



## GUADALAJARA IS A SWEET SURPRISE

Athena Lucero | [Return](#)

GUADALAJARA, MEXICO — My guide Gus Melor and I are thoroughly entertained watching Roberto, a diminutive but energetic gardener, move like a ninja photographer while taking our picture at the huge Minerva roundabout.

“Roberto also looks out for tourists crossing the street,” says Melor. Indeed, the proud caretaker of La Minerva exhibits the friendliness of the Tapatios,

as people from Guadalajara are called.

Inaugurated in 1956, the dramatic monument honours the Roman goddess of wisdom, war, trade and the arts (her Greek counterpart is Athena).

Minerva's powerful presence at the entrance to Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city and the capital of the state of Jalisco, is a great photo op — if you can get across the swirling traffic.

A block away from Minerva we see Los Arcos (The Arches) erected in 1942 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Guadalajara's founding in 1532. Its neo-classical style models the triumphal arches around Europe.

On one side an inscription reads, "Guadalajara, a hospitable city," and on the other side, "A pleasant stay is a guarantee of return."



*Above:* Mexico's second largest city is a place filled with lots of regal squares like Plaza de la Liberacion.

It doesn't take long for my husband and I to see why vibrant Guadalajara is considered Mexico's most culturally rich city and Latin America's social centre. After all, it hosts the world's largest Spanish language book fair, is the birthplace of tequila — Mexico's potent liquor made from the indigenous blue agave plant — and where the country's mariachi music first started. Guadalajara is also home to "charrería", Mexico's knight-errant equestrian traditions. In the high-tech age, this metropolis of 7.5 million inhabitants adds another feather in its cap as the Silicon Valley of Latin America that produces and attracts top IT talent from around the world.

We see the IT influence in Providencia, the city's financial district where the cerebral energy is palpable as we exit the elevator on our way to the rooftop of a modern high rise. Home to software companies and tech startups, the building is part of the stylish open-air Punto Sao Paulo Mall complex that includes upscale shopping, apartments, hotels and a serious culinary corridor. Here, young and creative engineers think out of the box while producing Spanish language apps used throughout Latin America.

At the top we take in the city's expansive skyline and get views of Guadalajara Country Club's PGA -ranked fairways off in the distance.

"This is where golf (LGPA) champion and local hero Lorena Ochoa learned to golf," says Melor. "She grew up in Providencia."

We also see the city's new elevated train tracks, the most extensive leg of a light rail system set to launch in 2020. It will connect the metropolitan municipalities of Zapopan, Guadalajara, Tlaquepaque and Tonalá.

We work our way downtown to where Guadalajara was first founded in the early 16th century. Nicknamed the "Florence of Mexico," it's alive with visitors and locals enjoying the fresh air and visually feasting on the splendid Spanish colonial, neo-Gothic, and Baroque architecture surrounding Plaza de la Liberación — the Government Palace, Guadalajara Cathedral, and Degollado Theater complete with Apollo and his muses (home to the Guadalajara Philharmonic), to the Basilica de Zapopan and Templo Exploratorio del Santísimo Sacramento.

Nearby, the Instituto Cultural Cabanas, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is considered the most important building in the city. Originally founded in 1791 by Bishop Cabanas, it housed orphaned children and invalids. In 1980 its occupants moved to a new modern facility and the building was reborn



as a cultural centre.

Inside, I'm astounded at the 57 murals painted by Jose Clemente Orozco and the high dome of the neo-classical chapel. Scattered benches invite visitors to recline and contemplate Orozco's best works depicting struggles for freedom during the pre-Hispanic conquest.

Just south of the metropolis, the tempo subsides — but not the charm — in Tlaquepaque, which was named a "Magical Town" by the Mexican government in 2018.

We're transported to the colonial alleyways of this famous arts town that's also home to Mexican artist Sergio Bustamante's gallery of whimsical bronze sculptures.



*Above:* Artisans like Cristina Taylor treat visitors to some sweet surprises.



Tlaquepaque is also a sweet town — a place that's home to some candy-making factories like Nuestros Dulces.

Tlaquepaque tourism representative Ada Martinez introduces us to the proud candy makers and step-by-step we observe the production while inhaling irresistible aromas.

Soon we're trying our hands at cracking macadamia nuts and (clumsily) shaping snack-sized wooden containers for delicious "cajeta," Mexico's national favourite.

At the workshop of Cristina Taylor Chocolateria Artesanal, we hop onto bar stools for cacao and chocolate tasting, which are offered the first Saturday of each month.

"I will take you on a journey," says Taylor, a trained chef and life-time chocolate lover. Her award-winning all-natural recipes made with cacao beans grown in Mexico opened our eyes and taste buds to natural chocolate's gorgeous flavours and nutritional value (its caffeine provides energy but won't inhibit a good night's sleep).

The "magic" happens with Taylor's enhancements of spices, fruit, nuts and chiles — and maybe a bit of sugar or salt for added zing. At last, our palates elevate to pairings with tequila and cabernet sauvignon.

Our search for Mexican souvenirs ends as we beeline to Nuestros Dulces' store to stock up on mementos of the savory kind — that are hecho en Mexico (made in Mexico).

## JUST THE FACTS

- Learn more about Guadalajara and Tlaquepaque at:

<https://www.visitmexico.com/en/main-destinations/jalisco/guadalajara> ;

<https://www.tlaquepaque-centro.com>

- Nuestros Dulces: <https://www.nuestrosdulces.com>

- My overnight accommodation: Quinta Real Guadalajara, a part of Preferred Hotels & Resorts L.V.X. Collection: <https://www.caminoreal.com/quintareal/quinta-real-guadalajara>