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COVID-Safe In Careyes: Mexico's Elite Coastal Resort Doubles As Pandemic-Era Haven For Biz Creatives

By Malina Saval ▾



According to the U.S. State Dept., about 1.5 million Americans live in [Mexico](#), with more than 88,000 residing in Jalisco, a Mexican state bordering the Pacific Ocean. Careyes, a luxury resort community perched along Jalisco's southern coast has drawn elite expats and travelers since the late 1960s —Mick Jagger, Francis Ford Coppola and Uma Thurman have all visited — and that trend upticked this past year as COVID-19 reared its ugly head and the United States devolved into a fiery petri dish of viral plague.

In the entertainment industry in particular, those privileged enough to do so left the U.S. behind and made their way to their vacation homes in Careyes, a “protected community” where, thanks to strict quarantine rules, ample testing and a mandatory bracelet system marking individuals as COVID-negative, the pandemic made nary a dent.

“The Careyes community has grown even closer as many homeowners are choosing to spend more time in Careyes for many months at a time versus just for holidays,” says Filippo Brignone, Careyes Foundation president, whose father, Gian Franco, founded the secluded resort town in 1968.

“The community has also banded together to make sure everyone stays healthy.”

Home to the annual ArteCareyes Film and Arts Festival, Careyes, nestled between the emerald sea and a lush expanse of jungle, has not only served as a refuge from COVID-19, but a source of inspiration for those in the film biz.

Bill Johnson, L.A.-based co-founder of Lotus Entertainment and producer of such projects as Andrew Levitas' "Minamata" and the upcoming biopic "Nyad," starring Annette Bening as the legendary marathon swimmer, has been coming to Careyes for the past 20-some years.

"The community is really growing in consciousness right now," Johnson says. "The people here are focused on the sustainability and wellness of the planet. And I find that very inspiring."

Leah Forester, Johnson's wife and a sound healer-cum-musician, credits Careyes' "quirky principles and esthetic of surrealism" with luring artists savoring a sense of spiritual connection to the earth.

"The Careyes lifestyle just naturally lends itself to developing one's creativity," says Forester, who's renovating Casa la Huerta, the five-bedroom villa she and Johnson recently purchased.

"There is a tangible exhale of spirit and mind that comes with Careyes," says Raven Kauffman, a designer and artisan who fabricated red-carpet pieces such as the Met Gala headpiece worn by Gemma Chan and the chrome breastplate Gwyneth Paltrow donned for the cover of Harper's Bazaar.

“Upon arriving at the gates, the immersion in the lush dense foliage of the jungle, the sounds of the wildlife and other environmental colors, the smells are transformational,” Kauffman continues. “Iridescent beetles can be spotted in the night. The way the sky and sea combine in an ombré of blues. Natural treasures abound, from snake skeletons to sea sponges. The slowness here allows me to savor the beauty of life and death of nature.”

Kauffman is currently collaborating with Forester on the redesign of Casa la Huerta.

“For the La Huerta redesign, I am conjuring a garden of earthly delights,” she says. “For me, that is what Careyes embodies. Every sense is ignited there. Every pleasure spot activated. Vibrant flowering trees; deep green leaves the size of elephant ears; mangos weighing the branches. It’s intoxicating. Careyes is like passing into another dimension. I traveled extensively around the world, yet I have never been as drawn to a place as intensely as I am to Careyes. I am not exaggerating that it has changed my life — my energy, the lens through which I view the world. Careyes has deepened my power and voice as a creative.”

For Forester, Careyes has functioned as a pandemic escape, but it is also a place, a sanctuary, that will forever feel like home.

“This is a community that made a conscious effort to make sure that we were all safe and could live in relative normalcy,” she says. “This is what is so beautiful about Careyes. It’s a family.”