

Vivo Resorts a hidden gem in Puerto Escondido

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Vivo Resorts in Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca.

Tell a surfer or backpacker that Puerto Escondido is relatively undiscovered, and they might respond with a not-so-subtle roll of their eyes. Because as far as the bohemian, free-spirited crowd is concerned, Puerto Escondido is a rite of passage for west coast Mexico travel.

However, for the majority of vacationers, this corner of the Oaxacan coast is still a hidden gem to be tapped, mostly because of its lack of direct flights from the majority of the U.S. and an absence of mainstream hotels and resorts. That is part of its charm.

But a newcomer has burst onto the scene just 20 minutes north of downtown, and it is opening up the market for more and more travelers who want a relaxing beach vacation with all the resort perks, minus the hordes of tourists.



Vivo Resorts suite balcony with views of the Pacific Ocean.

Vivo Resorts is a first foray into Puerto Escondido's mainstream hotel market, and the company is doing it with understated elegance, comfort and a genuine earnestness that can often be lacking from megahotel chains.

Technically, Vivo Resorts is a luxury condo community that sits on 12 miles of near-private Playa Palmarita beach. But while many of the guests at Vivo are condo owners, the luxury apartments are also rentable as resort rooms.

Room categories begin with the Mountain View studios, which have uninterrupted views of the Sierra Madres and partial views of the ocean. They measure about 550 square feet and have a kitchenette. Rooms increase in size and space dramatically from there all the way up to the villas, each of which has its own private pool. Each room also has an in-suite laundry.

Each of the one-, two- and three-bedroom suites is clustered around a central pool that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. Each room has a beautiful and expansive balcony with views over the pool and ocean. And while each suite does have its own kitchen, and there's

a small market on the property, travelers don't have to lift a finger with the on-site Ernesto's Farm to Table Restaurant.

The dining room is open-air, with views of the pool, and while the design is basic but not boring, the food is what does the talking. The restaurant serves truly tasty meats, seafood, pasta and salads that are unpretentious in presentation as well as price. There is also an open-air sports bar on the property with televisions and great cocktails.



A bedroom with a balcony and sweeping ocean views.

Other amenities include a Senses Spa by Elena with a juice bar, lounge and Oaxacan sweat lounge as well as a fitness center with direct ocean views. There is also a library, kids club, business center and swim-up bar. Shuttle service moves guests to and from Puerto Escondido, which is less than half an hour away, making nightlife and restaurants entirely accessible, while still retaining the feel that you're well off the beaten path. The drive to the resort sets the tone as it curves down a dusty dirt road far off the main highway, with seemingly endless views of surrounding mountains and the sea in the distance. But despite this feeling of seclusion, the resort is only about 10 minutes from the Puerto Escondido airport.

The nearby area is packed with activities to help travelers discover this somewhat uncharted section of southern Mexico. Just three miles from the resort is Laguna de Manialtepec, which is known as one of Mexico's most diverse ecosystems. It also is home to a bioluminescent bay, so be sure to check the time of year to see if you can catch this natural phenomenon that causes the lagoons to glow a fluorescent blue at night.

The hotel is also near a variety of hiking trails into the Sierra Madres and can also arrange white-water rafting or canyoneering adventures. Other nearby activities include sportfishing, horseback riding, mountain biking or hopping into Puerto Escondido and nearby La Punta to watch surfers catch dramatic waves. Travelers can even arrange for private surf lessons in this mecca for epic waves.

But one of the most charming aspects of Vivo Resorts is that it is still a relatively virgin hotel experience. Not accustomed to the sometimes formulaic models of decades-old, established, fully dedicated all-inclusive resorts (Vivo is not all-inclusive, though there are packages that can be added on), there is a genuine sincerity to the experience and its staff. Nothing feels rehearsed, and the staff truly wants to get to know each guest on a friendly level. There's something very noncorporate about the entire experience, which may or may not change as Puerto Escondido's development picks up in the future.

For now, it is truly a warm, welcoming resort stay that is one of a kind. For starters, this thoughtfully curated experience starts at \$93 a night, which is unheard of for rooms and amenities of this quality in other parts of Mexico. And those of us who hate when the secrets get out on our favorite hideaways can rest assured that Vivo Resorts is just another positive reason why Puerto Escondido remains the hidden gem that it is.