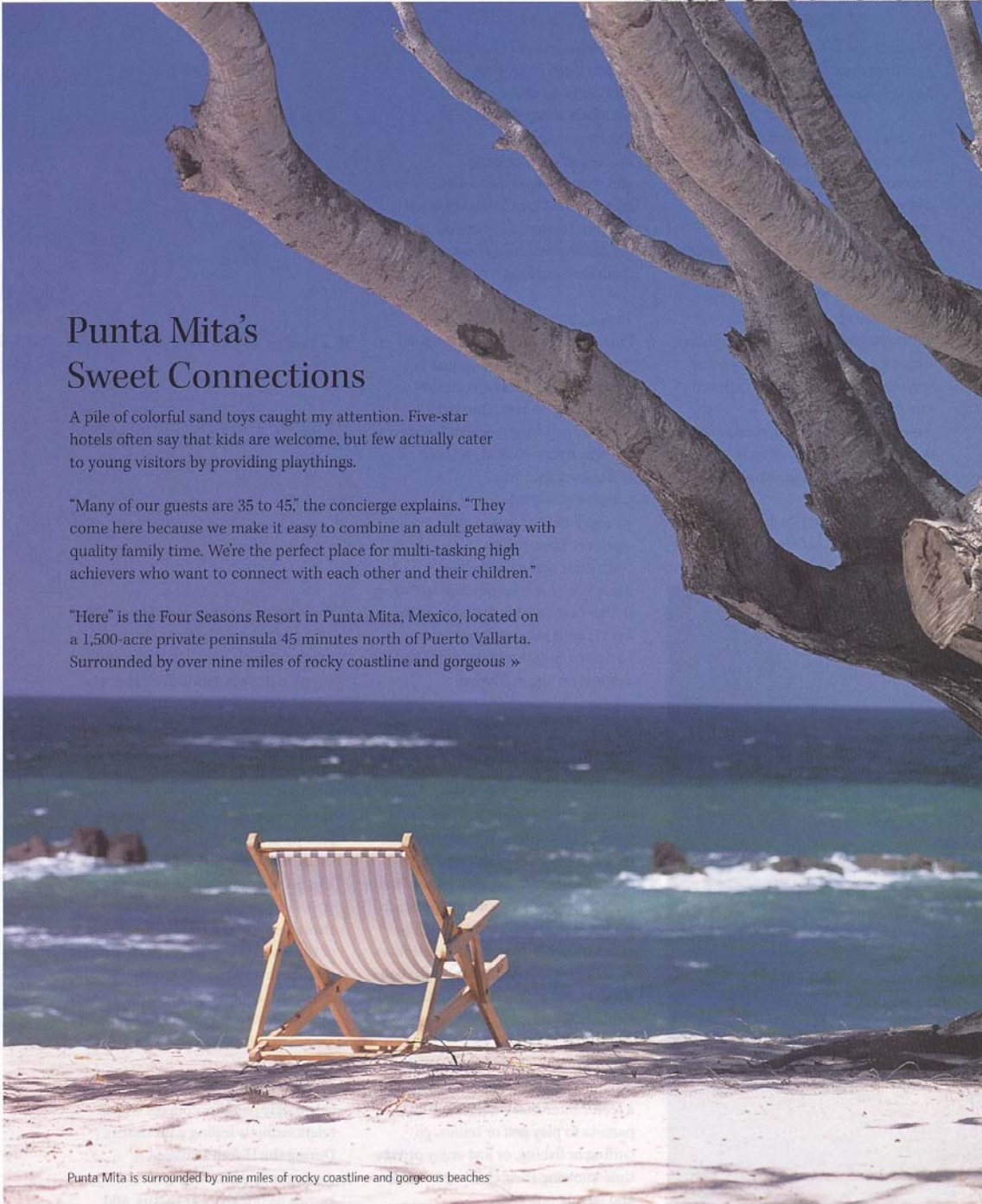


Punta Mita's Sweet Connections

A pile of colorful sand toys caught my attention. Five-star hotels often say that kids are welcome, but few actually cater to young visitors by providing playthings.

"Many of our guests are 35 to 45," the concierge explains. "They come here because we make it easy to combine an adult getaway with quality family time. We're the perfect place for multi-tasking high achievers who want to connect with each other and their children."

"Here" is the Four Seasons Resort in Punta Mita, Mexico, located on a 1,500-acre private peninsula 45 minutes north of Puerto Vallarta. Surrounded by over nine miles of rocky coastline and gorgeous »



Punta Mita is surrounded by nine miles of rocky coastline and gorgeous beaches

« beaches, the hotel is part of an exclusive master-planned resort and residential community.

In addition to the hotel, Punta Mita offers large, luxury villas and haciendas with up to nine bedrooms. These rental homes are ideal for multiple-generation family gatherings. Private pools are perfect for exuberant children and dramatic sea views lead to lingering over meals. The spacious casitas also offer guests the advantage of being able to unpack completely, and they come with the option of concierge, maid, and chef service.

(www.fourseasons.com/puntamita, www.puntamitaproperties.net, www.mitaresidential.com)

Couples enjoy private dinners on the beach in Punta Mita

On a recent visit, my husband and I stayed in Villa 12, where the master suite includes a large bathroom with indoor



and outdoor showers, a generous walk-in closet, and an inviting patio rimmed with colorful bougainvillea. The house also offers indoor and outdoor living and dining rooms and a well-equipped kitchen. Guests staying in the Four Seasons Villas can use all of the facilities at the hotel and order room service meals.

To date, 250 of the 850 planned Punta Mita homes have been built; 99 percent of these are owned by Americans or Canadians and 75 are available to rent. One Jack Nicklaus golf course, which boasts the only natural island golf hole in the Americas, was completed in 1999. A second Jack Nicklaus signature course will open soon, and a lavish St. Regis Resort is scheduled for unveiling in October. Looking further into the future, 2010 will see the opening of La Solana Resort and the first Mii Amo destination spa in Mexico.

The St. Regis will include a Jean George Restaurant, but for the moment, Bahia in the Four Seasons offers some of Punta Mita's best meals. Here, overlooking the Bay of Banderas, our fellow diners included couples on their own and those enjoying a meal with their children. After dinner, a few of the dads played with the kids on the beach while the moms chatted nearby. The resort supports these sweet connections by providing complimentary high chairs, strollers, and a wide range of infant and toddler necessities.

In addition, the Kids for All Seasons program for children ages 5 to 12 and a teen center make it possible for parents to play golf or tennis, go surfing or fishing, or just enjoy private time knowing their children are safe and having fun.



From Bahia we could see The Rock, a lofty promontory between two beaches where each night one couple enjoys a private candlelit dinner at a table for two. What could be more romantic than a gourmet repast accompanied by sea breezes and waves crashing on the coast below? Nothing — except maybe the couple's watsu massage performed under a canopy of stars in the heated water of the adults-only Tamai pool complex. The 50-minute treatment includes a series of flowing movements and stretches, and the womb-like comfort of the warm water encourages deep relaxation and the release of emotions. Following this experience, a multi-course seafood dinner is butler-served in a secluded poolside cabaña.

The Apuane Spa also offers "a cure for the prickly pair" for couples whose relationship is feeling a bit thorny. During the Hakali Massage, a meringue made from nopal, also known as prickly pear cactus, and



Four Seasons Punta Mita



Shops in Sayulita offer high-quality handicrafts

pulque, from the agave plant, is applied to the body using a combination of massage techniques. These two ancient Mexican ingredients relax and rejuvenate the body while the stroke pattern promotes healing and detoxifying. It was tempting to stay at Punta Mita 24/7, but curiosity prevailed, and we

eventually made two sorties into the surrounding area.

The first was to snorkel around Las Marietas Islands, a national park inhabited by brown and blue-footed boobies and a plethora of frigate birds. While the fish life wasn't spectacular, it was fun to swim through caves and discover private beaches. Our great

bonus was the close sighting of three magnificent humpback whales.

Jack Nicol
golf cc

Our second excursion was to Sayulita, a cute beach town 20 minutes north of Punta Mita. Here, several shops offer high-quality handicrafts and jewelry, and folks ride horses on the beach, surf, snorkel, and play in the sand. Sayulita is also a popular off-the-path destination for hiking and jungle canopy tours.

Back at the Four Seasons, we floated around the Lazy River pool on inner tubes and attended a talk on tequila at the Cultural Center. At the end of the day, a hush descended as scattered couples and families watched the sun slip silently into the ocean beyond the free-form infinity pool. It was spectacular, but most memorable was the sight of a dad and his young daughter in the water at the far side of the pool also watching the display — he with a glass in hand and she with a sippy cup.

Regardless of what the dictionary says, to me, Punta Mita will always mean "place of sweet connections."

— Elizabeth Hansen, photos by Adams/ Hansen Stock Photos and courtesy of Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita and Punta Mita Properties