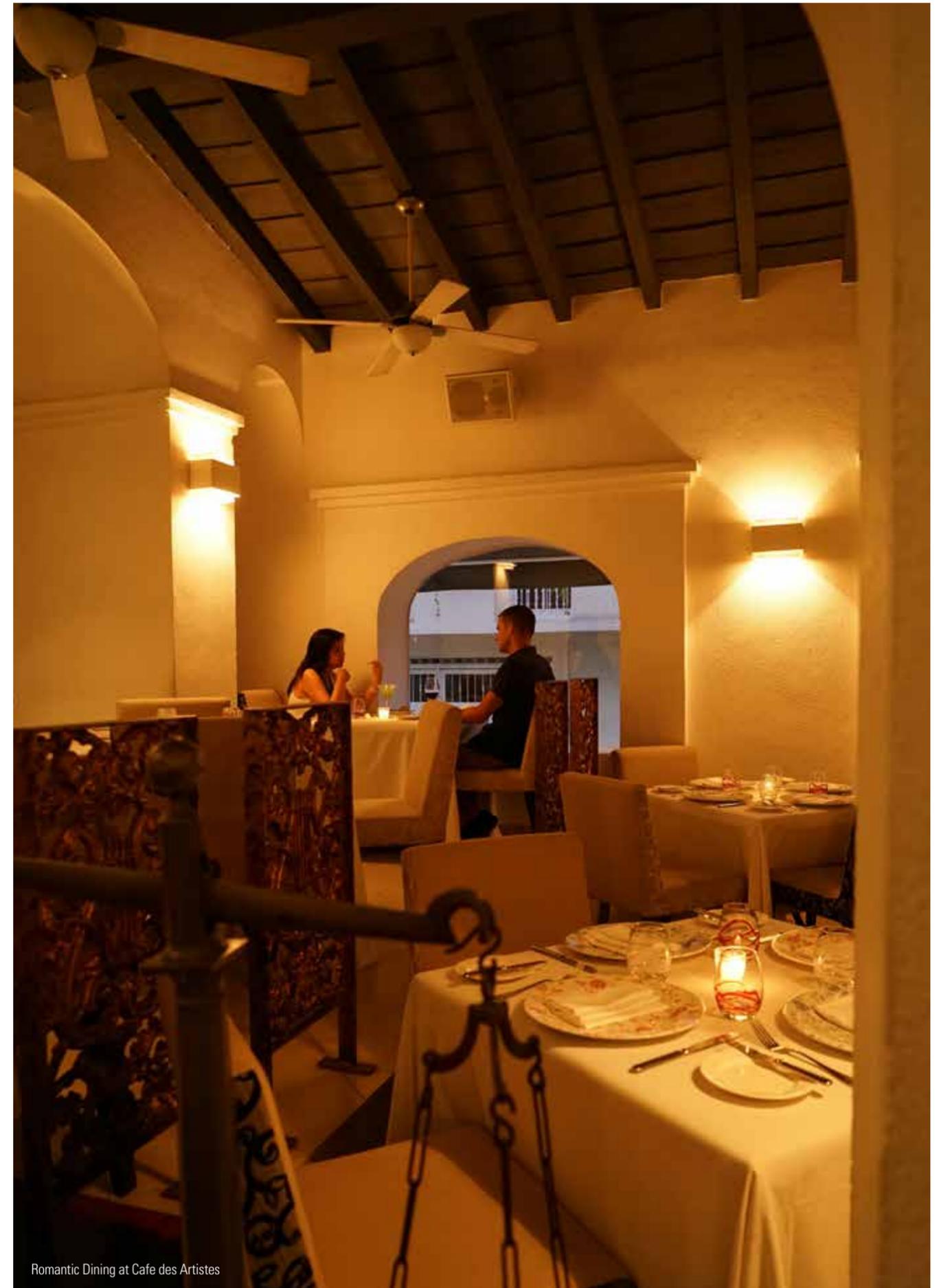
Prevailing winds are from the southwest, maintaining a beautiful warm environment. It also weakens weather systems as they pass over the Cabo Corrientes, a cape protruding into the Pacific Ocean at the southernmost edge of Puerto Vallarta Bay. This cape is highly effective at diffusing weather from Puerto Vallarta, even hurricanes are diverted from striking this protected bay. Because of this, weather here is so much milder compared to other areas along the Mexican Pacific coast.

NOT JUST THE TYPICAL TACO

While many of us have come to love Mexican foods, new chefs have joined the culinary scene in Puerto Vallarta to create new gourmet versions of the taco, and bringing back authentic Mexican recipes from days past in new presentations of delicacies as a new treat in gourmet dining.



The Ultimate Gourmet Taco found at the Marriott Puerto Vallarta Resort



Romantic Dining at Cafe des Artistes

THE MALECÓN - BOARDWALK

In downtown Puerto Vallarta, a mile-long esplanade was built. It is a walking street called El Malecón (photo below) along the beach lined with many restaurants, shops, attractions and significant artwork. It is considered the “jewel of the town” and is an important tourist area with many things to do for an entire day.

El Malecón (meaning The Boardwalk), stretches 16 blocks from the Old Town to the Romantic Village. This is a great way to enjoy the culture and art of Mexico during an afternoon stroll and exploration, while ending the day with a romantic dinner evening in the village.

There are artwork to enjoy along the entire path, especially sculptures. You will discover very interesting and unusual sculptures, many outdoor attractions and entertainment happening here, such as dancers, live music, cultural events and a very popular clown show in the evening. There are also many landmark statues here, including one of this town's most endearing works, the “Friendship Fountain,” of three dolphins and a famous nine-foot high statue of youth riding “The Sea Horse,” the Puerto Vallarta symbol.



Above: many restaurants adorn the Malecón with all types of delicious cuisine; above right, **In Search of Reason** by Guadalajara artist Sergio Bustamante, has two pillow-head figures ascending their ladder to the sky. People love to climb this sculpture and have their picture taken; and below, the mythical creature facing this **In Search of Reason** sculpture.



Photography counterclockwise: one of the beautiful dining rooms with dangling hand-blown glass bulbs; roasted duck leg with sauteed garlic potatoes, baby fennel, hoja santa, and chilhaucle mole from Oaxaca; fresh salmon tartare guacachile with pickled vegetables, fried fennel and capers; shrimp with plum and habanero mole, butter tamal, asparagus and pickled carrots.



CAFÉ DES ARTISTES

Expect a beautiful elegant restaurant here, with unusual modern artwork of uncommon types throughout the restaurant, all in harmony with the immensely visual style of Chef Blouet. Grand piano, luxury accoutrements and sensual dishes continue to distinguish Café des Artistes' visual senses, tempting aromas, subtle textures and concentrated flavors that enhance the culinary experience. Chef Blouet's passionate style for creative gourmet cuisine has earned him awards for **Best Chef of Mexico** and **Best Restaurant in Mexico**. Located downtown, CafeDesArtistes.com, +52-322-222-3228, info@CafeDesArtistes.com



Thierry Blouet is the charismatic owner and chef of Café des Artistes, an iconic gourmet-chic restaurant of 26 years. He was born in Puerto Rico of French parents who educated him in France and Mexico that haute cuisine is an integral ingredient of the good life. Blouet has taken this seriously, becoming a 21st century Ambassador of French gastronomy (member of the Académie Culinaire de France) bringing together chefs from France, Mexico, Canada, and United States to promote the importance of culinary experiences in Puerto Vallarta.



Photography counterclockwise: outside romantic dining; sesame crusted shrimp with eel gel and chipotle emulsion; pink ceviche octopus, tuna and roasted pepper emulsion; squash salad with calamari, mashed carrots and chayote; grilled rabbit on stone with thinly sliced radish topping; red snapper with smoked pineapple purée, celery salad and guajillo pepper salsa.



Joel Ornelas is the 29-year old chef and owner behind the new restaurant **Tintoque**, a culinary identity of 50 years ago brought back in grand style with ultimate creativity.



TINTOQUE RESTAURANT

At Tintoque, Chef Ornelas offers a most unique experience in culinary craftsmanship, by reintroducing local Puerto Vallarta recipes of eras past with advanced cooking techniques and massively artistic style. His family owns large farms locally from where he derives 80% of his ingredients to bring fresh and authentic foods to his creations. Located at the entrance of Marina Vallarta, Tintoque.mx, +52-322-221-0240, info@tintoque.mx





Photography counterclockwise: the resort's beach-side pool with views of downtown Puerto Vallarta; sunset dining on the beach; OAXACA Tlayuda: mini quesadilla with blue corn, stuffed with dry meat, fresh cheese and nopales; MICHOACÁN Avocado Sorbet: cleans the palate with its cold flavor and prepares for the next course; YUCATÁN Lime Soup: chicken broth poured table-side with lime essence, tomato, shredded chicken and crispy tortilla; SONORA Skirt Steak Brochette: tender and juicy flank steak, pepper, banana, chorizo, caramelized pineapple and dehydrated banana.

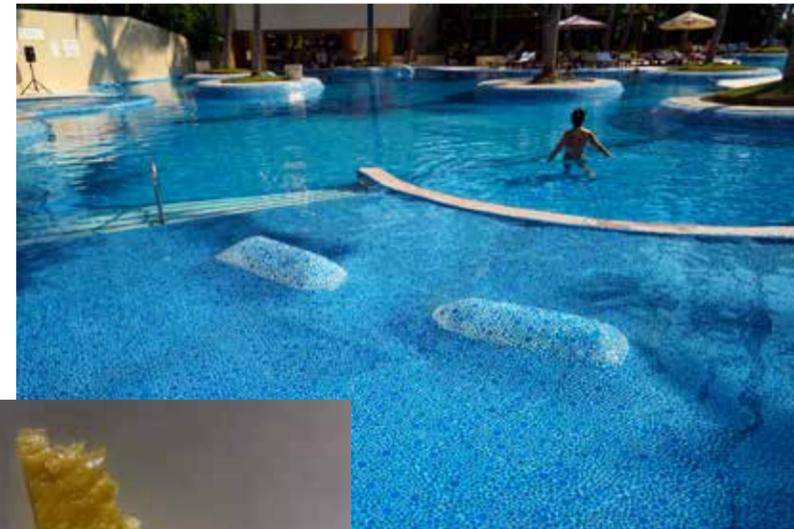
CASAMAGNA MARRIOTT RESORT

This delightful resort has beautiful beach-side dining with a unique cuisine to give you a memorable experience around Mexico. They call it: *Dine Around Mexico*, which brings diverse dishes from different states to sample the local flavors in the regions around Mexico. All gourmet! On the sand dining available. And their Taco (pictures at the beginning of this story) says it all... it is the Ultimate Taco you will never believe just how gourmet a taco can get. PuertoVallartaMarriott.com, +52-322-226-0000



WESTIN RESORT & SPA

This is a very beautiful and luxurious resort, right on the beach. The rooms are quite spacious and opulent. The grounds are beautiful, with literally hundreds of palm trees everywhere. The pool is magnificent with rich blue tiles, many small islands and a swim up bar. The service is very attentive, and the indoor/outdoor restaurant is at the beach with ocean views and a gourmet chef to satisfy your culinary interests. If you are super lucky, you may find a turtle laying her eggs at midnight on the beach. WestinPuertoVallarta.com & Westin.com/PuertoVallarta, +52-322-226-1100



Photography counterclockwise: multiple pools, dozens of islands and 100s of palm trees on the beach; take in the beauty and freshness of the magnificent pools; wild mushroom risotto with black truffle; smoked beef carpaccio with fresh arugula, sprouts and large shavings of parmesan cheese; fresh-caught local sea bass with couscous and white wine sauce.





ONBOARD GOURMET CHEFS

There are so much you can do on the boat... ask the captain to bring gourmet chefs from town. We had four chefs onboard. They will prepare a seafood lunch extraordinaire, all with local fresh ingredients, and fresh-caught fish. They even have craft beers for your secret craving. You really want to try their local seafood dishes. We enjoyed some of the most delicious seafood made right on the boat just for our lunch.

Ceviche is one type of very popular and refreshing dishes. It is made from fresh raw fish or shrimp cured in citrus juices, such as lemon or lime, and seasoned with chili peppers, salt, chopped onions, cilantro and/or avocado. If you are not very much into raw fish, no problem, the staff can grill lobster for you, with whatever seasonings or spices you may like to make your lunch just perfect to satisfy your secret craving.

After a mouth-watering big lunch, you can either lie down on a beach chair, take a cozy nap under the beautiful sunlight, or work off a little bit of your lunch by dancing around with vibrant music. Onboard DJ. The staff will even show you some steps if you are up to learning a few maneuvers.



Photography counterclockwise: fresh local shrimp surrounded by tomato and cucumber, topped with limes ready for making ceviche; Chef Grupo Lopez of Tuna Azul restaurant presents his seriously delicious tuna ceviche tostada; a spicy veggie ceviche made of cucumber, onion and pineapple; grilled lobster and shrimp pineapple skewers.

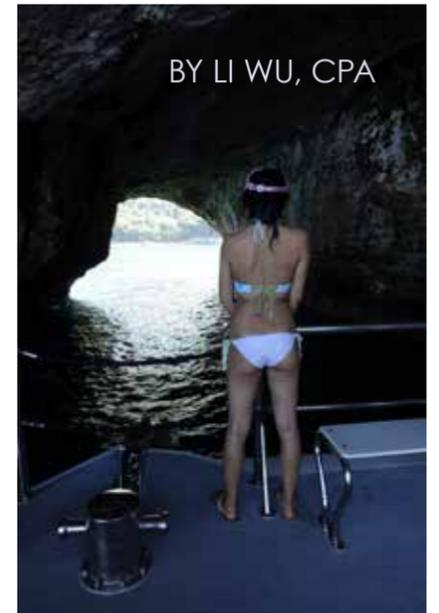
SOAKING IN THE SUNLIGHT ON PUERTO VALLARTA BAY

It was one of those perfect sunny days with pure blue sky and inviting waves, teasing you to put on your sexy bikini and big sunglasses to jump on to a boat in the Marina Vallarta Port. Just gaze out from the front of the sun-deck at the railing of the boat, let your skin soak in the sunlight, feeling the speed, the waves and the breeze splashing over your whole body, indulging the feeling of being lost in the middle of the ocean (photo bottom).

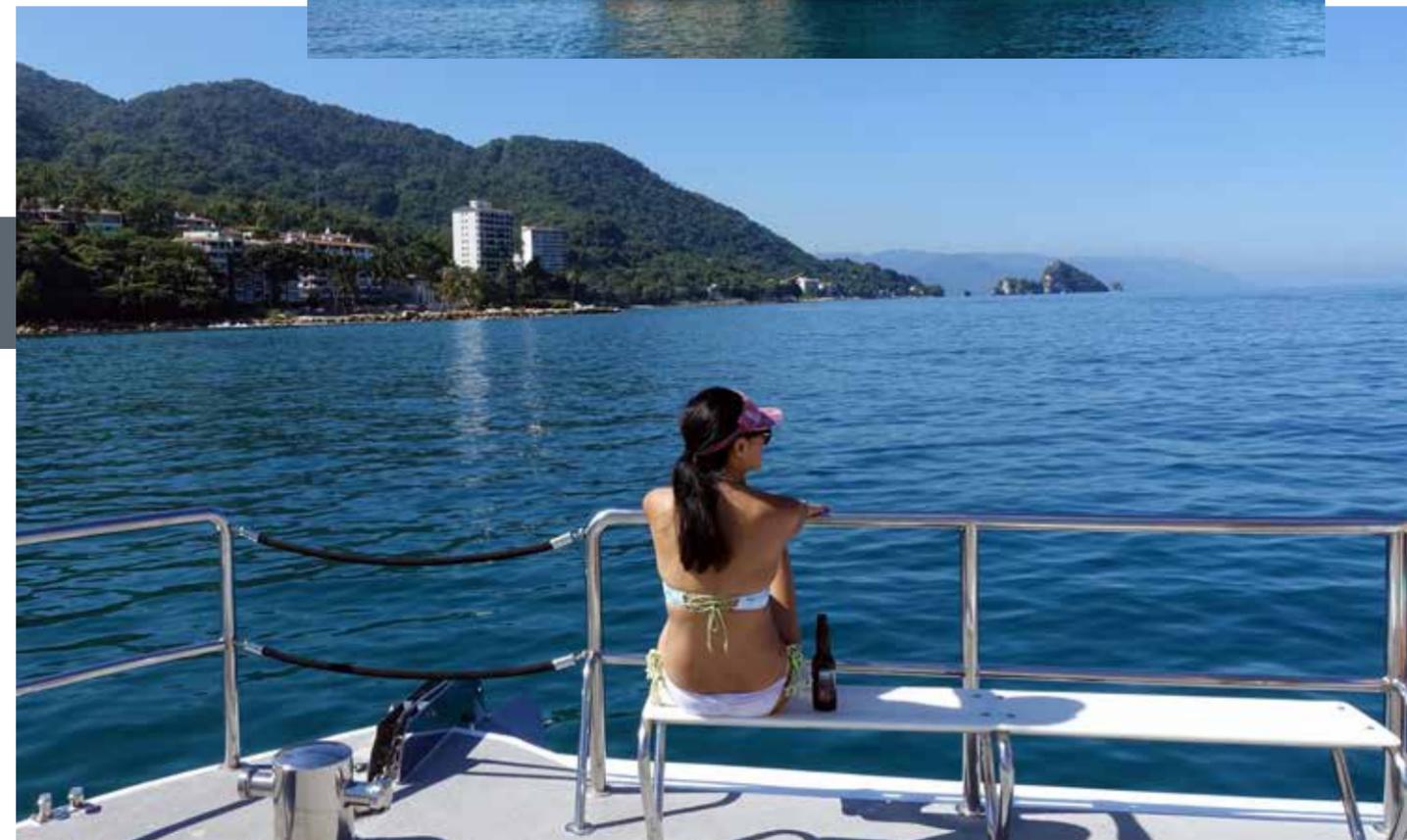
We traveled to the south of the bay to Los Arcos National Undersea Park, a group of four tiny rocky islands with a cavern in the middle of larger one (photos below and right). There were so many fish there and we snorkeled right through the hole, and had so much fun. The adventure starts when the staff hands you a mask, snorkel, fins and life jacket. Put them on, are you ready for some sea world fun? Don't worry, you will have life guards with you all the way through. Just scream loud, laugh loud, and thoroughly enjoy the warm water and various beautiful fish under the water, and of course, don't forget to breath... using your mouth!

Oh... what a day on the boat! Totally indulged. Pack your bags, with your favorite bikinis... your adventure starts right there! Enjoy the journey, you are going to have a blast.

Depart from the Marina Vallarta on Canuwa Cruises, Canuwa.com, +52-322-221-1979, info@Canuwa.com



BY LI WU, CPA





OMG, WOW!

This dessert tops all culinary creations of the trip.

Our Favorite Pick - Cheesecake Mousse

By Chef Ornelas, at Tintoque

A cheesecake like no other. In fact, there is no cake in this dessert. It is a delectable texture of thick creamy vanilla ice cream mousse, with thin shavings of cheese on top. Add passion fruit, sugared pecans, raspberries... and you have the most creative, luscious and luxurious desert you have ever enjoyed, It is worth a trip to PV just to experience this unique culinary concept.