

by Janice Mucalov

# NUEVO A WHALE OF A TIME Vallarta

“**W**atching humpback whales is the ultimate wildlife experience,” exclaimed Vallarta Adventures’ guide Nicky Ransone, as we watched humpbacks put on a magnificent show in Mexico’s Bay of Banderas fronting Nuevo Vallarta (the resort area beside Puerto Vallarta).

All eyes were on the water’s surface, watching three great grayish-black mammals heave up out of the sea and spew 10-foot high plumes of white spray and air.

One whale rose so close to our 30-passenger Zodiac raft, you could hear its explosive, primordial gushes as it exhaled. Visible on its head were rounded bumpy knobs peculiar to humpbacks.

When the whales finally dove down, they waved their tails slowly as if in a farewell salute.

## Other Wildlife

Banderas Bay is a nature lover’s delight. Bottlenose dolphins, seven of the eight species of sea turtles, giant manta rays with 12-foot wing spans, a countless variety of big game and reef fish, 250 bird species, and of course, humpback whales, all frolic in the bay.

From May to November, sea turtles take center stage. That’s when endangered Olive Ridley turtles (the smallest known sea turtles) come to lay their eggs on the beaches around Nuevo Vallarta.

In winter, the spotlight shifts to whales. The humpbacks are seen between December and early April, when up to 300 of the north Pacific population migrates to the warm waters of the bay to mate and later give birth.

Nuzzling up to Nuevo Vallarta’s long wide stretch of beach, the 267-suite,

all-inclusive Grand Velas All Suites & Spa Resort recently snagged AAA’s Five-Diamond award for the third consecutive year.

Service is exceptional. Whether sunning by the three-tiered infinity pool, joining a free kayaking tour or indulging in 24-hour room service, the attentive staff goes out of its way to cater to you.

It takes some convincing, then, to leave the resort. But whale watching shouldn’t be missed.

During our morning expedition, we

shadowed at least 15 different whales. And we saw them fluke, slap the water with their tails, spy hop and head slap, where they lunge head-first out of the water and pound their massive heads on the water’s surface.

We oohed and aahed. Like any good vacation sport, whale watching is addictive. ■

## Here’s the value!

Receive up to \$400 air credit at All-Inclusive Vallarta Palace and kids under 17 stay, play and eat free.

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