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# Tapatio -- the Heart of Guadalajara

By Travel Writers (/author/travel-writers)

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By Athena Lucero

"Tapatio hot sauce was created by a Tapatio," tour guide Gus Melor told me about the product that is a staple in just about every American kitchen, including mine. "'Tapatio' is the nickname for a person from Guadalajara."

When Jose-Luis Saavedra Sr. immigrated to Southern California from Guadalajara, he created the sauce with a nod to his homeland. He began by selling 5-ounce bottles in 1971. Today, still family-owned, Tapatio is sold around the world. Holsters hold 3-ounce bottles for travelers who can't be without their favorite hot sauce.

It's only fitting for a Tapatio to bring happiness to all who partake. Hospitality is the motto of Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city and capital of the state of Jalisco. It is world-renowned as the cultural capital — and the Silicon Valley — of Latin America. At its entrance, the inscription, "Guadalajara, a hospitable city," can be seen on one side of Los Arcos ("The Arches"), modeled after the triumphal arches around Europe. The other side reads, "A pleasant stay is a guarantee of return."

Guadalajara is also the birthplace of mariachi, the romantic music genre that dates back to the 18th century. Originally called "son," it was performed at countryside haciendas with indigenous instruments. Spanish settlers later introduced guitars, harps, violins, and woodwind and brass instruments, as well as polkas, waltzes and salon orchestras into the mix.

After the Mexican Revolution, musicians left the haciendas and roamed between towns, performing in small groups for a fee, and the name of the musical form changed to "mariachi." They brought news of the day and sang of the revolution. Eventually their simple white shirts and pants and leather sandals were replaced with the handsome charro outfit we see today — fitted pants for men, long skirts for women, waist-length jackets adorned with embroidery and ornamentation, bow ties, sombreros and boots. Today the small groups sing heart-tugging ballads of love, joy and hardship at official events, weddings, birthday celebrations and funerals - a distinction recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2011.

A popular venue for early mariachis was the fashionable village of Tlaquepaque, 20 minutes from downtown Guadalajara and a renowned pottery and arts town. El Parian, with its iconic gazebo, is the heart of the town where mariachis still sing. While on an afternoon excursion here, I stopped to watch handsomely dressed couples dance elegantly underneath the canopy.

The architecture, colors and cobbled streets of Tlaquepaque transport me to the charms of Old Mexico. These attributes — along with the village's friendly people and local traditions such as candy-making at family-owned Nuestros Dulces factory and Mexican chocolates at Cristina Taylor Chocolateria Artesanal — earned Tlaquepaque "Magical Town" status from the Mexican government in 2018.

This program recognizes small towns near major cities that offer visitors authentic cultural experiences through local history, natural surroundings, cuisine and warm hospitality.

Guadalajara has bragging rights for another "Magical Town" — Tequila, the birthplace of its namesake spirit. Like champagne that can be made only in Champagne, France, true tequila can only be made in Tequila, Mexico.

The journey to Tequila starts onboard the luxury Mundo Cuervo Express at Guadalajara train station, where I join other guests for tequila tasting as an expert offers a mini-course on the spirit that comes from the blue agave plant grown at the foot of Tequila Volcano. According to legend, an agave plant caught fire when the Goddess Mayahuel sent a lightning bolt to earth and happy villagers drank the sweet syrup oozing from the plant.

Every weekend the sleepy town of Tequila comes alive with visitors eager to see its agave fields and tour La Rojena Distillery, the oldest and longest-operating distillery in Latin America. It is still run by descendants of Jose Antonio Cuervo, the first person to cultivate agave for making tequila, today one of Mexico's main industries.

In October the Day of the Dead, a favorite holiday, is celebrated throughout Mexico to remember the lives of loved ones who have passed. I'm amused by a lively group of locals dressed in Katrina costumes complete with smiling skull-painted faces, a fantastic folk art.

I can't leave Guadalajara without immersing my senses in the vibrant atmosphere of Mercado Libertad, Latin America's largest indoor marketplace. Opened in 1958, the market is a labyrinth of seemingly endless stalls where I smell the rich leather boots, belts and handbags while friendly vendors eagerly share the features and quality of their wares. I'm overwhelmed and entertained by countless aisles filled with traditional Mexican crafts and souvenirs, shoes, clothes and food. Third-floor vendors sell computer equipment as well as imported goods and clothing.

In the marketplace's outdoor courtyard I stand at the top of the steps to take in the fresh air and watch the people. A man smiles and points to my scruffy boots. Within seconds I'm sitting in a chair as the gregarious man meticulously cleans, polishes and shines my boots until they look like new.

Before rushing off I pay the happy Tapatio, not only for the shoeshine but also for making my day. Now, whenever I lace up those boots I will remember that spontaneous moment at the marketplace in Guadalajara.

#### WHEN YOU GO:

About Guadalajara: [www.visitguadalajara.com](http://www.visitguadalajara.com)

Nuestros Dulces: [www.nuestrosdulces.com](http://www.nuestrosdulces.com)

Cristina Taylor Chocolateria Artesanal: [www.cristinataylorchocolat.com](http://www.cristinataylorchocolat.com)

Accommodations: [www.caminoreal.com/quintareal/quinta-real-guadalajara](http://www.caminoreal.com/quintareal/quinta-real-guadalajara)

Solar de las Animas Tequila: [www.solardelasanimas.com](http://www.solardelasanimas.com)



Nuestros Dulces is a family-owned candy factory and store in Tlaquepaque, Mexico. Photo courtesy of Athena Lucero.



Erected in 1942, Los Arcos, "The Arches," in Guadalajara, Mexico, were modeled after the triumphal arches around Europe. Photo courtesy of Athena Lucero.



Mariachis in traditional charro suits perform romantic tunes at Hotel Villa Tequila in Tequila, Mexico. Photo courtesy of Athena Lucero.