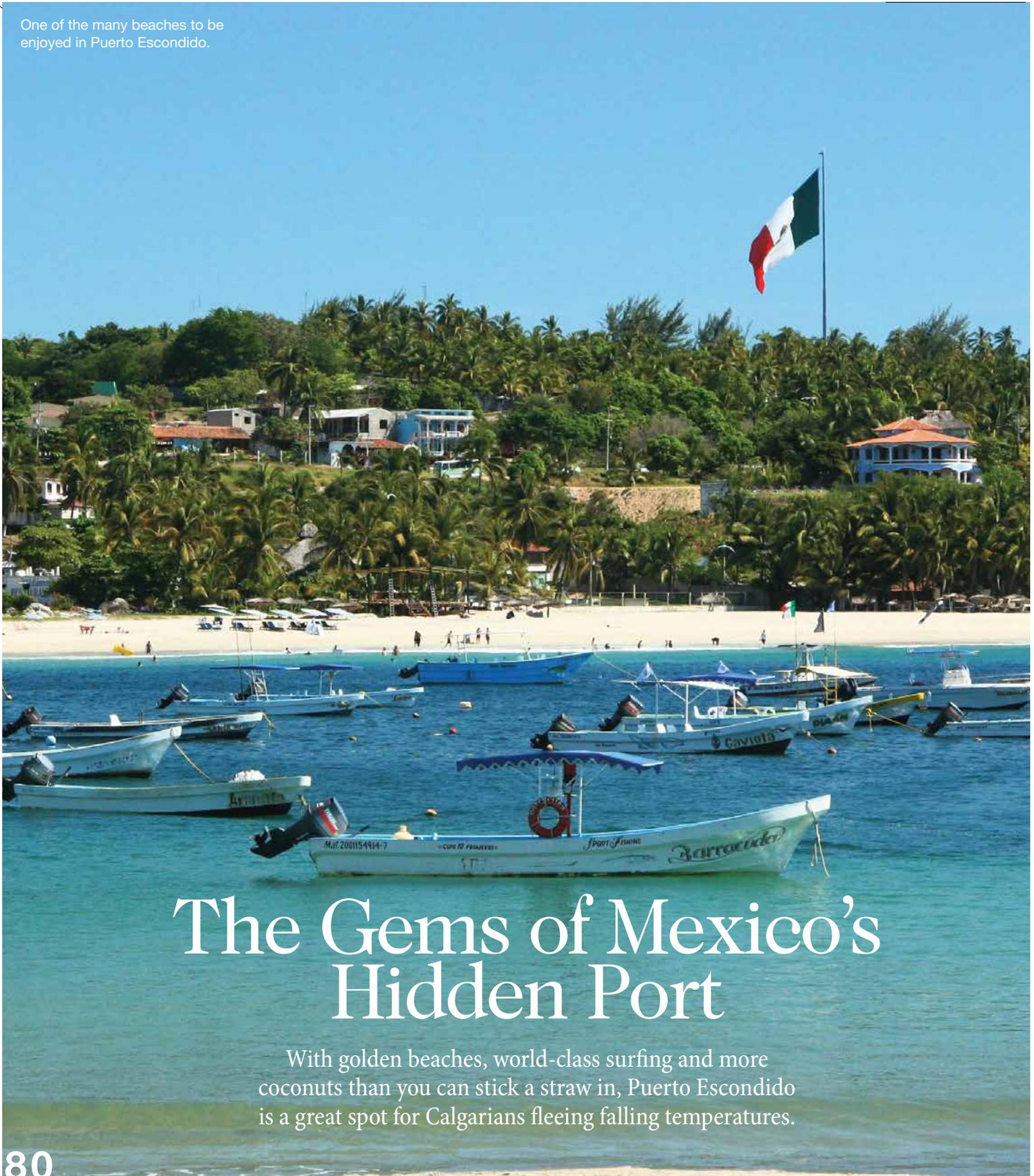


One of the many beaches to be enjoyed in Puerto Escondido.



# The Gems of Mexico's Hidden Port

With golden beaches, world-class surfing and more coconuts than you can stick a straw in, Puerto Escondido is a great spot for Calgarians fleeing falling temperatures.

The crisp crunch of leaves can hardly compete with the feeling of warm sand underfoot, but that's not the only draw to Puerto Escondido (the "hidden port") on the south side of Mexico's Oaxaca region. Along with warmer weather, Puerto Escondido offers the opportunity to visit a coffee plantation, rescue baby turtles and surf.

## What to do

### LEARN TO SURF

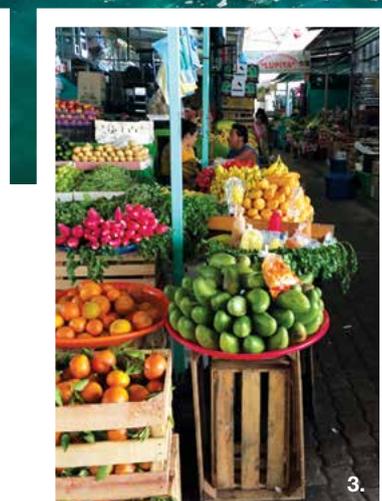
Frequently rated among the best surfing in the world, a visit to Puerto Escondido demands you spend some time getting tubular. Surf season runs March to December, with waves in the area known to reach 20 feet during the summer months. Zicazteca surf school, found right off the main strip of Zicatela beach, offers daily lessons at 10 a.m. specifically geared toward the beginner and intermediate levels. Sign up for the two-hour group lesson, or, if you're a more seasoned wave rider, ask about their trips to less-crowded destinations that offer the kind of waves the region is renowned for.

[zicazteca.com](http://zicazteca.com)

### VISIT THE MERCADO

#### BENITO JUAREZ

Puerto Escondido's local market is where you can ditch the tourist-trap fare and pick up local produce, thin strips of meat (known as *tirada*) hanging in the *carnicerías* or local cheeses such as soft *queso* and stringy *quesillo*. You'll also find the region's famed chocolate products here, including drinking-chocolate powder and *mole* sauce, as well as dried hibiscus leaves, an essential ingredient in *agua de Jamaica*, a juice drink popular here. Grab lunch at one of the stalls in the market's food court, which presents a wide variety of options, from fish dishes to traditional tacos and *chilaquiles*.



**1.** Surfing at Zicatela Beach.

**2.** Sign for the Zicazteca surf school. **3.** Produce for sale at Mercado Benito Juarez.

**4.** Helping to release baby turtles into the surf is a must-do in Puerto Escondido.



### RELEASE THE TURTLES

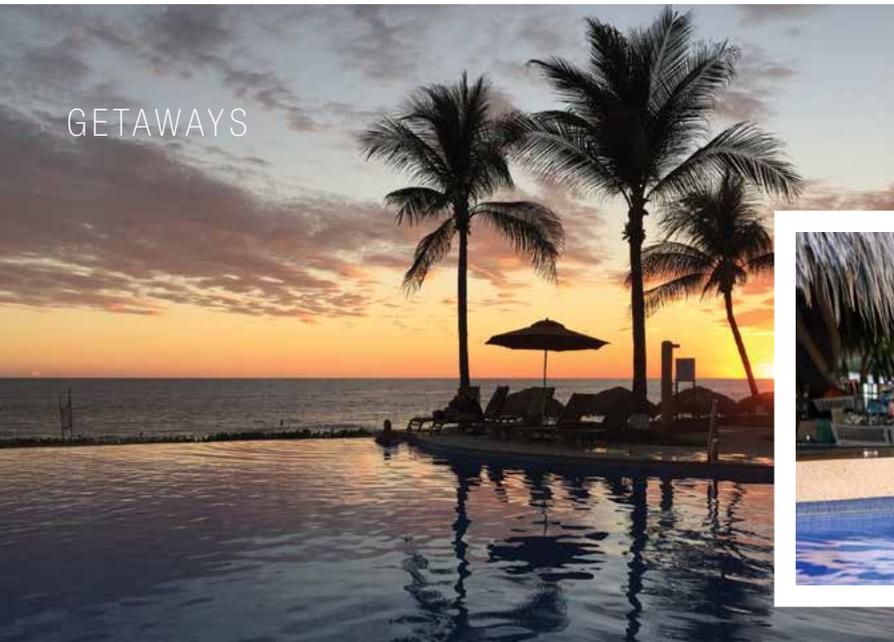
Life for baby sea turtles can be nasty, brutish and short, as these endangered creatures are favoured snacks for local predators. That's why, from October until May, the Palmarito Turtle Camp dutifully collects turtle eggs to hatch at their camp. Once hatched, the tiny, two-inch turtles are brought by bucket to the edge of the surf at sunset to flipper their way into the ocean. Groups such as Lalo Ecotours will take you to and from the release point to help release these tiny creatures by scooping them up with a coconut shell and placing them on the beach (then feeling your heart melt as the newborns make their uncoordinated dash to the waves).

[lalo-ecotours.com](http://lalo-ecotours.com)

### SHOP THE ADOQUÍN NIGHT MARKET

While the souvenir stalls at Benito Juarez might seem appealing (the prices are certainly better than the gift shops at airports), if you'd like to pick up a sugar skull, piece of locally crafted jewellery or other unique trinkets, save your pesos for the Adoquín, an open-air night market on the Alfonso Pérez Gasga avenue. The name references the Spanish term for "cobble," a reference to the cobblestone road the market occupies every night from 4 p.m. onward, when the street turns pedestrian-only. The market, which runs parallel to Playa Principal (the main beach), also has a wide selection of beach clothes, mescals and woodcrafts, as well as restaurants and bars for a post-shopping meal or cocktail.

## GETAWAYS



LEFT Sunset view at Vivo Resort.  
BELOW Swim-up bar at Vivo Resort.  
BOTTOM Hot chocolate at the restaurant at Hotel Santa Fe.



### Where to Eat

#### ESPADIN

If you've travelled all this way, it's certainly not to get boxed into a stuffy restaurant. With its hilltop view of the ocean and nearby Carrizalillo beach, the Villas Carrizalillo Hotel's in-house eatery Espadin is the airy vacation restaurant of your dreams. The menu features seafood caught that morning, with dishes such as crispy red snapper stuffed with shrimp, squid and octopus, a pumpkin-seed-crust fish fillet with bell-pepper sauce and coconut shrimp with achiote salsa. Regardless of the entree you choose, the must-try side dishes are the watermelon guacamole and the sweet plantains. And while mescal is the local liquor of choice in Oaxaca, if drinking it straight isn't your style, try Espadin's martini-style "mezcalini." [villascarrizalillo.com/dining.html](http://villascarrizalillo.com/dining.html)

#### THE RESTAURANT AT SANTA FE

The restaurant at Hotel Santa Fe is known for its veggie-focused fare, something owner Robin Cleaver, a vegetarian, says was lacking in Puerto Escondido's restaurant scene when he opened the hotel in the '80s. Dishes on offer include tamales, *chilaquiles*, tostadas and every other classic Mexican dish you can think of. You'll also find locally sourced



chocolate here, served as a wonderfully thick hot drink, perfect for cooler nights under the palapa. For dessert, the banana flambé in rum and honey is a treat, as is the generous portion of high-on-fruit, low-on-crust strawberry pie. [hotelsantafe.com.mx/restaurant/](http://hotelsantafe.com.mx/restaurant/)

#### FRESH

Fresh was founded by a couple of Canadian expats whose background in the service industry shines through. The great service combines with a relaxed, beachside setting to create a dining experience sure to make your Instagram followers envious. Seafood is obviously the go-to anywhere in Puerto Escondido,

and Fresh is no exception; the restaurant lives up to its name with dishes such as pan-fried octopus with garlic and chili or tropical ceviche featuring the catch of the day with pineapple, cucumber, cilantro and chili. If you prefer turf to surf, the menu includes baby back ribs with house-made barbecue sauce, as well as Canadian Angus T-bone steaks. The drinks list is your best friend when it comes to beating the heat, and while the chocolate martini is a great dessert drink, it's the Fresh Signature, a blend of rum, pineapple, coconut cream and Midori liqueur, that makes for the perfect slow sip. [freshrestaurantlounge.com](http://freshrestaurantlounge.com)

### Where to Stay

#### VIVO RESORTS

Each of the 110 suites (ranging from studios to private villas) at this private beachfront resort just a 15-minute-drive north of town has a full kitchen and a patio with an ocean view. The resort's inner courtyard features an infinity pool with swim-up bar, as well as an open-air restaurant area with great drinks, delicious food and snappy service. Vivo can facilitate a wide variety of adventure activities for guests, including sea safaris, fishing trips, ecological tours and scuba diving, and will be opening a clubhouse facility in December that includes a spa, fine-dining restaurant and lounge, kids' club, business centre, event space, general store and sports fields. Should you happen to fall in love with the place, both suites and beachfront condos are available for purchase. [vivoresorts.com](http://vivoresorts.com)

#### HOTEL SANTA FE

This hotel has 50 standard rooms, as well as junior, master and presidential suites, all surrounding a beautiful inner courtyard with pools and palm trees. For the ultimate luxury stay, Santa Fe also has eight private bungalows perched above the hotel compound with horizon-spanning views. Situated right on Puerto Escondido's Zicatela beach, the hotel's Mediterranean revival architecture and views of the surf provide the perfect setting for lazing the day away. Santa Fe also hosts excursions out to owner Robin Cleaver's coffee plantation, Finca Las Nieves, providing guests the opportunity to walk through the high-altitude mountains and get a unique perspective on where your morning joe actually comes from. [hotelsantafe.com.mx](http://hotelsantafe.com.mx) 