

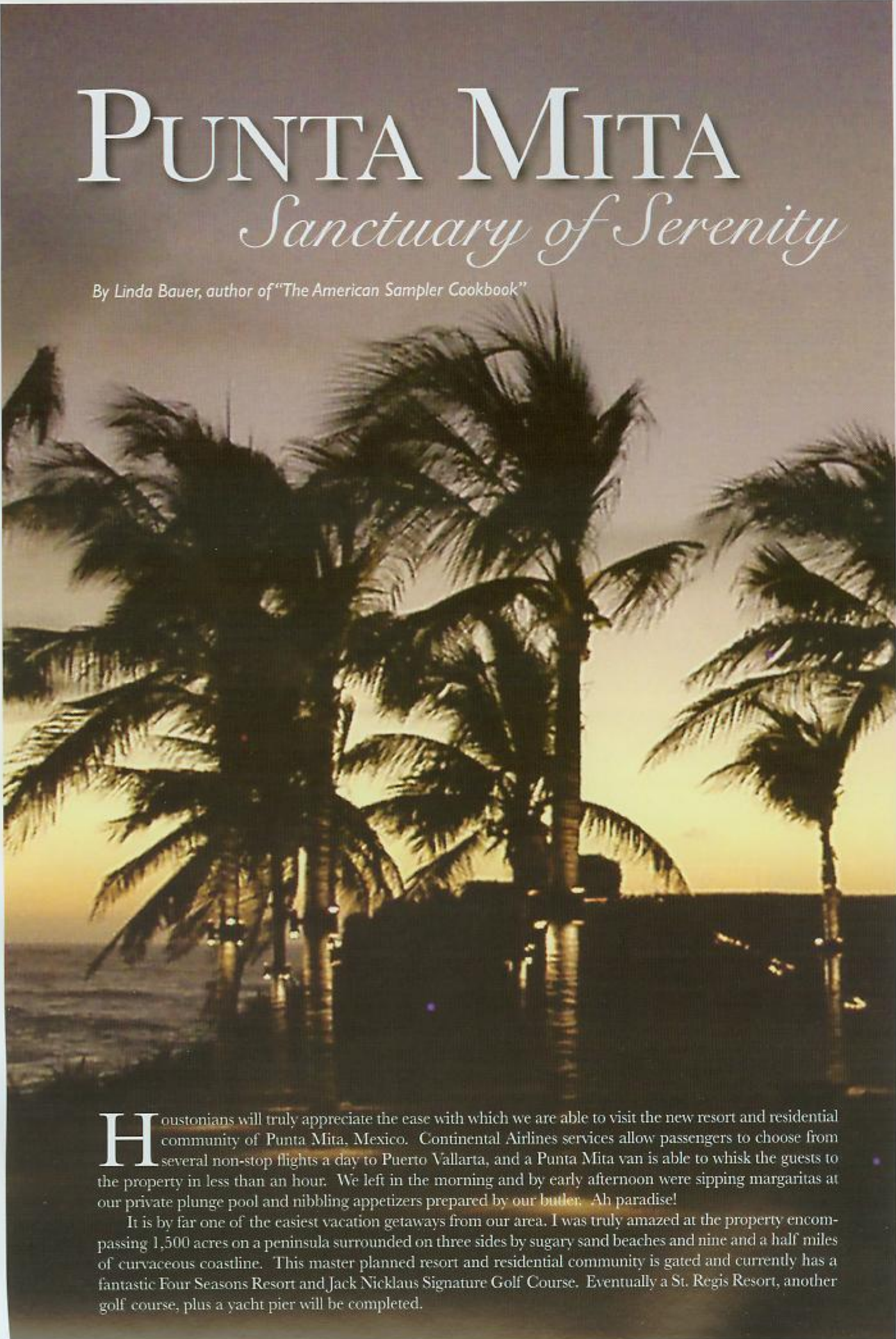
# PUNTA MITA

## *Sanctuary of Serenity*

By Linda Bauer, author of "The American Sampler Cookbook"

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Houstonians will truly appreciate the ease with which we are able to visit the new resort and residential community of Punta Mita, Mexico. Continental Airlines services allow passengers to choose from several non-stop flights a day to Puerto Vallarta, and a Punta Mita van is able to whisk the guests to the property in less than an hour. We left in the morning and by early afternoon were sipping margaritas at our private plunge pool and nibbling appetizers prepared by our butler. Ah paradise!

It is by far one of the easiest vacation getaways from our area. I was truly amazed at the property encompassing 1,500 acres on a peninsula surrounded on three sides by sugary sand beaches and nine and a half miles of curvaceous coastline. This master planned resort and residential community is gated and currently has a fantastic Four Seasons Resort and Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course. Eventually a St. Regis Resort, another golf course, plus a yacht pier will be completed.



Four Seasons rooms, suites and rental villas offer a variety of choices to rest and relax as well as many different venues to swim. Some are located near the beach and the large infinity pool that appears to drift off into the ocean is heated and home to fantastic daily water aerobics classes. These classes are a great way to gain friends and lose pounds. Maybe floating in a huge inner tube on the lazy river might be just the ticket.

This is a green resort and is full of wildlife from exotic birds to crabs to iguanas etc. The lush vegetation thrives in this climate and flowering bushes and trees abound at the villas and the resort and beach areas. Ann Armstrong, marketing director, says that any unwanted species that may harm guests are caught and transported to a friendlier environment.

Four Seasons Villas may be purchased or rented through Mita Residential and have fantastic views. Many are on the beach and the supreme one that is the choice of celebrities such as Jennifer Garner and Matt Damon is mammoth with dramatic furnishings and plenty of space for an entourage. Our villa was on the hillside overlooking the area with about seven-thousand square feet, complete with a private chef and a butler, and gourmet stocked kitchen. Four bedroom suites allow plenty of privacy and the outdoor spacious shower or indoor double shower head just beg for some good clean fun. Hammocks abound on the terraces and a fire pit lights the night if you so choose.

The night sky peppered with sparks of light was dazzling, but my favorite memory was laying in the warm Jacuzzi each evening and watching shooting stars blast across the sky. With

such a show, who needed the large screen televisions?

Equally amazing is a relaxing massage outdoors on the beach or at the spa itself. The indoor spa has a state-of-the-art fitness room and impressive amenities. I did not avail myself, as there were so many things to do simply by checking the daily program, such as kayaking, surf fishing, historical tours and the manager's cocktail parties. The only down side is the Pacific Ocean is quite cold in winter, so instead of snorkeling, most of the guests enjoyed the heated pools.

Golfers will delight in the award-winning Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course with the natural island hole. Named the "Tail of the Whale" this optional par 3 hole plays 199 yards from a mainland tee box to the island green in the Pacific. At high tide, guests may choose to take the amphibious vehicle to finish their putt. At low tide, they may just walk on the path while watching crabs and fish on their way. It is one of the most unique holes in the golfing world and the largest natural island green anywhere. Eight of the holes on this course face the Pacific Ocean and this summer a second Nicklaus course will open for additional play.

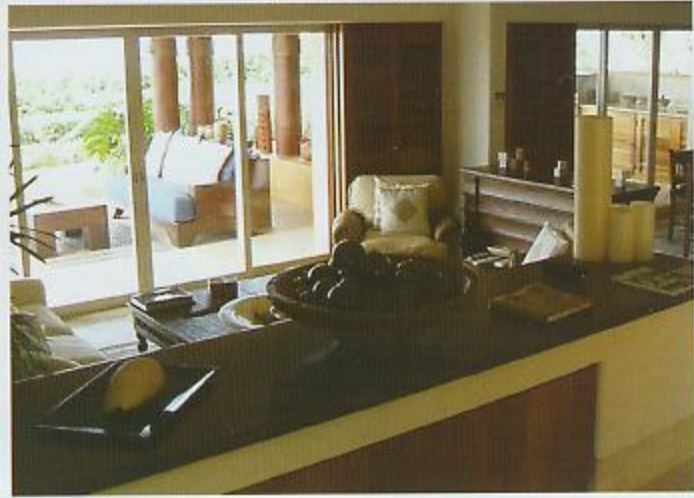
Ask the concierge to book a trip to the whale watching where our guide, who had tremendous agility, maneuvered our small craft very close to seven different Humpback whales. The trip to the Marieta Islands Marine Reserve is a way to view the Blue Footed Boobies and other exotic birds numbering about ten thousand. Snorkeling is allowed, but the reserve is only accessible by boat and be sure to ask for Rudi, who is a magnificent guide as well as a sport fisherman.

Dining choices abound with one of the favorites being Bahia Restaurant. At 11:30am, three days a week, the fresh catch of the day arrives from the local fishermen and guests are able to



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actually pick their fish and have it grilled to perfection at Bahia, the lovely beach restaurant. The Four Seasons even thought of illuminating the sea for fantastic visual effects at night. Try the seafood platter with a fine selection of ocean fresh fish and do not miss the truffle mashed potatoes. For extra-special occasions a couple may wish to have a private dinner on the Rock, where they are served on a huge outcropping over the ocean with private waiters and incomparable, romantic service. Then a fire allows them to roast marshmallows- how sweet it is!

The Residents' Beach Club, accessible only to Punta Mita residents and guests renting any of Punta Mita's rental villas or condos, has the best tortilla soup that we ever tasted and their margaritas de oro are superb, but the aguachile style scallops and shrimps are also sensational. The upscale restaurant, Aramara, is perfect for that special occasion.

Shopaholics will be enthralled with the selections at the four new boutiques offering luxury lifestyle shopping and featuring fabulous designs by Michelle Smith of Milly fame. Her vibrant

creations were inspired by her trip to Punta Mita and ICON celebrated her special collection at the Houston Neiman Marcus store. Sure to be a hit with Houstonians, the line as well as the resort are simply fantastic. Note the bright Milly cabana set pictured. La Perla, Elizabeth Hurley and Regina Donde are just some of the many other fine designers featured in the shops.

The Punta de Mita Foundation involves a community-based effort to transform local towns into healthy neighborhoods and improve public safety, provide capital, technical assistance and training by helping local non - profits. Just the kind of spirit that is so evident in the hospitable atmosphere of this superb sanctuary. Punta Mita, Mexico truly is a haven from the rest of the world.

*For more information about Punta Mita, visit [www.puntamita.com.mx](http://www.puntamita.com.mx) or call toll-free 888-647-0979. For villa rentals, contact Mita Residential, [www.mitaresidential.com](http://www.mitaresidential.com) <<http://www.mitaresidential.com/>> or call toll-free 877-561-1893.*