



PRODUCTS, PLACES & INSPIRATION



BEYOND THE BORDER »

DESTINATION PUERTO VALLARTA

Grab your team and your passports for a Mexican retreat.

BY TERESA KENNEY

THE SENSE OF ARRIVAL SETS THE TONE FOR ANY DESTINATION, and the all-inclusive resort Velas Vallarta in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, has got that down pat. Its expansive, airy lobby-slash-gathering space boasts soaring coved ceilings and grand arches. In lieu of doors, the outside and inside intermingle, allowing a tropical breeze to beckon you to hurry up—the beach awaits! As you take in your first impression of the resort, your host will offer you a fresh glass of refreshing hibiscus juice. ¶ You have most certainly arrived.

The Group-Stay Experience

For groups, Velas Vallarta goes to even greater lengths to roll out the proverbial red carpet. Digital signage welcomes you as soon as you step inside the lobby—and is repeated throughout the grounds—and a dedicated reception area for your guests makes for a smooth check-in. As they mingle at arrival, your business team can enjoy an interactive guacamole and salsa bar with offerings freshly made as they

watch. Or if you prefer, choose a craft beer and cheese tasting welcome for your VIPs.

The resort is particularly well suited for incentive trips and business retreats. The suites boast lanais—perfect for an intimate evening reception with the sounds of the ocean as the party’s soundtrack. All of the 345 studio to three-bedroom suites have kitchens or kitchenettes with fully stocked bars and snack trays that are replenished daily. And the

gracious living areas provide a comfortable space to relax after a day of meetings or to commiserate with colleagues before heading out for dinner.

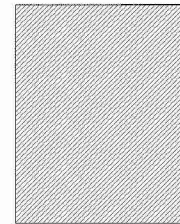
The Resort Experience

Velas Vallarta has the rest of the resort experience down to a science, as well. The lush courtyard gardens are home to resident peacocks and peahens, and meandering paths connect guests to the beach and amenities. Oh, and that hawk you see overhead? That’s just the resident Harris hawk, keeping the pigeons and blackbirds at bay.

The resort has three pools that are connected via one shared lazy “river.” One is perfect for kids, another has a swim-up bar for poolside libations. And waitstaff make the rounds during the day, refreshing drinks or bringing you a snack to nosh on while you’re engrossed in a beach read. Additional amenities include daily family activities and entertainment, tennis courts, and a spa (the spa’s menu of services includes beach massages so close to the water, you may feel a soft mist of ocean spray).

If you happen to have forgotten sunscreen—or are looking for a magazine to read under a cabana on the sand—the resort has a small market with essentials. Forgot your hat or looking to dress up a tad more for dinner? It also offers an elegant boutique. And at several spots throughout the resort and on the beach you’ll find Mexican artisan vendors.

PHOTOS: VICTOR ELIAS; VELAS VALLARTA





For dinner, Velas Vallarta has two restaurants open year-round: Andrea and La Ribera. The seasonal cantina, Foodies, offers a more intimate, fine dining option and is open November through Easter. Post-dinner, live entertainment is available in the Alhambra lobby bar. Grab a table and a cocktail and enjoy mariachi bands and other musicians.

As an added convenience, you can exchange currency right at the hotel, and two ATMs, one for U.S. dollars and the other for Mexican pesos, are available in the lobby.

The Business Experience

Velas Vallarta simplifies getting down to business (that's why you came, remember?). The resort's conference center has room for up to 1,250 for a reception and 600 for an awards banquet. Spaces are also available for breakout sessions of up to 30 delegates classroom-style.

Cellphone Concierge services are available for meeting and convention attendees, which allows busy executives to leave their phones with a professional concierge who filters incoming calls and messages, only alerting execs when there's an urgent matter. Before scheduled meetings, executives can specify

which calls must be answered and which email contacts their personal concierge should respond to promptly.

For group team-building, the meeting and event staff are at your service. Want to learn how to paint traditional Mexican pottery or create the pre-Hispanic technique of Arte en Popotillo (straw mosaics)? Looking to whip up some competitive team spirit with a beach volleyball tournament or cooking competition? Velas Vallarta's events team can assist. Depending on when you arrive, you can also take a behind-the-scenes ecotour of the resort, including the sea turtle nursery, where baby turtles are protected before being released back into the water. (Last year, nearly 24,000 baby turtles were raised and released.)

And when it's time to head out, your Check-out Concierge will help your group with printing boarding passes and transportation to nearby Puerto Vallarta International Airport, where direct flights are available to and from Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth. As a final thank you, they'll gift you with bottled water, cookies and a tote bag for your trip.

From the first welcome to final goodbye, it's a destination meeting experience like no other.