

Mexico Buyers Guide

Buying a home in Puerto Vallarta and Riviera Nayarit, explained step by step: the process, the bank trust, the real costs, and the questions worth asking before you sign.

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Start here

Foreigners buy property in Puerto Vallarta every week, safely and legally. The system is different from the one at home: a government-appointed notary runs the closing, most sales are cash, and near the coast you will hold your home through a bank trust. None of this is complicated once each piece is explained in order. That is what this guide does.

Prices in this guide are in US dollars unless noted. Puerto Vallarta listings are usually quoted in USD; closings settle in pesos at the exchange rate on the day.

The buying process, step by step

1. **Choose your agent.** Work with a licensed local agent, ideally an AMPI member, who will show you closed comparable sales, not just asking prices.
2. **Search and view.** Your agent searches the MLS (FlexMLS, run by the local AMPI chapters) and arranges showings. Good listings here can sit for months; a long time on market is the normal rhythm of this market.
3. **Make an offer.** Offers are written on a standard purchase offer form, with a stated expiry, an earnest money deposit (typically around 5 to 10 percent), and any conditions you need, such as a document review period.
4. **Acceptance and escrow.** When the offer is accepted, the deposit goes to a licensed escrow company, never to the seller or an agent directly.
5. **Due diligence.** Your agent and the notary verify the deed (escritura), confirm the seller's title, check for liens, and confirm condominium documents and HOA standing for a condo purchase.
6. **The bank trust (fideicomiso).** If the property is in the restricted zone (below), the notary arranges your trust with a Mexican bank while the paperwork proceeds.
7. **Closing at the notary.** Buyer and seller sign the escritura before the notary. The balance is paid through escrow, the deed is registered, and you get your keys and a copy of the deed.

From accepted offer to closing usually takes 30 to 45 days, longer if a new bank trust has to be created.

The fideicomiso, in plain words

Mexican law reserves direct ownership of land within 50 km of the coast (and 100 km of a border) to Mexican nationals. Foreign buyers use a **fideicomiso**: a trust held with a Mexican bank, created with a permit from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE).

- You are the trust's beneficiary. You can live in the home, rent it, renovate it, sell it, and leave it in your will.
- The trust runs for 50 years and is renewable. Renewal is a routine filing, and trusts are renewed as a matter of course.
- The bank holds title as trustee only. The bank has no claim on your home and cannot sell or encumber it.
- Setup costs roughly $2,000 to $2,500 USD including the SRE permit, and the annual trust fee is roughly $450 to $600 USD, paid to the bank.

- If the seller already has a trust, it can usually be transferred to you, which is faster and cheaper than a new one.
- Mexican citizens, and foreign buyers outside the restricted zone, take direct title instead.

What it costs to buy

The buyer pays the closing costs in Mexico. Budget for the following, calculated on the purchase price:

Acquisition tax (paid to the state)	about 2%
Notary fees	about 1%
Registration and certificates	about 0.5% to 1%
Bank trust setup and SRE permit (first year)	about $2,000 to $2,500 USD
Escrow fee	about $1,000 to $1,500 USD
Appraisal (avalúo)	a few hundred USD

All in, most buyers pay **about 4 to 6 percent** of the price in closing costs, plus the trust setup where one is needed. Your agent should give you a written estimate for your specific purchase before you sign an offer. The seller pays the real estate commission in Mexico, so buyer representation costs you nothing.

Running costs to plan for: annual property tax (predial) is low by North American standards, often a few hundred dollars a year for a condo. Add HOA fees for a condo, the annual trust fee if you hold a fideicomiso, utilities, and insurance.

Choosing an area

Zona Romántica and Emiliano Zapata

The old town south of the Cuale River: restaurants, beach clubs at Los Muertos Beach, and the liveliest street life in the city. Mostly condos. The most walkable area in Puerto Vallarta.

Centro and 5 de Diciembre

The historic centre and the hillside above it. Traditional Mexican neighbourhoods, the Malecón, and a mix of houses and smaller condo buildings, often with bay views.

Versalles

The city's foodie neighbourhood, flat and increasingly popular: newer condo buildings, excellent restaurants, and prices still below the old town.

Marina Vallarta

A planned community around the marina and golf course, close to the airport. Gated developments, larger condos and houses, a quieter pace.

Amapas and Conchas Chinas

The hillside just south of the Zona Romántica. Luxury condos and villas with the best sunset views over the bay.

Bucerías and Riviera Nayarit

Thirty minutes north, in the state of Nayarit. A long sandy beach, a small-town feel, and newer beachfront condo developments, with La Cruz and Punta Mita further up the coast.

Questions buyers ask

Can I own property in Mexico as a foreigner?

Yes. Outside the restricted zone you take direct title. In the coastal zone you hold the property through a fideicomiso, with full rights to use, rent, sell, and bequeath it.

Do I need a Mexican bank account?

No. Purchases settle through escrow in USD or pesos, and your trust fees and bills can be paid from abroad. Many owners open a Mexican account later for convenience.

How do sales usually settle, cash or financing?

Roughly 99 percent of sales in this market are cash. Mexican bank financing for foreign buyers is rare and slow; plan on cash, or on financing arranged at home against assets there.

Can I rent my home out when I am away?

Yes, subject to your condominium's rules. Short-term rentals are common in the tourist zones; your HOA bylaws govern what is allowed.

What happens when I sell?

You sell the same way you bought, before a notary. Capital gains tax applies, with exemptions and deductions that depend on your status and records; good advice at purchase time, including how the price is recorded, pays off at sale time.

Is my deposit safe?

Yes, when it is held by a licensed escrow company under a written escrow agreement, which is the standard practice this guide describes. Never pay a deposit to an individual.

Talk it through

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This guide is general information about buying property in the Puerto Vallarta area, current as of November 2026. Fees and taxes change, and every purchase has its own details; the notary assigned to your closing confirms the exact figures for your transaction. Nothing here is legal or tax advice.