



# I Never Wanted to Visit Mexico Until I Came to This Region and Never Wanted to Leave

Fodor's

Natasha Nyanin | December 17, 2021

I'd never considered Mexico a destination until the pandemic left me no choice. Why did I wait so long?

I live in the United States and have visited a great many countries, but until this year, I'd never been to Mexico: a neighboring country. In fact, I'd never even once considered a

trip to this vacation destination beloved by residents of the United States. I imagine Mexico is a magnet for U.S.-dwellers as it evokes a certain feeling of far-flungness, which belies its relative proximity to the U.S. And yet, for all its closeness and the recent ubiquity of Tulum on my Instagram feed, Mexico was not a destination that ever piqued my interest as far as the idea of a luxury-holiday-that-goes-beyond-plush-terry-cloth-robos-and-chilled-margaritas is concerned.

All of that changed when the shape-shifting storm of the pandemic rendered Mexico one of my only fathomable options for travel. As they say, limitation breeds creativity, and with the new fetters fastened around my penchant for journeying, I was determined to search for a part of this country in the southern portion of the North American continent that would offer me a rarefied experience, an immersion that married comfort with a sense of numinousness that I find so alluring and that has carried me across the cinnamon sands of the Sahara and through the dense Ecuadorian cloud forest.

In travel, I tend to seek sublimity in its truest sense in the discourse of aesthetics, which is defined as “the quality of greatness... greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation.” More specifically, I search for what German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer described as the “Fullest Feeling of Sublime”—situations in which pleasure is derived from the realization of the “Immensity of Universe’s extent or duration,” resulting in an implicit and concurrent understanding by the observer of their own nothingness (in contrast with the vastness of our planet and universe) and oneness with Nature.” The fallacy in my thinking was that I could only find this fullness of feeling a great distance from home. Sometimes otherworldly is right next door and it was precisely this combination of sublime, wild, overpowering natural beauty—and manicured hospitality—that I found on the Costalegre in Mexico’s Pacific coastal state of Jalisco.

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I am not sure anymore how I found Jalisco—or perhaps Jalisco found me. The “discovery” was probably through some providence and grace of the oracular Instagram algorithm. Whatever or however Jalisco, the Mexican state known as the birthplace of Mariachi and the source of Tequila (amongst several other cultural signposts now synonymous with the country itself), flew into my ken, it was one particular destination that sealed the deal for me, luring me in with its promise of eco-tourism, lush vegetation, contrasting landscapes, and wellness: that place is Cuixmala.

I would never deign to describe Cuixmala as a resort. It is so much more than that. Originally built as the vacation home of billionaire Sir James Goldsmith, the grand Casa Quixmala and its surrounding bungalows and casitas sit on a 30,000-acre biosphere at the edge of the Costalegre. Here the savage Pacific dances like a dervish right into the mouth of the jungle: a tango of topographies that would stop “stout Cortez” himself dead in his tracks. If it was the sublime I was searching for, I had found it.



At Cuixmala, the farrago of landscapes that make up Jalisco's Costalegre seamlessly commingles: the sea climbs into pal groves that roll into sprawling savannahs that in turn dissolve into lagoons. With three restaurants, a 5,000-acre biodynamic farm, 26 horses at the Caballerizas, three private wild beaches, several zebra and eland (not to mention 270 species of birds populating the sky, and 150 ongoing research projects) my time at Cuixmala was the furthest thing from travel by the numbers. The Moorish-influenced rooms at Casa Cuixmala are works of punctilious curation, a certain design syncretism—from Klismos chairs studded by with inlaid bone à la Morrocaïne at inbuilt desks to brightly hued velvet banquetts upholstered by Geraldine de Caraman—that culminates spaces worthy of worship.

I spent my dawns watching, from the veranda of my cathedralesque alabaster Horse Suite at Casa Cuixmala, dense fog spit out an orb of fire as the sun's rays illuminated seemingly a ceaseless défilé of treetops. By midday, I was gliding across the still lagoon—vivified by the occasional sighting of a crocodile at rest—by boat as flocks of avian life choreographed dalliances with the flora. My late afternoons were affairs of exploration on horseback after having napped to the ruthless roar of pacific waves on the secluded playa Escondida. At dusk, it was not unusual to release just-hatched turtles onto the grainy shore, waiting for the sea to swoop in to envelop them in its graceful might. And by nightfall, I was spent silently sitting at the edge of the ocean watching the dark sky come alive with stars, strewn like jewels sewn into stygian velvet.

If Cuixmala sounds out of this world, it is because it is. Yet, the down-to-earth staff, led by manager Efrain, are actually what give Cuixmala its peculiar anima. No request seemed out of the ordinary, not even asking for a hot water bottle at midnight that required a journey to the nearest pueblo. Speaking of the soul, Cuixmala does focus much of its attention on wellness. Besides taking a yoga class from resident specialist Michaela Beach, I had the opportunity to experience both sound and RASHA healing, the latter which is a scalar-plasma-sound technology consisting of frequency generating software that harmonizes the autonomic nervous system by synthesizing the left and right hemispheres of the brain to relieve stressors. Did I depart feeling healed? It is hard to say. What does healing feel like? I know that I left changed; inoculated by the imprint of this part of the earth, for the near future at least, against the humdrumness of New York pandemic life.

I spent a final few days at Cuixmala's sister property, Hacienda de San Antonio, in the neighboring state of Colima. The hacienda is a pink and palatial 120-year-old edifice, which owner Alix Marcacinni (daughter of the late Sir James Goldsmith) worked closely with Filipe de Lencastre to renovate. Think acres of coffee plants, bamboo-lined avenues, and



mountainous vistas all planted under the watchful eye of the active Colima Volcano, which springs out of the earth in the distance. The hacienda is perhaps one of the most refined places in which I have ever stayed and I won't soon forget my equestrian excursion through the Mexican highlands with Audi, our guide, during which we picked and ate wild berries, rode by a waterfall, and ended on the banks of a lake where an exquisite haute-picnic awaited us. What better way to work off our luncheon than paddleboarding on the entirely unpeopled lake?



My visit to Cuixmala and Hacienda de San Antonio was the Mexican dream I didn't even know I had been nursing. Finally disabused of the myth that I could only find sublimity far away from home (and by now such an ardent believer in chilaquiles— a Mexican breakfast dish consisting of corn tortillas cut into quarters and lightly fried with salsa and topped with a protein such as eggs or chicken) that I was not ready to let Mexico go just yet, I opted to extend my layover in Mexico City on my return into a full-blown week of immersion.

CDMX is not exactly what one might describe as far-from-the-madding-crowd, which was what I sought out of this trip—but once at my hotel, the three-bedroom only La Valise in the romantic Roma Norte *quartier* (for which Alfonso Cuarón's Oscar-winning film *Roma* is named), it certainly felt that way. I stayed in the El Patio suite, which features a swinging hammock on the back patio as well as a balcony that overlooks tree-fringed Tonalá street. The streets of Roma are indeed a marvel in that they seem to lead, inexorably, to the sense of a time far gone, drumming up a certain nostalgia for a time I have never even known. And La Valise does well not to interrupt the reverie: though appointed in a modern fashion and teeming with contemporary art and flea market treasures alike, one still feels the delight of age and history within its walls, and certainly from beyond its windows.



Sublimity is not only to be found in wild landscapes, it would seem, but on the quixotic streets of a new-to-me town, unearthing its singular art scene, for example, and mining its culinary gems, the most brilliant of all which must be Elena Reygadas' Rosetta. Rosetta is a light-laden oasis of a restaurant where the chef takes Italian staples—like tagliolini with lobster, cherry tomatoes, and broad beans—and reimagines them with a Mexican twist, in a manner that is at once inventive *and* approachable. So transportative was my first bite into her braised short ribs and polenta that I returned to the restaurant on three more occasions.

I can't say that my visit to Mexico has cured me of my pathological craving for "far away" worlds, but what is distance if not relative? And what is far away, if not a feeling? Sometimes far away is right next door. I certainly found the resonance of that truth in Jalisco and beyond in Mexico.