

MEXICO

Fiesta Americana on point in Puerto Vallarta

By Eric Moya

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The Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta resort, which opened in 1980, has made several upgrades recently.

For a resort nearing its 40th year in operation, the Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta is looking good. It was evident from the moment I checked in and gazed upward at the lobby's piece de resistance: a soaring palapa thatched roof (the second largest in Puerto Vallarta, I was told),

which has been a trademark of the resort since its opening in 1980.

Angel Sanchez, the resort's social media manager, told me during a property tour that the palapa was painstakingly rebuilt about four years ago. Apparently Gaston Azcarraga Tamayo, founder of parent company Grupo Posadas, is a big fan, and thus there was practically no chance that the rebuilt roof would use an alternative material that would be easier to install and maintain.

That roof came to encapsulate my feelings about the Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta, a property that has stayed true to its roots. After all, those looking for a more contemporary vibe in Puerto Vallarta certainly have options: for example, Grupo Posadas' very own, adults-only Grand Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta, which opened in 2015 about a half-hour drive south.

Still, the 291-room Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta is not some stuck-in-time relic. Along with general repairs and upkeep, the property continually rolls out upgrades to offer guests the expected modern amenities.

For example, the property started life as a European Plan property before switching to an all-inclusive model in 2013, and today, guests have access to five a la carte restaurants. I had dinner at the Italian venue, L'Isola, on my first night, sampling grilled shrimp wrapped in prosciutto. The next night I dined at Tiantang, which serves Thai, Indian and Chinese dishes as well as sushi. I opted for shrimp pad thai and a spicy tuna roll.

Breakfast was at the recently renovated Chulavista, an international/Mexican buffet venue, perfect for those guests who might want pozole along with pancakes or a side of chilaquiles with their corn flakes (I'm among them).

A lunch highlight was the beachfront La Cevicheria, which in addition to its namesake ceviches serves grilled items and Mexican seafood classics. I

ordered Baja-style shrimp tacos and, as a suite guest, was entitled to seating closest to the beach. (This might not be ideal for those who'd rather avoid sales pitches from the souvenir vendors walking past, though most of them weren't especially pushy.)



The living room of one of the resort's presidential suites, which can accommodate up to six guests. Photo Credit: TW Photo by Eric Moya

Of course, I could have opted for 24-hour room service in my presidential suite, measuring nearly 2,600 square feet and featuring two bathrooms; a living room with widescreen TV; a bedroom with an exceptionally comfortable, king-size bed (and another widescreen TV); and enough balcony space to rival many standard guestrooms. The suite can be furnished with rollaway beds to accommodate up to six guests.

It was a lot of space for one guest, but I did try to make the most of it, having lunch one afternoon at the eight-seat alfresco dining table offering views of old Puerto Vallarta and the Bay of Banderas. At night, the suite's heavy, engraved wood doors and thick stucco walls no doubt helped to keep noise to

a minimum; in fact, I can't recall hearing much of anything save for the crashing waves nine stories below.

Similarly serene is the Nakawe Spa, where I enjoyed an hourlong deep-tissue massage. Facilities include seven treatment rooms (including a couples room with private hot tub), a sauna and a relaxation pool.



The relaxation pool at the Nakawe Spa at the Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta.

In my suite and elsewhere on property, I was pleasantly surprised by the robust WiFi. According to Sanchez, it was upgraded this year to accommodate the demands of video streaming and smart TVs. (During my hosted weekend stay, I was able to download huge photos and log on to the servers at Travel Weekly to edit some articles – I hope your clients are considerably less productive, but I imagine Netflix will work fine.)

Another nod to the modern vacationer is the rooftop Sonne Club, where guests can enjoy specialty cocktails and other refreshments while taking in bay views from the infinity pool or one of nine cabanas, which are equipped with daybeds, 42-inch flat-screen TVs and minibars. Access to the Sonne Club

is complimentary for guests of the eighth and ninth floors, while other guests can pay about \$10 for admission.

The Sonne Club was part of a recent round of renovations, but the work continues. According to a Fiesta Americana representative, the property recently completed refurbishments to rooms on the seventh and eighth floors, and renovations of ninth-floor guestrooms are underway; lobby renovations will follow soon thereafter.

It's all business as usual for this property, where continual improvements are key to keeping up with Puerto Vallarta's evolving hotel scene. Sanchez told me that about a third of the resort's clientele are return guests, some of whom stay there two or three times a year. That sort of loyalty leads me to believe that whatever hospitality trends make their way to Puerto Vallarta, there will always be a place for the Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta, thanks to its solid foundation — and the palapa overhead.

The Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta is a quick drive from the airport (my ride took less than 10 minutes in Friday night traffic) and about two miles from downtown Puerto Vallarta (cab rides averaged about \$6).

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