

Girlfriend Getaway; Casa Velas in Puerto Vallarta

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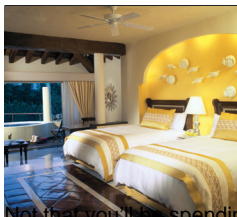
You'll feel just like a princess in paradise after flying the coop to picturesque Puerto Vallarta with a tight-knit group of gal pals. Let the girl bonding begin!



Why is it that when you grow up you stop going away with your gal pals? Somewhere between college and kids, summer vacay with the girls goes from the highlight of your social calendar to a faded memory. The easy answer is that life gets in the way—plus jobs, husbands, kids, responsibilities, blah, blah, blah—and the next thing you know the extent of your girl time is sending updates on Facebook. Yet a funny thing happens when age-old friends flock together: that fairy-tale feeling returns. You feel refreshed, rejuvenated, reconnected and even a little younger—at least that's what happens after an all-inclusive BFF escape to Casa Velas, an adults-only boutique hotel and ocean club in picturesque Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.

We all know that the most important thing about a trip with the gals is, well, the gals, but the right setting elevates the experience. Good news: Puerto Vallarta hasn't changed that much since your spring break days. Same sweet spot between the Sierra Madres and the sparkling Pacific Ocean. Same glorious sun. Same balmy 80 degrees. And Casa Velas fits in perfectly. Nestled along the beautiful Marina Vallarta golf course, the intimate and upscale resort is high on luxury. This is obvious from the minute you walk through the lobby doors. Instead of the usual check-in, you're ushered to a comfy couch where you deal with all the paperwork over a mouthwatering mocktail made with freshly squeezed guava from the garden. You're also bound to notice the service. It's perfecto (translation: consistent and genuine), and will instantly make you feel like a VIP.

Thankfully, the suites have nothing in common with your college dorm. All the rooms come with the sleeping beauty basics: Italian marble bathrooms (they're huge), lush bathrobes, mini bar and snacks stocked daily, a beach bag for carting your essentials and nightly turn-down service; rooms with private balconies, immersion pools and terraces are also on the menu. If you have more than three in your princess posse, the two-bedroom Royal Suite won't disappoint, but the true pièce de résistance is the Presidential Suite, a four-bedroom behemoth with a private balcony, a pool, a brag-worthy dining room and a fully stocked bar. The butler is optional.



Not that you'll be spending that much time in your room. Chaise lounge lizards can luxuriate by the pool, a sanctuary with water-submerged sunning stations, decadent day beds and loungers. The surrounding real estate is ample enough that you can giggle and gossip without dirty looks; and the gracious servers are only too happy to keep your cocktail glass full and your tummy from rumbling. Or jump ship to the Ocean Club—yes, you have your own private beach club at your disposal—an oceanfront oasis a quick van ride away with a private beach, an infinity pool and alfresco dining. The menu of fresh salads, scrumptious sandwiches and sushi, not to mention top-shelf drinks galore, will please any palate. No need to lift a finger; just revel in relaxation and rejoice in uninterrupted catch-up time.

Downtime is aplenty, but it's not your only option. For fit friends, there's an on-property gym with all you need to get sweaty, plus free morning yoga at Velas Vallarta or discounted rounds of golf. For your pampered pals, SPA Casa Velas has a full menu of massages, balancing body wraps and fountain-of-youth facials. There's also a weekly roster of cooking lessons, cocktail mixing and tequila tasting, not to mention karaoke and casino nights at Velas Vallarta.

But we all know the most important activity where girls are concerned is food. No doubt, you've shared a meal or 10 together, but eating at Emiliano, Casa Velas' upscale à la carte restaurant, is unforgettable. Whether ordering oven-fresh sweetbread and freshly squeezed tropical juice for breakfast or organic greens, filet mignon and vanilla crème brûlée for dinner, the chef's fine palate and eye for detail will shine through. The plates look and taste like true works of art. And in keeping with the this-is-nothing-like-an-all-inclusive-resort theme, you're not limited to on-property dining.

Velas Vallarta's gourmet and beachfront restaurants are at your disposal, gratis. Just be sure to book dinner reservations in advance through the always helpful concierge; they fill up fast.

The only complaint is that the food and service may be too good, especially considering that at some point your trip to paradise will have to come to an end. It's tough not to feel like Cinderella at the stroke of midnight as you bid farewell, but you've always got the memories—and next year's trip with the gals to look forward to.

To Learn More:

Casa Velas 866.529.8813, www.hotelcasavelas.com.