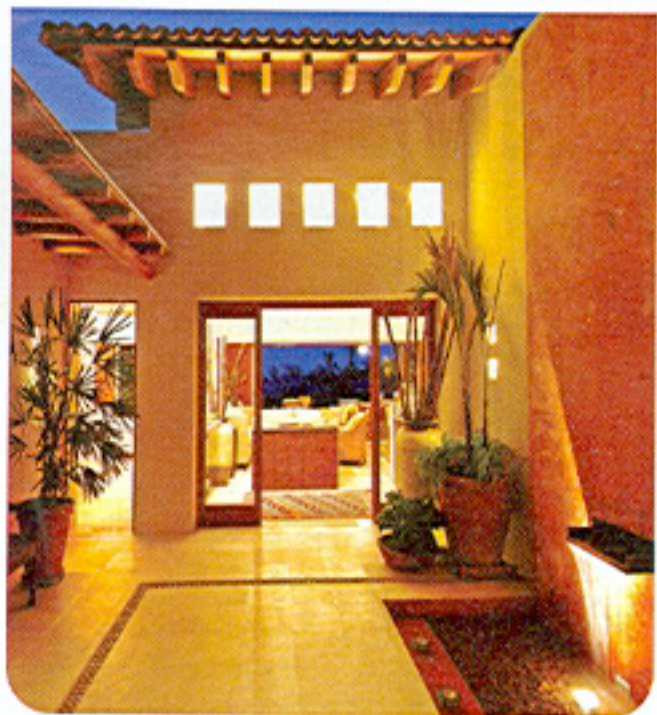




Las Palmas de Punta Mita, Mexico



This page: an adobe entryway at one of Las Palmas de Punta Mita's villas. Opposite: a snow-covered view of Yosemite Valley makes for an indelible family vacation.

Punta Mita, a development about 45 minutes north of Puerto Vallarta, at the top of the Bahía de Banderas, has lately been awash in fawning press: celebs like Jay-Z and Beyoncé are reported to vacation there. Zip on down in winter, when temperatures are the best, to see what all the fuss is about.

The **Four Seasons** opened in Punta Mita in 1999, and next thing you know, some were calling it the best Four Seasons property in the world. The **St. Regis** will follow, opening in late 2007. As luxurious as these hotels are, there's another option that's just as indulgent but with a lot more privacy.

Each of the 21 villas for rent at **Las Palmas de Punta Mita** is equipped with wireless Internet, a terrace with a private pool, and a full kitchen. If your idea of a serious vacation is whipping up a four-course meal, you can arrange to have the cupboards stocked upon your arrival. Then again, if just the notion of chopping an onion while on a tropical getaway brings tears to your eyes, you can request a personal cook and spend your pre-dinner hours getting an in-house massage.

With the ocean mere meters away, a beach visit, whether for snorkeling, surfing, or good old-fashioned sun-worshiping, is always an option. There's also a signature Jack Nicklaus golf course with not 18 but 19 holes. The extra hole is on a small island that's accessible even during high tide—with the help of an amphibious vehicle.

If you really have to be around other people, head over to the Four Seasons' casual restaurant, **Bahía**, for simple grilled seafood, such as shrimp with mango and dry chili. Then wander back to the villa and revel in your stately isolation. —S.H.