Cultural Daily

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Trading Fight-or-Flight for the Pacific in Riviera Nayarit

R. Daniel Foster · Friday, October 9th, 2026

I know so many people retiring to Portugal. While Portugal's coastal Mediterranean climate, a match for L.A.'s, is tempting, I've set my sights on Mexico instead. It's closer, and while I don't plan on moving there to retire, I'm considering longer stays.

My first stop: the 200-mile Riviera Nayarit coastline—specifically the ten or so miles known as Nuevo Nayarit, about 40 minutes from Puerto Vallarta International Airport.



The swim-up bar at Armony Marival Resort & Spa / Photo courtesy of Marival Resorts

I hopped on a Volaris flight from Los Angeles to Tepic, about two hours northeast of Nuevo Nayarit; it was a lower-cost option. Phoenix, Houston, and Calgary also have direct flights to Tepic. Canadians seeking winter sun, I've learned, have favored Nayarit as they pass on markets in Florida, Arizona, California, and Hawaii.

To get from Tepic to Nuevo Nayarit, I used Terramar DMC for ground transport. The firm also offers airport transfers, private transportation, VIP services, and arranges group transport.

I stayed at two all-inclusive resorts about 40 minutes apart. They're part of the Marival Resort family. First up was Marival Distinct All-Suites & World Spa. I then moved to Armony Marival Resort & Spa overlooking Banderas Bay. The latter is on Punta Mita, a gated peninsula with a maritime culture. Expect to pay from the mid-$300s per night and up at the resorts—depending on the season.



Armony Marival Resort & Spa / Photo courtesy of Marival Resorts

High season runs from mid-November through April given the drier weather and lower humidity.

A Hurricane Reroutes the Sail

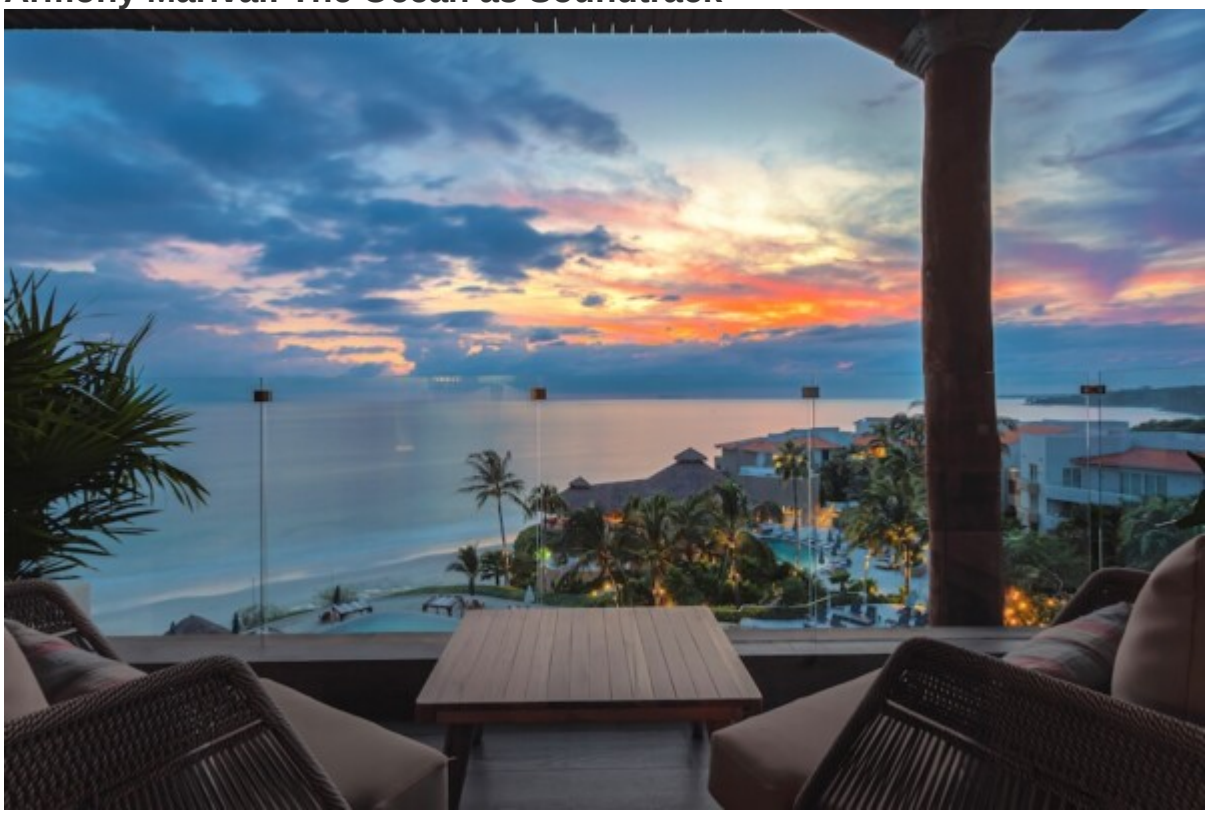
Hurricane Polo was barreling up the coast, but besides a few nighttime showers, it didn't affect my stay. (Pacific hurricane season runs mid-May through November.) The storm did affect a sailing trip via Punta Mita Adventures. We were scheduled to sail to the Marieta Islands and their Playa del Amor (Beach of Love), a hidden strip that sits inside a huge sunlit crater.

Instead, Captain Julio Valdez sailed the 50-foot Beneteau sailboat *Lucky Seven*, stocked with food

and drink, to a private beach. We swam, chilled on rafts, and paddleboarded.

“We get lots of Canadians coming out to sail,” said Valdez, who’s been piloting the Lucky Seven for six years; he’s been with the outfit for thirteen years. The fleet includes sailboats and a catamaran. “We often go to Marietas, but also Playa Palito Verde—plenty of sand and turquoise waters.” Sunset sails are also popular.

Armony Marival: The Ocean as Soundtrack



Some Armony Marival rooms have ocean views / Photo courtesy of Marival Resorts

At Armony Marival, I had a room with a balcony overlooking the Pacific. Although I could hear the ocean with the sliding doors closed, I cracked them at night to better hear the crashing waves.

The resort was designed around nature; it feels organic to the land. Trunks of the parota tree (known locally as Huanacaxtle or Guanacaste) are used as towering building supports. They stand like sentinels amid the palms and trees, their wood a golden brown with hints of red.



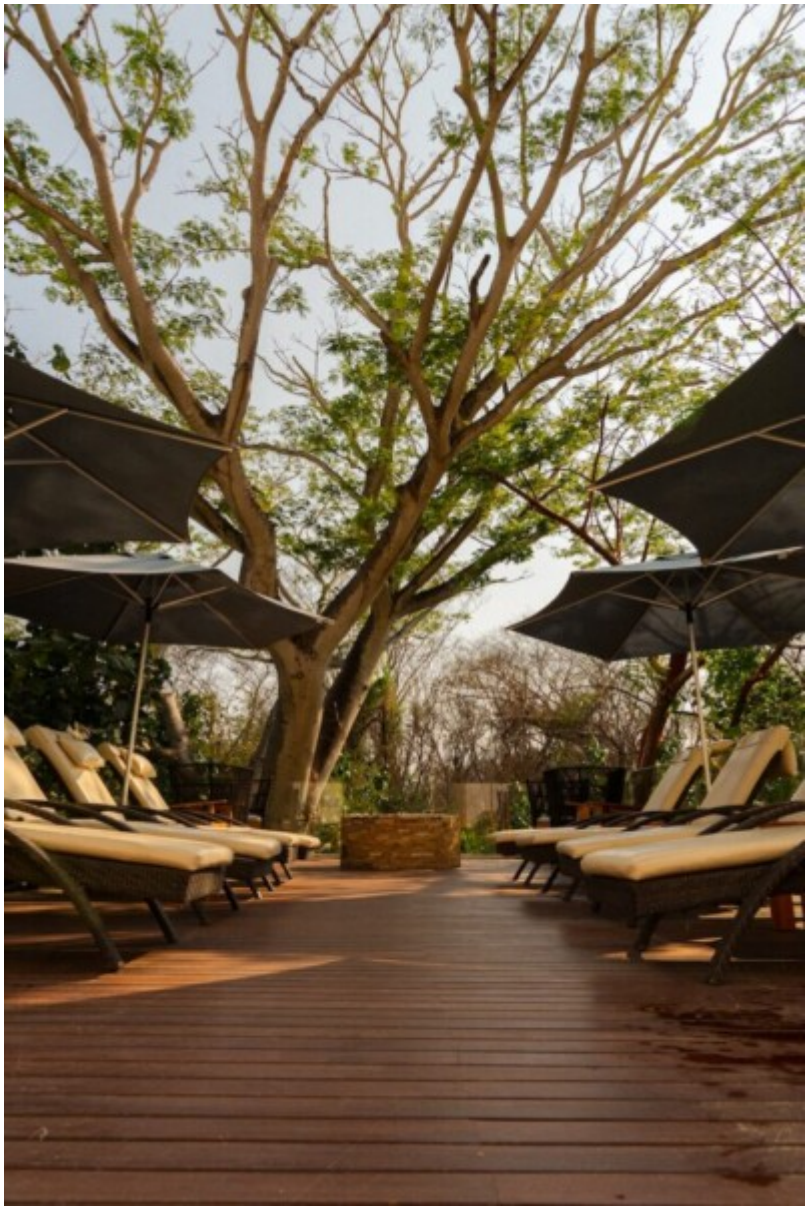
The Armony Marival architecture strives to blend into nature / Photo courtesy of Marival Resorts

The look blends into the lush surroundings, awash with color: Mexican petunias, the pink doll plant, the orange-yellow peacock flower, and plenty of palms and other trees.

Disconnecting From the Urban Mind

One morning at Armony Marival, I joined a yoga class on the resort's Cañada Deck, near the Mélange World Spa. It's a chill area, flanked by two pools. After the class, I joined a group for an Ice Bath Challenge. Our goal was to stay submerged at least three minutes.

I've taken cold plunges before—my favorite at the W Amsterdam's AWAY Spa. But that plunge was cold water, not a tub brimming with ice, which takes the dip to a whole new level.



The Cañada Deck at Armony Marival / Photo courtesy of Marival Resorts

I survived the three-minute immersion (or was it four?), coached by the resort's entertainment director, Andres Figueroa, who set us up with deep breathing as prep.

Lounging in a tub of ice has all kinds of physiological benefits, including a spike of norepinephrine, which sharpens alertness and focus (no kidding), along with dopamine and endorphins. The practice is not advised for those with circulation and heart conditions.

I was impressed with Armony Marival's wellness center and instructor Victor Garcia, who leads sessions. His specialty is Watsu therapy, the name a portmanteau of "Water" and "Shiatsu." Performed in chest-deep water, a therapist supports you while you float, guiding your body using fluid movements that feel lyrical.

At times, and with a prior signal (I was wearing a nose plug), Victor submerged me, maneuvering my body via various wave-like movements. For someone who lives with a city-dweller's constant fight-or-flight response, the session was refreshing, coaxing me out of my primal brain into a weightless, safe space.



Low tide at Armony Marival / Photo courtesy of Marival Resorts

That was followed by a sound bath in the pool. Members of our group were supported by pool noodles, with metal bowls perched on our chests. Struck, the bowls seemed to resonate to my marrow, releasing even more city-bound tension. It was good not to think and simply listen to the sounds of water gurgling and the otherworldly tones.

Omakase Under a Cloud

That night, ParrotFish was on the menu–not the dish (whatever that would be), but the resort's Japanese-Pacific cuisine restaurant. The arched entrance is flanked by skeletal trees bearing golden lamps, and inside, a sculptural wave-like structure hovers like a cloud above tables.



The restaurant ParrotFish at Armony Marival / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

We went with the omakase experience, a chef-curated menu that included table-side preparations—the sushi clouded with dry ice was impressive. Expect slices of seared tuna with white and black sesame, imported yellowtail with curry oil and ponzu sauce, and fresh salmon tataki. It was all delicious.

Chef Benito Hernández Cortés, famed for his sushi, appeared several times to present dishes and see how the menu was progressing.

Other Armony Marival restaurants include La Brise, situated under a massive thatched structure—favored for its ocean-side views. Breakfast at La Brise comes with made-to-order taco and omelet stations. I often lingered with coffee, mesmerized by the waves.



The sushi at ParrotFish / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Divum is the resort’s gourmet restaurant with farm-to-table offerings and views of Banderas Bay and the Sierra Madre. It’s an elegant setting with a gold, tan, and blue color scheme. I recommend the zarandeado octopus taco, marinated in chili and spices on a blue corn tortilla with Creole relish, and the oyster mushroom ceviche.



Divum restaurant interior at Armony Marival / Photo courtesy of Marival Resorts

Marival Distinct’s Beach Access is a Blast

The best hangout spot at Marival Distinct is its Mozzamare Beach Club, a short walk from the lobby. Here, the ocean is on full display. The club has an oceanfront infinity pool, Balinese beds and loungers, a bar, al fresco dining, and access to the beach. Volleyball matches are popular, along with kayak tours. At night, guests toast cocktails around bonfires, the inky sky dotted with stars.



Mozzamare Beach Club at Marival Distinct / Photo courtesy of Marival Resorts

The rooms at Marival Distinct are large (I had a two-bedroom suite with a balcony). The site was originally slated to be a condo project, but switched to a hotel, hence the larger rooms, which range from one- to four-bedroom apartment-style villas and penthouses with full kitchens, dining rooms, laundry, and terraces.

Marival Distinct’s largely open-air lobby has an easy vibe, riffing on Italian and Mexican aesthetics, which include dark trim and wood inlays lending a sophisticated Mediterranean look. I got lost exploring the quiet walkways that wind through gardens.



Marival Distinct’s open-air lobby / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

For pre-dinner drinks, visit the Insú Sky Bar with its unbeatable sunset Pacific Ocean vista. There, you can swim to the edge of the Pacific, at least via an adjacent infinity pool. A DJ performs on weekends.

Despite the muggy weather, I used the steam room at Marival Distinct’s Mélange World Spa, a name it shares with Armony Marival’s spa. I enjoy steams, and the experience always relaxes me, so I was okay passing on the spa’s other treatments. They follow wellness traditions in India, Bali, Turkey, Russia, Italy, Japan, Thailand, Mexico, and the U.S.

Kitsch, Pyramids and Free Bikes

Marival Distinct concierge Lizbeth Fernandez said the resort is popular with visitors from the U.S. during winter. “I recommend all kinds of outings—people really like the Bucerías Flea Market with the artisan goods,” she said. Known locally as Mercado de Artesanías, the market sells Huichol (Wixárika) beadwork, yarn art, hand-painted Talavera ceramic, jewelry, apparel, and other items.



Biking along the Nayarit Coast / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

I love to bicycle, so I took one of the resort’s free bikes out for an hour-long spin. I rode down Paseo de los Cocoteros to Paradise Village (took about 20 minutes), a resort and shopping complex. I explored the commercial zone, anchored by a massive replica of a step-pyramid.



Maya-style warriors in front of Paradise Village's Starbucks / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

The entire complex is meant to pay homage to ancient Maya culture, and given the pyramid, it seemed a bit kitsch. Adding to the vibe: two towering Maya-style warriors that flank the local Starbucks. Guardians of coffee culture?

Sayulita: A Day on the Taco Trail

While it's tempting to stay within either resort's tropical embrace, I suggest at least a half-day trip to Sayulita, a funky beach village about a 40- to 50-minute drive away.

The sprawling beach is populated by vendors, families, digital nomads, and young bohemians out for a day of fun. I mostly toured the town, taking in the street performers, art, and live music, bringing along my new Dags backpack packed with extra water. I didn't realize when I got it that it's designed for dads with babies (it's called "The OG Dag"). It has an insulated compartment for baby bottles. No matter, it kept my water bottles cool.

Hungry, I hopped on a Vallarta Food Tour for three hours of standout eateries packed with local flavor. The stops:

• Cayetano's is in the Centro neighborhood with street-side dining. It's known for its charcoal-grilled meats and taco de tuétano, made with bone marrow.

• El Costeño, a beachside spot that opened in 1964 as a cantina for local fishermen, poured tall margaritas and served a variety of tacos. As the oldest restaurant in Sayulita, El Costeño is famed for its fresh Pacific seafood, including mariscada (shared seafood platters), octopus, fajitas, and shrimp cocktails.

• Tacos El Taliván, at Calle Marlin 12, is an open-air taco counter featuring marinated pork shaved from a trompo, a vertical rotisserie. Other specialties include crispy tortillas with melted cheese and meat, called volcanes, and house-made salsas. The decor sets the tone: photos of luchadores (masked wrestlers) and 1960s photos of locals.



Tacos El Talivan / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

• Tacos Gaby's specialty is Baja-style seafood tacos. The owner, affectionately known as Doña Gaby, has a street-side spot set with plastic tables and stools on Calle José Mariscal. She's been there nearly 25 years. You can order up local fish or shrimp fried in tempura batter, heaped onto warm tortillas.

• Buonissimo Cafe and Gelato is a local favorite for dessert, just up from the beach at Delfines 6B, Centro. The menu features about a dozen blended drinks, and of course, lots of gelato.

Back in L.A., all that great food and the laid-back resorts soon felt like a dream. I don't often get away to simply relax at a beach resort, but rather enjoy touring foreign cities.

The fight-or-flight thrum in my head quickly returned. But in truth, how hard is it to find street tacos in L.A.? Or a sound bath? I'm on it.

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