

BEST BEACHES

The best things to do in Puerto Escondido, Mexico

Susannah Rigg, CNN • Updated 10th May 2018

(CNN) — Despite being a firm favorite with surfers and backpackers, Puerto Escondido, on the Oaxacan coast of southern Mexico, has remained under the mainstream tourism radar for years.

The lack of big resort hotels, which is part of its appeal, probably has something to do with this, as well as that there are no direct flights from the United States or Canada.

However, the intense waves of the roaring Pacific Ocean and the town's easy-going vibe make it a hidden treasure worth discovering (Puerto Escondido does mean Hidden Port, after all).



***Puerto Escondido:** This Mexican beach town is already beloved by surfers, but there's plenty more to see and do beyond the water's edge.*

These are some of the best things to do when you travel here:

Hit the surf

Set your alarm for before sunrise, grab your surfboard, slap on your zinc and head to La Punta to surf the waves that slam against the rocks there. Experts can also head further down the beach to Zicatela to surf waves that pound down close to the sand.

If you are a beginner, there are also great options for you to learn to surf with the pros.



Head to the stunning Carrizalillo beach, where surf instructors take wannabe surfers out on the calmer waves of this bay to learn for around \$500 pesos (\$27) an hour including board rental. If you manage to stand up in the first hour, there will be high-fives all around.

Carrizalillo is also a great place to get in the water with your board if you need a little refresher before hitting the bigger waves.

But you can also find great places to frolic in the waves without a surfboard.

Playa Carrizalillo is one of the most popular local beaches.

Playa Carrizalillo is located about five kilometers (3.1 miles) north of Zicatela. You have to walk down a stone stairway to get to the sand, but the view of this horseshoe-shaped bay with turquoise waters is worth the walk down -- and back up.

The sunbeds, which sit under umbrellas, provide shade for free so long as you consume food or drinks (in the high seasons there is sometimes a minimum spend). Coconut water, enjoyed from the freshly cut fruit, is a refreshing luxury here and costs about a dollar.

Just along the coast from Carrizalillo are two bays that sit right next to each other, Playa Puerto Angelito and Playa Manzanillo. Both have a relaxed, fun feel and on the weekends are full of families enjoying the waves. Just watch out for incoming boats that coast right up to the shore to pick up boat tours.

The Playa Principal is also a favorite for a swim or a body board. The fisherman dock here in the morning to offload their catch, but after the initial dawn influx, they generally don't affect swimmers.

Enjoy a quiet beach

Outside of Easter and Christmas, Puerto Escondido is quiet and laid-back and you will almost always find a place in the sand just for you. However, if you are looking for virgin beaches with almost no other visitors, take a drive along the coast in the direction of the resort town of Huatulco.

About 30 minutes outside of Puerto, you will start to see signs for beaches to your right. Follow the dirt tracks to find some of the most beautiful, rugged stretches of virgin beach. Some are full of seashells, while others have little rock pools full of sea life where children can paddle.

Take a boat trip to see ocean life

If you can drag yourself away from the sun, sand, and sea, then Puerto will reward you with some interesting activities.

Depending on the season and the stage of the moon, you can choose to take boat trips to see dolphins, seas turtles and whales, get involved in a baby turtle release or swim in water filled with bioluminescence under the dark of the moon.

All of these experiences can be booked at any of tour operators along Calle El Morro, which flanks Zicatela beach.



The variety of beaches means you can surf in the Pacific or swim in a quiet, hidden rock pool in the same day.

If you have a car and would like to organize the bioluminescence trip alone, take the Carretera Puerto Escondido-Acapulco 200, west out of town. The 17-kilometer drive to the Laguna will take around 20 minutes. Turn off at La Puesta del Sol, which offers bioluminescence tours for \$200 per person (\$10 USD). Tours last around 1.5 hours.

You can swim with the bioluminescence and, while it's unlikely to be a problem, it should be known that there are crocodiles in areas of this lagoon, so use caution.

La Puesta del Sol, Carretera Puerto Escondido- Acapulco Km 124, +529541328294

Chow down on local seafood



For traditional Oaxacan food in a glam setting, head to Almoraduz.

Whether you are surfing the day away or just playing in the waves, Puerto has some great options to sate your hunger. Local fishermen bring fresh fish to the shores every morning, so you are guaranteed some of the freshest offerings at the local eateries.

Cafecito on Zicatela is a firm favorite for breakfasts and gets full even in the low season.

Offering big breakfasts, fresh juices, smoothies and pastries, it's often frequented by hungry sun-kissed surfers loading up on post-surf carbs.

Another great option at the other end of Zicatela is Finca las Nieves, which offers homemade goodies like their own almond milk and granola and great local coffee.

For an afternoon cool-down, grab an ice cream from La Palma Negra in La Rinconada. The lemon and chia sorbet and the coconut ice cream are refreshingly delicious.

As the day draws to a close, enjoy a sundowner at El Espadin restaurant and watch the impressive sunset over Playa Carrizalillo.

Ever eaten fish grilled in a VW Kombi van? No?

Well, you can at El Coste Cevichería and it might be the best grilled fish you have ever tasted. Go with a group and order all four marinade options. The accompanying potatoes, fried in butter, are so tasty and the margaritas are rather special too.

For special occasion fine dining and some very traditional Oaxacan touches, head on over to Almoraduz. The house starters of esquites (Mexican corn) and a tamal with beans and hoja santa set the stage for the incredible flavors to come. Try the peanut water, you will be amazed at how good it tastes.

Cafecito, El Morro S/N, Playa Zicatela, 71988, Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, +52 954 582 0516

Finca las Nieves, El Morro 4, Playa Zicatela, 70934 Brisas de Zicatela, Oaxaca, +52 954 582 2414

La Palma Negra, Mantarrayas, Rinconada, 71983 Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, +52 954 144 0818

El Espadin, Camino Carrizalillo No 125, Carrizalillo, 71983 Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, +52 954 582 0995

El Coste Cevichería, Calle del morro S/N, Marinero, 70934 Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, +52 954 127 0424

Almoraduz, Benito Juárez 12, Rinconada, 71983 Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, +52 954 582 3109

Where to lay your head

There are few high-rises and no big-brand hotels in Puerto Escondido, which leaves space for cozy cabañas and small, sweet lodgings.

Staying near to Zicatela beach gives the option for great morning beach walks along this far-reaching stretch of sand, as well as a great selection of bars and restaurants.

Taxis to the more swimmable beaches in the day will set you back about \$35-40 pesos (around \$2 USD).



Villas Carrizalillo is as close as you can get to sleeping on the beach, minus the sand in your hair.

Alternatively, for great views and a private stairway straight down to a swimmable beach, stay at Villas Carrizalillo, which is perfectly poised upon the cliffs, allowing for spectacular sunsets.

A very trendy design hotel can be found tucked away about 30-40 minutes outside of Puerto Escondido just beyond the Laguna. Hotel Escondido is a Grupo Habita hotel oozing with cool but rather further from the action than some may like.

Villas Carrizalillo, Ave Carrizalillo, Carrizalillo, 71980 Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, +52 954 582 1735

Hotel Escondido, Carretera Federal Salina Cruz --

Santiago Pinotepa Nacional KM 113, 71983, Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, + 52 954 582 2224

Hotel Arcoiris, Calle del Morro s/n, Playa Zicatela, 71980, Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, +52 954 582 0432

Know before you go

Unless you just love crowded beaches and serious party vibes, head to Puerto Escondido outside of spring break and the December holidays. The rainy season (June-September/October) can be muggy and see a rise in mosquitoes, so the best times to go are Jan-May and October-mid December.

While there are no direct flights to Puerto Escondido from the United States or Canada, flights arrive into the small airport daily from Mexico City and six-seater planes also fly in from Oaxaca.

There are direct flights from Canada and the United States to Huatulco airport, which is an easy two-hour drive down the coast.

Susannah Rigg is a freelance writer and Mexico specialist based in Mexico City.