

Retirement on the Mexican Riviera

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Riviera; the word alone tends to conjure pleasant images of beautiful scenery, of calm serenity or relaxation, even of Paradise. By definition, Riviera is an Italian term originally from the Middle Ages for the coast of Liguria. The two divisions of the original Riviera, both of which border the Ligurian Sea, an arm of the Mediterranean Sea, are the Italian Riviera and the French Riviera. Retirement on either Riviera would be wonderful if you have seriously deep pockets, don't mind the 10 hour transatlantic flight, and the possible language barrier when you're there!

Today, the term is more generally applied worldwide to about a dozen warm coastal regions popular with tourists. Mexico is blessed with two such regions; the Riviera Maya and the Mexican Riviera.

The Riviera Maya consists of 80 miles of Caribbean coastline wrapping along the eastern side of the Yucatan Peninsula in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo. It includes the resort cities of Isla Mujeres, Cancun, Playa del Carmen, Cozumel, and Tulum. This region is a terrific area for visiting with its warm weather, sandy beaches, and historic archaeological sites however it may be a different matter when it comes to retirement. The average daily temperature for the "high season" of November through May along the Riviera Maya is 77°F however you can expect an average monthly rainfall during this season in excess of 3 inches. Also, the Yucatan area is annually threatened by hurricanes off the Caribbean Sea with Playa del Carmen and Chetumal being virtually wiped out a few years ago and Cancun devastated in 2005. The topography of the entire Yucatan peninsula is essentially flat thereby providing no scenic mountainside retirement communities. This flat topography results in the beautiful large beaches and shallow water that attract the younger generation for spring break vacations and other holidays with a very active night life.

The Mexican Riviera consists of more than 1,000 miles of Pacific Ocean coastline on the western side of Mexico stretching all the way from Ensenada in Baja California to Puerto Escondido and Huatulco in the state of Oaxaca. With the Sierra Madre Mountains running virtually the entire distance, this shoreline has to be considered one of the most scenic on the planet. First dubbed the Mexican Riviera by the American cruise industry, today this magnificent shoreline is the fourth most popular cruise destination in the world with approximately 300 cruises annually.

For retirement consideration, let's take a closer look at the resorts along this Riviera.

Located only 70 miles south of the US border, Ensenada is a convenient drive from most of the western cities in the US. With beautiful weather and rolling hillsides, the Ensenada area has become world class wine country. Ensenada also has a thriving fishing industry, agricultural business, a substantial gravel mining industry, six major maquiladora parks, and of course tourism. The only deep water port in Baja California is located in Ensenada and therefore global shipping of products manufactured in the area is another main source of revenue. Because the region is more industrial than tourist based, the cost of living is quite attractive in the Ensenada area.

Mazatlan has 500,000 inhabitants and is one of the largest working ports in Mexico. Fishing, agriculture, cotton textile spinning and weaving, sugar refining, breweries, coffee roasting plants, etc. are located in

Mazatlan. Approximately 300 miles south of Mazatlan is Manzanillo. It is substantially smaller than the other industrial cities on the western coast of Mexico; however it has become Mexico's busiest port with a huge volume of containerized freight. Both Mazatlan and Manzanillo rely heavily on industry and much less on tourism. Both of these industrial cities have nice beaches, fine weather, reasonable costs of living, and facilities catering to tourists and retirees.

Acapulco is by far the largest city on the Mexican Riviera with a population exceeding 700,000 people. Due to its easy access from Mexico City, Acapulco was the first resort city to be built along the Mexican Riviera. This popular resort destination offers scenic terrain, beautiful beaches, warm climate, and all the amenities that any tourist would desire. It grew so rapidly that the infrastructure was unable to handle the population; consequently during the past decade the authorities in Acapulco have tried to upgrade the infrastructure, clean up the city and beaches, and return it to world class resort status.

Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo, Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Escondido, and Huatulco are much smaller cities, each having populations of less than 70,000 people. These relatively new resort cities are built around fabulous beaches with magnificent surrounding mountainous terrain. They each have beautiful golf courses and other tourist related activities. Being strictly resort areas, there are virtually no other industries and therefore most of the locals speak some English. Since these resort areas are still quite young and relatively small, some of the amenities that retirees are accustomed to might be lacking. The cost of living in these relatively remote areas may be somewhat higher than in the more accessible, further developed areas.

The last and probably the most popular resort destination, located in the center of the Mexican Riviera, is Puerto Vallarta; home of nearly 50,000 North Americans. Puerto Vallarta has easy access from Guadalajara, has nearly 50 international flights daily from the US and Canada (more than all the rest of the Mexican Riviera cities combined), and has a Maritime Terminal that was recently upgraded and tripled in size in order to accommodate three large cruise boats simultaneously.

This city of 350,000 inhabitants is large enough to support the "big box" stores such as Sam's Club, Super Wal-Mart, Costco, Home Depot, Office Supply, Office Max, etc. as well as many other mega modern supermarkets. High speed internet, VoIP telephone service, satellite TV, and all the other modern amenities are available in PV. Four new modern hospitals with sophisticated equipment and highly trained doctors are now in Vallarta as are a number of modern dental clinics. The area has always had world class sport fishing and now boasts 8 magnificent signature golf courses, a new convention center, botanical gardens, new parks, and numerous sites to visit. Since Vallarta's only industry is tourism, communications are never a barrier.

The cost of living in Vallarta is about average for the Mexican Riviera but a fraction of that in Pebble Beach where the scenery might be comparable but the climate is not! Being on the same latitude as Maui, Hawaii, the average daily temperature in Vallarta during the winter months of November through May is 73°F with virtually no chance of rain; i.e., the weather is perfect for whatever activity pleases you and every activity imaginable is available!

As you can readily see, there's a reason for Puerto Vallarta's popularity; it basically has it all! So, whether you arrive via one of the 300 Mexican Riviera cruises or by one of the 50 daily flights, you really ought to consider Puerto Vallarta on the Mexican Riviera for your retirement residence. After all, not only is it a short 2-4 hours away but it's probably the only Riviera you'll ever be able to afford, except perhaps your dad's old Buick!

Jim Scherrer has owned property in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico for 25 years and resided there for the past eleven years. The mission of his series of 50 articles pertaining to retirement in Puerto Vallarta is to reveal

the recent changes that have occurred in Vallarta while dispelling the misconceptions about living conditions in Mexico. For the full series of articles regarding travel to and retirement in Vallarta as well as pertinent Puerto Vallarta links, please visit us at <http://www.PVREBA.com>.

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