



CRUISING By Chloe Ernst

into the marina in La Cruz

The 60-foot yacht easily sidles back to the dock, passing a stand-up paddle boarder and the local fishing wharf on the way.

While Banderas Bay excursions have long been offered on the small panga fishing boats, traveling by yacht presents a more leisurely option.

Marina Riviera Nayarit opened in 2007, staking a claim as one of the largest and deepest on Mexico's Pacific coast. The marina can accommodate vessels of up to 400 feet. Luxury yachts, cigarette-style speedboats, and fishing vessels fill the slips.

But for those visitors without their own boat, the marina means greater options in Nayarit for sailing trips, surfing charters, and fishing excursions.

"There are lots of tours," says Rafael Alcántara Duarte, the harbor master at the

marina. In part, it's the marina's services—a fuel dock, 150-ton boat lift, and pump station, among others—that have attracted new tour operators to the marina.

In nearby Sayulita, for example, two companies offer charters and tours out of La Cruz. Riviera Nayarit Magical Tours and Sayulita Adventures both transport passengers from the popular vacation town to La Cruz by taxi. Taking about 30 minutes, the trip to the marina is far more appealing than battling traffic into Puerto Vallarta.

The marina is also a short distance from luxury resorts in Punta de Mita and the markets in Bucerias. Both communities are packed with hotels and beaches, as well as visitors who are eager to experience Banderas Bay.

While the open-topped tour boats are often less expensive, most yacht tours

provide an on-board bathroom. The boat railings ramp up the safety for those traveling with children. Embarking from a dock provides smoother access than a beach launch, and makes it easier to find your sea legs.

Alcántara talks of fostering community spirit on Banderas Bay, where he has lived for more than 20 years. This year, some of those docked at the marina added their dinghies to the annual parade of local pangas from La Cruz to Bucerias.

"That's what the people like: they like to be in real Mexico and talk to real Mexicans," he says.

As the trimaran cuts along the resort-dotted Punta de Mita coast, the distinct dorsal fins of two humpback whales break the surface.



Banderas Bay has wonderful sailing conditions, a variety of great destinations within less than 15 miles, and a great city - Puerto Vallarta - that has just about everything you could need.