

27 Unmissable Things to do in San Pancho Nayarit Mexico (2023)

By Isabella Biava • Updated on August 24, 2023

Planning your trip to San Pancho Nayarit? This small Mexican town is filled with a surprising amount of activities, as you'll see below in this list of the best things to do in San Pancho. Plus general travel tips, including how to get there and more!

San Pancho (Nayarit) is a pretty little town nestled in one of the most beautiful and tranquil bays on the Riviera Nayarit, Mexico – a must-visit if you are in the area. The only risk is that you'll never want to leave.

Although it has grown quite a lot since the last time I visited, San Pancho Nayarit is still preserving its quaint vibe of a small community town, where everybody knows each other and looks after one another, which makes the level of crime almost down to zero.

When I visited San Pancho again in 2023 I realized how much it has grown since my first visit in 2018, luckily in a good way. You will find many more events, and things to do, delicious restaurants and cute hotels.

However, it still conserves the same laid-back vibe and a strong sense of community.



San Pancho Beach

However, the number of hotels and home rentals has grown and so the restaurants and cafe choices, the marketplace selling organic products as well, and the community center [Entreamigos](#) has more volunteers to help with all the amazing initiatives to support the local kids and the community in general.

Among the new residents, there is a community of [digital nomads](#) that have made their temporary home here, as they found San Pancho a cool place to live a comfortable beach life, with little noise, yoga classes, great Wi-Fi, great cafes, and healthy products, besides so many activities to be entertained in the free time.

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San Pancho Nayarit at a glance

Below we'll talk about everything you need to know about San Pancho Nayarit, but here I wanted to share a summary.

- **Best time of the year to travel to San Pancho, Mexico – Mid-January – February**
- **Best hotel in San Pancho – [Hotel Casa San Pancho](#)**
- **Best restaurant in San Pancho – [Barracuda](#)**
- **Best coffee shop in San Pancho – [Kokonati](#)**
- **The best thing to do in San Pancho is watch the sunset from the beach!**

Now, without further ado, here is a list of all the most amazing things to do in San Pancho, Nayarit, and in this post I will tell you all that I know about it.



Sunset from San Pancho beach

Amazing things to do in San Pancho Nayarit

Let's dive into everything you should do while in San Francisco Nayarit – San Pancho's official name.

Hang out on the beach

The first thing that you will want to do in San Pancho is to bask in the sun on that white sand beach. Playa San Pancho is a spectacular infinite stretch of beach embraced by the Sierra Madre mountain range with its lush tropical vegetation contrasting the blue ocean creating breathtaking picture-worthy landscapes.

You can enjoy long walks while watching surfers trying to ride the difficult waves. San Pancho Beach is not suitable for beginner surfers.

San Pancho Beach is one of the cleanest beaches in Mexico and most of all it doesn't have vendors trying to sell you their goods every 5 minutes. You can just lay down in peace and tranquillity without being disturbed.

Surf in San Pancho, Mexico

As I mentioned before, San Pancho is considered one of the [beaches near Sayulita](#) that are very much appreciated by the surfing community, although not beginners. Surfing in San Pancho is great for intermediate or pro surfers with a shortboard.

You can rent a surfboard in town on the main road just a few steps from the beach

If you want to learn how to surf, this is not the best beach. But you can take a surfing class.



San Pancho beach chairs on the public beach

Hike to the deserted beach Playa Clavelinas

Playa Las Clavelinas is located past the golf course on Las Palmas Road, lined with beach houses and beautiful hotels. It's great if you could get there by sunset. Further down the road, there is also a beach called El Barro, but I never ventured there. I was told the road is quite hidden and difficult to find. If you feel adventurous, you can go and find it out. Please send me a picture when you find it 😊

Take a tour to Islas Marietas

The popular Isla Marietas is one of the most unique natural rock formations in the water. Its so-called love beach is a beach below a crater that you can reach only by swimming. Also, the underwater world is just spectacular and still offers great views of the local marine fauna and corals.

I have to say, though, that this site has been too exploited, and to protect the delicate environment the authorities have closed it for a while. Now that it's open again they have raised the price and reduced the number of visitors per day.

To visit, you must join an organized tour with an authorized company a natural park and protected area. The tour costs around 140 USD all worth it, and this is something that you cannot visit on your own. On the main road of San Pancho, you will find travel agents to buy the tour. Or you can pre-book the tour.

[BOOK YOUR TOUR TO THE MARIETAS ISLANDS FROM SAYULITA](#)



San Pancho Main Street – Photo from Getty Images by Linda Raymond

Dive around the Marietas Islands

This tour is only available for certified divers. You will be exploring the underwater world around these unique rock formations and among a wealth of marine life, you will swim with dolphins, turtles, and manta rays. It's an unforgettable experience.

The tour departs from Sayulita, which you can reach by taxi at only 10-minute drive.

[BOOK YOUR DIVING TOUR TO THE MARIETAS ISLANDS](#)

Enjoy the extraordinary international cuisine in San Pancho

Such a small village and so many delicious restaurants. My favorite is [Barracuda](#), and the present guest's favorite coffee place is [Kokonati](#).

Check out my review on more [restaurants in San Pancho](#).

Watch the sunset on San Pancho beach

Sunset in San Pancho is a real event. Every day locals and tourists alike gather on the beach to say goodbye to another amazing day while the sky becomes a pink red and yellow backdrop to surfers trying to catch the last waves of the day before it gets dark. An unmissable appointment.



Volunteer at Entre Amigos

The cultural center **Entre Amigos** was born with the purpose of empowering children and offering them a safe space to gather after school and learn new skills while having fun and offering them the know-how they need to develop their potential with after-school activities.

Their work is based on the support of sponsors and volunteers.

So, you are definitely welcome to join and help, and you can also use their library and free WIFI. It's a creative and happy space to hang out. They also organize different communitarian activities such as beach cleaning and fund raisings.

Join yoga classes

In San Pancho, there are a couple of yoga centers where you can continue your practice also while on vacation. You can find yoga classes at [El Estar yoga center](#) or [Pilates San Pancho](#) for Pilates or Acro Yoga classes.

Visit the nearby Sayulita



San Pancho beach almost Sunset

Sayulita fame goes way back much earlier than San Pancho's debut in the tourism scene. In fact, only 3 years ago San Pancho wasn't even on the map while [Sayulita](#) was thriving as the best surfing spot in Mexico and the party town.

[Sayulita's amazing beaches](#) and great shops showcasing the unique local artworks make it a great trip and totally worth a visit. It's only 5 minutes drive from San Pancho.

Also, [the restaurants in Sayulita](#) offer a variety of choices for every taste and budget.

Explore the nearby beaches

There are amazing beaches along the coast at a short distance from San Pancho, that are indeed worth a visit and not only for surfers.

Many of those beaches are enjoyable also to beach lovers who just want to bask in the sun and relax.

In my post on [Sayulita's beaches](#), I talk about all of them. Check it out and make sure you rent a car to make the most of your day.

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San Pancho beach day on the nearby bay

Take a day tour to Puerto Vallarta

Even if you are not particularly fond of big cities, you will love Puerto Vallarta. Located on the majestic Banderas Bay, at only a 1-hour drive (or bus ride) from Sayulita, [Puerto Vallarta](#) has so much to offer to its visitors.

From its charming historical center brimming with [local restaurants](#) cafes and art gallery, the green park around Cuale River where you can enjoy the local

art and crafts market, the Malecon, to take a stroll along the beach, especially beautiful at sunset, the cool vibes of Zona Romantica and its delicious restaurants, and last but not least, Playa Muertos.

There are so [many things to do in Puerto Vallarta](#) but in one day trip, you can get the feel of it and maybe plan for your next vacation.



Puerto Vallarta

Explore the fancy Punta Mita

Punta Mita is the fancy corner of the Riviera Nayarit, home to high-end luxury hotels, world-class golf courses, and fancy restaurants.

If you are not staying there you can also visit the small town of Punta Mita, also an elegant community with beautiful art galleries, shops, and cafes.

There are also many deserted beaches in the area, some particularly loved by surfers but also ideal for some serious tanning business. 🤔

Take a Spanish class

If you are traveling to San Pancho and intend to stay for a while, you might consider taking some Spanish classes to get the hang of it or improve your communication.

If you are going to travel through South America, it will certainly help. At [Entre Amigos](#) they now offer this service at a small cost.

Visit the pretty Mexican town of Bucerias

If you have time and always love to explore your surroundings, just like I do, you will love to check out this little Mexican pueblo.

Bucerias is located only 24km (about 16 miles from San Pancho on the way to Puerto Vallarta).

Although it hasn't reached the popularity of San Pancho or Sayulita, Bucerias is a cute charming town that conserves the authentic Mexican feel, with its colorful homes, cobblestone roads, and beautiful endless beaches offering all sorts of watersports.

You will also find great local seafood restaurants for a lovely lunch on the beach. Definitely worth checking it out.

Go bird watching in the Estuary

If you look right while on the beach, you will notice a wetland that is almost merging with the ocean. Right there you will have the opportunity for some amazing bird watching with a certified guide from the Bird Watching and Nature Conservation Association.

*“Our “classic” tour offers a great opportunity for both beginners and advanced birders to enjoy and learn about tropical and migratory birds, natural history, and culture in the unique mosaic **of habitats of San Pancho**”* [Check out their website](#) (English and Spanish)

Check out Lo de Perla Jungle Garden

Even though the Puerto Vallarta Botanical Garden is the biggest in Mexico, do not underestimate the beauty of this unique oasis in the jungle, [Lo de Perla Jungle Garden](#).

It may be smaller but its 3 hours of guided tour is full of educational entertainment, with a variety of birds and insect species, trails through lush tropical vegetation, and much more. The tour ends at El Santuario, a nursery with a collection of 70 species of orchids endemic to Nayarit.

Definitely, a unique way to spend half a day. Check out opening hours and more info on the [Lo de Perla Jungle Garden website](#).



Photo courtesy of Lo de Perla Jungle Garden

Go for a hike

There are plenty of hikes around San Pancho. The most common hike is the one that goes from San Pancho to Sayulita and back. It's only 5 km for a 1-hour mild pace.

Start off your day with the best coffee in San Pancho

One of the things I love to do the most in life is work from a coffee shop while sipping a creamy double espresso or a double shot of Americano accompanied by a croissant or a piece of banana bread or anything fat and sweet while working on my projects (AKA this blog).

In San Pancho, there are many cute places where you can do that.

When I was there there weren't many coffee spots. I was always in a cute tiny vegan place but it's not there anymore. However, I have found three other great spots that I can't wait to try.

Guests' favorite is [Kokonati](#) close to the beach, with great coffee and pastry and comfortable tables in a cozy ambiance.

For amazing French pastry and a coffee, you can also check out [Cafe Paraiso](#). Please let me know which one is your favorite.

Join the turtle project and help the leatherback turtles

Many decades ago, the wild and untouched beaches of the Riviera Nayarit, including San Pancho beach offered the perfect environment for the reproductive cycle of these fragile creatures.

Thousands and thousands of eggs were deposited on the beach and many newborn turtles were making their way back to the sea every year.

With the uncontrolled development of these coasts, the number of individuals kept decreasing, and *“by 1988, pressures from coastal development, poaching, shrimp fishing, and tourism reduced a population of tens of thousands to less than 200 nesting turtles per year.”*

“The first conservation effort to protect the marine turtle began in the late eighties. It was then that members of the community became concerned that the local marine turtle population may soon face extinction.”

“In the spring of 1992, the founding members of the Group built the first marine nursery. By June, large-scale protection of Olive Ridley and Leatherback turtle eggs had begun. In 20 years the population of the Olive Ridley has increased from 200 to 1,475 nests.”

There are different ways to contribute to the cause. The easiest one is to donate. Otherwise, they have full-time programs or you can contact them and make an appointment for a visit. Here is the [Turtle-Project website](#).

Check out the artisanal market on Tuesday in Plaza del Sol

A recent addition as the town has grown, this lively market is definitely going to delight all your senses. It's an outburst of colors, flavors, and scents.

You will find incredible handmade products from housewear to clothing, natural medicine, decorative objects, and delicious homemade food. Definitely not to miss. Check out this [beautiful video](#) I have found online to see what I am talking about.

Spend a fancy day at La Patrona Polo and Equestrian Club

It's indeed an awkward surprise to see such a fancy high-end place in the laid-back town of San Francisco Nayarit. It's like entering a different world, but if you are ready to splurge this is an interesting way to spend a day.

[La Patrona Polo and Equestrian Club](#) offers all-inclusive packages where you can enjoy a delicious brunch while watching a polo game and using the fancy facilities.

It's located just outside San Pancho on the beach.

In this club, you can take horseback riding classes, or you can join one of their amazing hiking, biking, or horseback riding tours.

La Patrona Polo and Equestrian Club have also a sister property on the beach that serves as a beach club. Open from Tuesday through Sunday, for only 800 MXN you can enjoy luxury facilities on the beach until after the sun goes down.

Discover San Pancho's amazing murals

Scattered around San Pancho you will find amazing art that brightens up the otherwise boring grey walls. Start an art-hunting game and let me know what you find.

Some hints: Some amazing murals are to be found by Plaza de la Hermandad and others on the lateral streets that lead to the beach.

I look forward to seeing what you have found! 😊

Don't miss San Pancho Music Festival (February 23-25, 2024)

It started as a jamming session among a few friends in a home backyard and it became a huge annual event that attracts musicians from all over the world.

The 2024 event will be held from February 23 to 25. Check out the [official music festival website](#) for more information.

Wander Avenida Tercer Mundo

The main street in San Pancho is called “Avenida Tercer Mundo” (“Third World Avenue”), and the side streets are named after various countries, like “Honduras”, “Kenya”, etc.

If you're in San Pancho and not sure what to do, just head to the main street and start wandering to see what you discover.

Go whale watching

If you're visiting between December and April, whale watching is a must. Riviera Nayarit is a hot spot for humpback whales passing through and San Pancho is no exception.

You'll find many different whale-watching tours available, many departing from Sayulita. [This tour](#) takes you to the Islas Marietas National Park and is a great option.

Not staying in San Pancho? Take a day tour to San Pancho and Sayulita

If you are not staying in San Pancho, but you would like to take a look, who knows maybe for the next vacation, and you don't have much time, you can always join a tour from Puerto Vallarta.

They will take you to explore San Pancho and Sayulita in one day and you can get an idea of what it's like.

[BOOK YOUR TOUR TO SAN PANCHO AND SAYULITA](#)

How To Get To San Pancho Mexico

If San Pancho Nayarit is your first destination, you'll want to fly into the international airport in Puerto Vallarta (PVR). There are regular direct flights from several US cities straight into PVR and many others that first connect through Mexico City.

Even if you're flying from another part of Mexico, such as Mexico City, you will want to fly into PVR.

From the airport, you have several options.

You can take a taxi right outside the airport which should cost approximately \$60-75USD (the most expensive option), cross the pedestrian bridge outside the airport to grab an Uber (approximately \$30-40USD), or you can also cross

the pedestrian bridge to the bus stop and take a bus to San Pancho for just around \$3.

Note that if you have a lot of luggage, the first two options are your best bet. The bus is cheap but often crowded.

If you are already in the region, such as Puerto Vallarta or Sayulita, you can reach San Pancho by the same means, though Uber drivers are not as plentiful in Sayulita. If you'd like to take public transportation, ask your hotel where the closest bus stop to San Pancho is.

You can also drive to San Pancho from the airport or anywhere in the region. The roads from Puerto Vallarta to San Pancho are paved and quite nice!

How To Get Around San Pancho Nayarit

Once you're in San Pancho, all you need is your own two legs! The town is very small with some cobblestone streets, so it's definitely a pedestrian town.

There are some taxis and occasionally an Uber available but unless you're going somewhere outside town, you truly won't need it.

If you decide to rent a car and drive to San Pancho, you'll definitely want to choose a hotel with parking and leave it there. Parking is limited within the town.

The Best Time To Visit San Pancho

So when is the best time to visit San Pancho, Mexico? The small town is truly a year-round destination but here's a quick run-down of the seasons.

- **High season (November to May).** This is when San Pancho (and the rest of Mexico, truly) is the busiest – especially from December to April. There's hardly any rain, the weather is warm and sunny, and everyone is trying to escape the cold winter in the US and Canada.
- **Low season (June to October).** From June to October, you can expect some rainy days and a bit more humidity – but also fewer crowds and lower prices.

More Tips for Visiting San Pancho

Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind as you plan your trip to San Pancho.

Carry some pesos in cash

Some small restaurants and shops don't accept cards, so don't get stranded without any cash. Small denominations are best, as sometimes little taco stands and such can't break larger bills.

There are now ATMs in San Pancho

One of the great things about San Pancho becoming a popular little spot has been the addition of an ATM in town. That said, I would still grab some cash in Puerto Vallarta or Sayulita, just in case it's out of order the day you need it.

Avoid drinking the tap water.

In general, you should avoid drinking tap water in Mexico and San Pancho is no exception. Make sure you get filtered water at restaurants and grab bottles at the store.

Expect to see dogs off-leash

As with most Mexican towns, you'll see lots of dogs off-leash on the streets as well as on Playa San Pancho. They're not necessarily street dogs – most have an owner – and most are friendly.

WiFi and cell reception can be spotty

Though it's definitely improved over the last few years, cell service and WiFi can still be spotty and tend to go out sometimes. Even if your phone has service in Sayulita, it may not be in San Pancho, and WiFi outages do still happen.

And that's it, although there are many more things to do, I left them for you to discover. Please let me know what you did and how you liked it. I would love to hear from you.

San Pancho Mexico FAQs

Where is San Pancho, Mexico?

San Pancho (real name San Francisco) is a small town in the Riviera Nayarit, about 15 minutes from Sayulita and 30 miles from Puerto Vallarta.

Is San Francisco Mexico the same as San Pancho?

Yes! Do not be alarmed if you type “San Pancho” into a GPS and it automatically changes to “San Francisco”. The official name is San Francisco Nayarit but everyone calls it San Pancho.

Is English spoken in San Pancho?

Yes, though not to the extent you’ll find it in the larger cities like Puerto Vallarta and Sayulita. It’s always best to learn the basics of Spanish or at least have Google Translate on your phone.

How long do you need in San Pancho?

San Pancho is one of those destinations that you can easily spend a day, a week, or a month in. I would say give it at least 2 to 3 nights to really soak up everything the little town has to offer.

San Pancho Nayarit: Final Thoughts

As you can see, San Pancho Mexico is a special slice of heaven on the Riviera Nayarit and one destination well worth visiting. At least make the day trip from Sayulita or Puerto Vallarta but I highly encourage you to add a few nights in San Pancho to your itinerary!

Please let me know what you did and how you liked it. I would love to hear from you.

About the Author, Founder & Editor

Hello there! This is Isabella, the author of this blog, and a cat lover. I am an Italian expatriate with a Mexican permanent Residence. After 7 years of living in Cancun, I have decided to leave my job and explore my beloved Mexico and the rest of this beautiful world, starting from South America, while sharing my travel stories and offering useful travel tips about traveling as a solo female traveler and digital nomad.

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WHO'S BEHIND ALL THIS?

Hey there! This is Isabella, a serious case of wanderlust! Born and raised in Italy, I have been living in many different countries for 4 years and in Cancun Mexico for 7 until in 2017 I decided to leave my office job and explore the world, with lots of bags and a camera. I have never looked back ever since. I have no specific travel goals if not just to travel because the journey is my destination.

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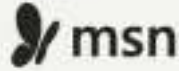
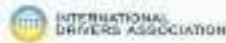
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