

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Why I'm Skipping Europe For Mexico

R. Daniel Foster · Tuesday, September 22nd, 2026

With international airfares soaring, I've been eyeing a cheaper, closer alternative to European and Asian travel: Mexico. I'm planning a late-September trip to check out [Nayarit](#), the Pacific-coast state just north of Puerto Vallarta.

I'm especially intrigued to visit [Sayulita](#), about 25 miles north of Puerto Vallarta. Sayulita markets itself as a surf town, but I'm more interested in the town's culture, including a plaza with clusters of artisan shops and Indigenous wares. I suspect it gives the place more depth than being just a rad surf destination.



The Nayarit coast / Photo courtesy of Visit Nayarit Travel

Nayarit's Magic Towns

Sayulita is one of roughly 177 [Pueblos Mágicos](#) (Magic Towns), a tourism designation that marks towns with notable cultural, historical, or geographical attributes. Nayarit has nine of these gems. Besides Sayulita: Compostela, Jala, Mexcaltitán, San Blas, Ixtlán del Río, Ahuacatlán, Amatlán de Cañas, and Puerto Balleto in the Islas Marías.

I have a small Wixárika (Huichol) art collection—a dog, a frog, a snake, and a tortoise—and I've learned that Sayulita is a prime place to shop for the brightly colored beaded animal figures and masks. I always enjoy asking who made a piece that I'm eyeing and how long it took to assemble the meticulous beadwork.



Some of Nayarit's street art / Photo courtesy of Visit Nayarit Travel

I also know this: a price that seems too good usually means a factory copy. Huichol beadwork is extremely labor-intensive, and the price should reflect that.

Día de Muertos in Nayarit

I'll be visiting Nayarit in late September, but in early November, the town is transformed during Día de Muertos, known locally as Festival Vivan Los Muertos—October 31 through November 2. If you go then, expect streets filled with *Ojos de Dios* (Eye of God weavings), *papel picado* folk art, altars, *catrinas*, sawdust mats, marigold flowers, and at night, fields of candles.

Overall, Nayarit celebrates the holiday in high style. One of the most authentic celebrations takes place in the Nayarit mountains, with the Cora or Náayeri people.



Día de Muertos in Sayulita / Photo courtesy of Visit Nayarit Travel

In Jesús María, in the Del Nayar municipality, “on the nights of November 1st and 2nd, five ‘dead beings’ dressed as corpses go from house to house, asking for offerings and imitating the lament of the owl,” according to the Nayarit Tourism website. “They take the offerings to the church and the living eat them, but not without setting aside something for the dead.”

Seafood Country

The food should be excellent, especially the fish since Nayarit’s coast is seafood country. The state’s signature dish is *pescado zarandeado*: a whole snapper brushed with chile, citrus marinade, and butter. Smoked marlin can be found in *tacos de marlin ahumado*. The list goes on: shrimp tacos, of course, and *aguachile tostadas* where the shrimp are cured in lime, chile, and cucumber.



Sayulita is Sayulita, about 25 miles north of Puerto Vallarta / Photo courtesy of Visit Nayarit Travel

For cheaper eats, I’ve been told to walk a few streets back from the beach, away from the main drag that caters to tourists. I’m planning to hop on a food tour with [Vallarta Food Tours](#), so I doubt I’ll miss much. I’m not sure if these spots are on the tour, but I hear they’re great:

In town, I’ll check out [Mary’s](#), often referred to as “beloved” for its vibrant look, vibe, and, of course, the food. The standouts, a local tells me, are the handmade fish and shrimp tacos.



Alto Alto is a local favorite / Photo courtesy of Visit Nayarit Travel

A chic spot for dinner: [Alto Alto](#) with its rooftop lounge and novel Mediterranean cuisine. For dessert, I’ll go to [Coco Banana](#), famed for its frozen bananas dipped in chocolate and rolled in select toppings. It was founded in 1991 by a vendor selling the treat out of a beach cooler. A humble beginning that’s turned into a famed local spot. There’s also all-day breakfast and lunch.



Go to Coco Banana for frozen bananas dipped in chocolate / Photo courtesy of Visit Nayarit Travel

Where I’m Staying

For a base, I’ll stay at [Armony Marival Resort & Spa Punta de Mita](#)—an all-inclusive MGallery resort on Destiladeras Beach. It’s at the northern end of Banderas Bay. The hotel’s [Divum restaurant](#) serves farm-to-table cuisine. Sayulita is roughly 40 minutes away by car.



Armony Resort & Spa Punta de Mita / Photo courtesy of Armony Resort & Spa Punta de Mita

At Armony, there are the usual wellness offerings—yoga, tai chi, Watsu, sound healing—but I’m up for the property’s ice bath. When I [visited Amsterdam last December](#), my hotel had an ice bath next to its gym; I took the plunge morning and night. It was invigorating in a way I hadn’t expected. I’ll mostly chill (in other ways) at Armony and then take side trips to Sayulita and San

Pancho.

How To Get To Nayarit

From Los Angeles/LAX, you can fly direct to Tepic-Riviera Nayarit International Airport (TPQ) on [Volaris Airlines](#). I just checked the price on a seven-day round trip around late October; the quote was \$540. Other cities with direct flights to TPQ: Calgary, Phoenix, and Houston.

Recently, Canadian snowbirds have been snubbing the United States for Mexico. Those in the Vancouver region, as well as Kelowna (in British Columbia's southern interior), have been favoring Mexico, especially the Nayarit coast.

I'll check in again with a full wrap-up of my wanderings around Nayarit, most likely by mid-October.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, September 22nd, 2026 at 7:01 am and is filed under [Food](#), [Travel](#), [Lifestyle](#)

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