

PENTA

EXPERIENCE

Great Escapes: Guadalajara Offers Culture, Tequila, Mariachi, and More

By **Leila Najafi** Dec. 17, 2021 2:45 pm ET



Guadalajara is Mexico's second-largest city and a mecca for traditional Mexican culture.
Roman Lopez, Unsplash

The emerald green coastline of Cabo San Lucas and idyllic beach towns dotted with all-inclusive resorts and luxury villas are what most people conjure up when they think of Mexico. But a quick 45-minute flight east of well-trodden Puerto Vallarta lies Guadalajara, Mexico's hub for culture—a blend of old world charm and modern-day living.

Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city and a mecca for traditional Mexican culture—both tequila and birria were born in the state of Jalisco—is known for its vibrant art scene, culinary delights, colonial architecture, and is often considered quintessential Mexico.

The metropolitan city is split up into five municipalities—Guadalajara Metropolitan, Tlajomulco, Tlaquepaque, Tonalá, and Zapopan—and six designated “Magical Towns” less than two hours away. There is plenty to see, eat, and do in this city so we've put together a guide to explore the town of Guadalajara and its Mexican heritage.

STAY

The best place to stay is either in the city's historic center, which provides easy access to many of the architectural monuments and cultural attractions, or the trendy Zapopan district. Quinta Real, a member of the Preferred Hotels & Resorts, offers spacious suite-style accommodations furnished with antique-style decor in an ivy-covered stone building reminiscent of colonial era haciendas.

For more contemporary accommodations, the design-focused Hotel Demetria in Lafayette is a chic boutique hotel with an on-site art gallery. Trendy restaurants and landmarks are all within walking distance from the urban hotel but the rooftop pool with city views will also give you a reason to relax.



Hotel Solar de las Animas.
Courtesy Hotel Solar de las Animas

EAT & DRINK

Guadalajara often gets overshadowed by its big sister, Mexico City, but there are plenty of top-notch restaurants here that celebrate both traditional Mexican cuisine and global fare. A good place to start the food adventure is with a cold Tejuino, a fermented corn-based beverage made with cane sugar and lime juice, frequently sold at roadside vendors.

Spend some time in the hip Colonia Lafayette neighborhood and gawk at the beautiful architecture of the homes that embody both a modern and traditional motif. There, you will find Bruna, an open-air experiential restaurant and art gallery that puts a twist on contemporary dishes such as beef wellington served with mole and seafood flautas stuffed with shrimp, octopus, and sole fish. But most impressive is the menu of inventive cocktails that come with extraordinary presentations that are part chemistry experiment and part cocktail wizardry.

For more libations, around the corner, Fat Charlie is a cool speakeasy cocktail bar that uses seasonal ingredients for its menu of craft cocktails. (Hint: You can snag a reservation on their Facebook page).

Named as one of Latin America's Best Restaurants, Alcalde, helmed by Noma alum chef Paco Ruano, features a small but mighty a la carte menu that celebrates local flavors and ingredients infused with the chef's European influences. Opt for the nine-course tasting menu where chef Ruano gets creative and shows off his culinary skills.

For fresh seafood, there is Beluga Oyster Bar, an airy upscale restaurant with a fun vibe and outstanding service. The menu is a laundry list of raw seafood dishes and hot plates such as the sashimi toro, Peruvian ceviche, and grilled oysters, but don't miss the melt-in-your-mouth Wagyu beef that the servers may (or may not) try to feed you. Head to Nadim Rooftop for a nightcap at a trendy lounge with interiors that resemble a greenhouse with pretty floral walls and hanging plants. Take in spectacular views of the skyline and dance to the tunes of a DJ playing until the wee hours of the night.

EXPLORE



Jose Cuervo Express is a wagon outfitted with wood panels, luxurious interiors, and an open bar stocked with premium tequila.

Jose Cuervo Express

The best place to immerse yourself in Guadalajara's culture is in the city center at Plaza de Armas. It's a crowded historic square with verdant trees, ornate benches, and an Art Nouveau bandstand in the middle of the square. Walk inside the twin-towered Guadalajara Cathedral, a blend of Gothic and neo-classical influences, and one of the city's most iconic landmarks.

Tequila drinkers will want to venture off an hour away from Guadalajara to the "Magical Town of Tequila," and the birthplace of the iconic spirit. Skip the car ride and hop on the adults-only tequila train, formally known as Jose Cuervo Express. Reserve a seat on the new elite wagon outfitted with wood panels, luxurious interiors, and an open bar

stocked with premium tequila including the small-batch Reserva de la Familia—Jose Cuervo's crown jewel—Maestro Dobel, and 1800 among other spirits.

The charming town is home to 20 distilleries including the oldest in Latin America, La Rojeña which is in the heart of Tequila across the street from the 93-room Hotel Solar de las Animas, one of the few upscale hotels in the area.

Spend the afternoon in Tlaquepaque, an artistic colonial neighborhood filled with galleries, boutiques, and restaurants. Take a stroll along Calle Independencia, a pedestrian-only cobblestone street, and enjoy the sound of live mariachi bands playing in the background. The walkway is adorned with playful statues and colorful artisanal shops chock-full of handmade pottery, leather goods, and jewelry. Look for a store called Del Corazon de la Tierra which showcases indigenous art and other handmade crafts and textiles.

For more Mexican goods and authentic cuisine head to the three-story Mercado Libertad, the largest indoor market in Latin America also known as Mercado San Juan de Dios. There, you will find a hodgepodge of tightly crammed stalls that sell everything from toys and sandals to Mexican spices and tortas.