

Exploring Puerto Vallarta, Mexico
Feb 19-26, 2023

Itinerary

Day 1, Sun, Feb 19: Arrival

Arrive in beautiful Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Prepare to enjoy the nearly perfect climate, colorful culture, and amazing birds along this vibrant section of coastline where green mountains tumble into the blue Pacific. Depending on your flight's approach, scan the bay for whales - you might spot one from the plane! Our first three nights will be spent at an all-inclusive resort that provides diverse dining options, excellent service, a chance to dip in the pool, and proximity to great birding. We will settle in at the beach and watch for breaching Humpback Whales as well as Heermann's Gull, shorebirds, Magnificent Frigatebird, Blue-footed Booby and more. ***Night in Puerto Vallarta.***

Day 2, Mon, Feb 20: Ameca River & Puerto Vallarta

Our Venture begins in earnest. Puerto Vallarta straddles the Mexican states of Jalisco and Nayarit, and we plan to explore portions of both! A morning foray along the banks of the Ameca River will seek out Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Northern Jacana, White-faced Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Laughing Falcon, Thick-billed Kingbird, Masked Tityra, MacGillivray's Warbler, the endemic West Mexican Euphonia, Blue-black Grassquit, Blue Bunting, Cinnamon-rumped Seedeater, Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, and more. We should also get close, but not too close, looks at the areas many crocodiles! A visit to the river's mouth should provide ample opportunity to enjoy shorebirds, waders, and waterbirds, including kingfishers, as well as offer a chance to view and purchase locally made handicrafts.

We then move inland to the drier, slightly elevated canyons stretching into the mountains surrounding Puerto Vallarta. We'll lunch at a local restaurant and seek out hummingbirds, raptors, flycatchers, orioles, and perhaps the most spectacularly plumaged bird in the area, the endemic Orange-breasted Bunting. Our late afternoon and evening will be spent back at the resort, sipping on a tropical concoction as the sun slips into the sea. ***Night in Puerto Vallarta.***

Day 3, Tue, Feb 21: Ameca River & Banderas Bay

In the morning we again visit lush lowlands along the Ameca River, enjoying looks at yesterday's "lifers" as well as hopefully finding new species for our lists. In the afternoon we Venture out by boat into Banderas Bay, the Bay of Flags, which hosts an incredible aggregation of wintering Humpback Whales. While we will almost certainly see breaching and tail-flipping whales from our hotel, the trip into the bay will provide close-up views as well as a chance to visit with Blue-footed and Brown Boobies. ***Night in Puerto Vallarta.***

Day 4, Wed, Feb 22: San Sebastian del Oeste

Today we temporarily leave the coast behind and journey into the mountains for an overnight visit to a lovely hamlet with great birding nearby. The drive is short, but scenic, and after winding along mountain roads reminiscent of the Blue Ridge Parkway and passing fields of pale green agave, we arrive in San Sebastian del Oeste. Named a "Pueblo Magico" by the Mexican government, a moniker given to "towns that offer visitors special experiences because of their natural beauty, cultural richness and traditions", the village provides excellent access to habitats at an altitude of nearly a mile above sea level. Breathe in fresh mountain air and explore the surrounding uplands for Lilac-crowned Parrot, White-eared, Bumblebee and Berylline Hummingbirds, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper,

Tufted Flycatcher, Greater Pewee, Vermilion Flycatcher, Golden Vireo, Black-capped Vireo, Happy Wren, Rusty-crowned Ground-Sparrow, Blue Mockingbird, Townsend's Warbler, Golden-crowned Warbler, Red-faced Warbler, Slate-throated Redstart, Varied and Blue Bunting and more. You might even find an old silver mine along the way! We'll have ample time to take in the evening paseo at the village square in this former mining center, enjoy local cuisine, shop for handicrafts, listen for owls, and reminisce on the day. ***Night in San Sebastian del Oeste***

Day 5, Thu, Feb 23: San Sebastian del Oeste to Puerto Vallarta

Spending the night in San Sebastian del Oeste allows us to get an early start, taking in the morning's chorus of birdsong and enjoying the peak of daily activity. We'll go until the birds take their siesta! After enjoying a last bit of highland scenery, we will make the short drive (2 hours) back toward Puerto Vallarta. Returning to coast, we spend three nights at our all-inclusive hotel, set in a scenic cove, surrounded by green mountains (the film *The Night of the Iguana* was filmed nearby). We'll watch pairs of Military Macaws screech overhead while enjoying a tropical beverage at our seaside resort, marvel at swarms of Gray-breasted Martins, and enjoy colorful Cinnamon Hummingbirds. Dine buffet style or enjoy a gourmet meal at one of the resort's specialty dining venues. ***Night in Puerto Vallarta.***

Day 6, Fri, Feb 24: Vallarta Botanical Gardens & Yelapa

After breakfast, we visit the nearby Vallarta Botanical Gardens, named one of the top ten botanical gardens in North America and home to West Mexican Chachalaca, Groove-billed Ani, Golden-crowned Emerald, Mexican Woodnymph, Citreoline Trogon, Golden-cheeked Woodpecker, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Green Jay, San Blas Jay, White-throated Thrush, West Mexican Euphonia, Yellow-winged Cacique, Red-crowned Ant-Tanager, Yellow Grosbeak and many more. Enjoy botanical and architectural wonders in addition to amazing birdlife. This afternoon, we'll take a short open boat ride to the village of Yelapa. While no roads serve the tiny coastal village, it's meandering narrow streets, rushing waterfall, colorful butterflies, and yes, birds, tempt naturalists and sightseers in equal measure. ***Night in Puerto Vallarta.***

Day 7, Sat, Feb 25:

With nearby proximity to both mid-altitude dry and wet forest, we will set out early in the morning to explore mid-level habitat in the area south of Puerto Vallarta. Here we seek out Crested Guan, Common Black Hawk, Crested Caracara, Rose-throated Becard, Greenish Elaenia, Greater Pewee, Pacific-slope, Nutting's, Brown-crested, and Social Flycatchers, Thick-billed Kingbird, Black-throated Magpie-Jay, Stripe-headed Sparrow, Streak-backed Oriole, Nashville, Black-throated Gray, and Wilson's Warblers, Blue and Varied Buntings, and much, much more.

After a solid day's birding, it's time to relax, sit on the beach, take a swim in the pool, watch for macaws, and tally up our lists. We've covered a number of habitats at various altitudes and should have a resulting list of goodies including wintering Neotropical migrants, residents, and West Mexican endemics. Don't forget to take in tonight's show in the theater! ***Night in Puerto Vallarta.***

Day 8, Sun, Feb 26: Departure

All good things must come to an end, but your photographs, trip lists, and memories capture the week's events! After breakfast, we transfer to the airport for our flights back home. Until next time, adios and buena suerte!