

Los Muertos Beach

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by Carlos Munguia Fregoso Los Muertos Beach is the most popular beach in Puerto Vallarta. Up until the 1960's, it was the favorite place of the families of Vallarta for their Sunday picnics. They would gather in the shade of a palm-frond lean-to and eat the tacos they had brought from home in straw baskets. The children would play in the shallows of the bay's crystalline water under the ever vigilant eyes of their parents who whiled away the long, lazy afternoons chatting with friends on the beach. During those years, instead of the unpleasant odors of gasoline and sun-tan lotion, the beach was fragrant with the smells of salt air breezes and fish-on-a-stick grilling over an open fire.

At the end of the 1950's an attempt was made to change the name of Los Muertos Beach to something more attractive to tourists. The suggested names were Las Delicias and Playa del Sol but neither name met with success and to this day it continues to be Los Muertos Beach. Many people ask about the origin of the name of the beach, a name that, oddly enough, native Vallartans associate with happy childhood memories, not funereal events.

According to Dona Margarita Mantecon de Garza, the name precedes the founding of

the Las Penas Ranch. In her book, *The First Centennial of Puerto Vallarta*, she states that this was the place where the gold and silver ore was brought from the Cuale Mines by mule drivers to be loaded on to ships. On one occasion, when the ship's crew was preparing to move the ore from the beach to the waiting ship, they were set upon by a band of indians who slaughtered the sailors with machetes and left the beach covered with the unburied dead bodies. It was several days later that some mule drivers arrived, found the dead sailors and buried them right there on the beach. Ever since then the beach has been known as Los Muertos Beach.

Another version claims that pirates or smugglers set up an ambush and, when the ore-laden mule drivers appeared, they killed them and stole the gold they were transporting.

The hypothesis that is probably closest to the truth is the one put forth by several archaeologists such as Dr. Isabel Kelly, who visited the site in 1938, and, more recently, Dr. Joseph Mountjoy. They believe that, originally, the area surrounding Los Muertos Beach was an Indian burial ground and when the first settlers began to build their palapa huts there, they dug up human bones and ceramic shards. As further confirmation of this theory, in 1960, when the foundation for the Marsol Hotel was being dug, a soapstone vase was uncovered. The vase could have been a funeral offering to an important person.

Even Dona Margarita confirms this theory in her book when she mentions that one afternoon Don Gudalupe Sanchez and his brothers went to Los Muertos Beach and "upon arrival they quickly began to excavate and found human remains, idols and gold (?), but they ran away when they heard noises and whistling sounds coming from the bushes and they thought that it was the Indians that guarded their buried treasures".

Whatever the reason, the beach continues to be called Los Muertos, and even though it has undergone many changes in the last 30 years, it continues to be the favorite.