

# SKY

DELTA

FEBRUARY 2020

MEXICO, BEYOND THE RESORTS

1 CITY 5 WAYS: **SANTIAGO**

TALK SHOW WITH **MARY ELIZABETH WINSTEAD**

OUTERWEAR FROM OUTER SPACE

BIKING FRANCE'S **MONT VENTOUX**

## FORWARD — MOMENTUM —

Virgin Group founder **Sir Richard Branson** and Delta CEO **Ed Bastian** on the unrelenting need to innovate on behalf of customers, employees and the planet.





THIS PAGE: A bartender pours  
mezcal at El Mural de los  
Poblanos in Puebla. OPPOSITE:  
Preparing to surf at Playa la  
Saladita near Troncones.



# UNEXPECTED Mexico

Venture beyond the  
tried-and-true resort  
destinations for a taste of  
authentic Mexico.

BY JENNIFER BUEGE, MARY HOLLAND  
AND CHADNER NAVARRO  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUIS GARCÍA





**S**ometimes what you need from a Mexican vacation is a luxe, all-inclusive resort in Cabo San Lucas or Cancún where you can stay rooted to your pool chaise drinking margaritas and indulging in some serious restoration time, gazing out at the Sea of Cortez or Gulf of Mexico. Oh, yes, that can be just what the doctor ordered. But if you're feeling a little more adventurous, you might want to pick a new spot in Mexico in which to unpack your suitcase. Perhaps it's a trip to Mexico City followed by a respite in Valle de Bravo, Puebla or San Miguel de Allende. Or time spent in Mexico's answer to Napa Valley: Valle de Guadalupe, just 90 miles from San Diego in northern Baja, boasting beautiful views and delicious wine. A low-key visit to the sleepy beach village of Troncones, just outside Zihuatanejo. Or a horseback exploration of the agave fields of Tequila, near Guadalajara. It's all accessible and ready for you to explore—without the crowds you'll find in the popular resort towns.

## Valle de Bravo

**RESIDENTS OF A BOOMING METROPOLIS** require—among many things—an idyllic, easy-to-reach reprieve from the draining demands of the big city. In New York, that might be the Hudson Valley; for the porteños of Buenos Aires, there's Tigre; and for Mexico City, a two-hour drive gets you to Valle de Bravo—a beautifully preserved colonial town surrounded by equally stunning nature. Getting there is part of the allure, too, as CDMX's dwarfing skyscrapers and patience-defying traffic give way to open air, succulents and, eventually, a forest of pine trees.

Because of its location on the shores of manmade Avándaro Lake, Valle de Bravo has been compared to another urban escape: Lake Como. And from above (parasailing and paragliding are popular attractions here), the view of the buildings' terra cotta roofs and the lush hills that border them only strengthens the resemblance. As does its inventory of upscale, see-and-be-seen cafés, boutiques, hotels and restaurants such as Nuestro, the locavore culinary temple built by Diego Isunza Kahlo—nephew of Frida.

A languorous stroll through town, however, highlights Valle's charm. Plaza Principal and its adjacent streets offer that quintessential Mexican energy. The congress of food vendors specializing in Mexican street corn or *esquites*—some simply prepared with crema, chili powder and a squeeze of lime; others more robust with the inclusion of shellfish—is often crowded with both curious bystanders and ravenous snackers. After grabbing a small cup of whatever is on offer, it's easy enough to evade the mob with a visit to the San Francisco de Asís cathedral, a neoclassical monument featuring a bright mural behind the altar. But the true star of this district is Mercado de Artesanías. There's nothing quite like losing hours in an arts and crafts market, visiting its endless network of stalls admiring merchandise by artisanal makers of the immediate region. There's *ocoxal* (baskets woven from pine needles), textiles in a rainbow of intricate Mazahua embroidery and so much pottery thanks to the valley's longstanding







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
The view of Puebla's Temple de San Francisco and Popocatepetl volcano from Hotel Azul Talavera; La Mexicana restaurant in Troncones; Museo Internacional del Barroco in Puebla; A bartender at Azul Talavera; Dining al fresco at Cafe Pacifico in Troncones; Chilpachole Azteca crab soup at Cafe Pacifico; Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios in Puebla; Beach hats in Troncones; Lobster with chilies en nogada at La Mexicana restaurant in Troncones.







**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**  
 Cascada Velo de Novia (bridal veil falls) in Valle de Bravo;  
 The pink-hued Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel in San Miguel de Allende;  
 El Mural de los Poblanos restaurant in Puebla;  
 The modern villas/ecolofts at Encuentro Guadalupe in Valle de Guadalupe;  
 A street in San Miguel de Allende;  
 An agave field in Tequila; Boulders at Encuentro Guadalupe;  
 A chef at the rooftop garden of Hacienda El Santuario in San Miguel de Allende;  
 Luna Rooftop Tapas Bar at the Rosewood Hotel in San Miguel de Allende;  
 Chicken in mole sauce at El Mural de los Poblanos restaurant in Puebla.





tradition of making high-heat earthenware.

But the best thing about Valle de Bravo is that it offers time away from urban indulgences. Lago Avándaro is its most important and most emblematic physical feature, and everyone who comes here builds his or her itinerary around spending time in or near this lake, whether it's from above (via a parasailing excursion), with a picnic along its shores or by renting a boat to while a day away sailing its silver-shimmering splendor. Skipping out on the lake is akin to visiting Paris and ignoring the Seine, but it's just one of the many natural gems that Valle shares with those who make the pilgrimage. Take the Velo de Novia (or bridal veil) trail. The hike alone, under a canopy of fir trees, is picturesque enough, but it leads to a pretty 115-foot waterfall of the same name (the arteries of water that trickle down the surface of the hill create the illusion of a veil). Is it a hidden secret? No, everyone knows where it is, but it's rarely swarmed by visitors—as if they've all decided to give each other enough space to enjoy the meditative cascade in peace. —CHADNER NAVARRO

## Troncones

**REMEMBER THE DAYS** when Tulum didn't have tons of yoga retreats and vegan juice bars—and Noma hadn't yet popped up? When you didn't have to wear a \$300 caftan to the beach so you could blend in? Thankfully, there is a place where you can capture that prebuzz Tulum vibe.

On the Pacific Ocean, a 30-minute drive from Zihuatanejo, lies Troncones, a low-key fishing and surf town where no expensive caftans or shoes are required. Days spent here include surfing, fishing, beach walks, horse rides, eating and a whole lot of nothing. In 2017, the beach town received a slick new boutique hotel, Lo Sereno (a member of Design Hotels), a modular 10-room spot that spills out onto a golden beach. From the simple rooms, guests can hear the pounding of the ocean through the cool wooden shutters. In the evenings, the ocean-facing patio comes alive with candles and gentle music while diners sip tequila cocktails and watch the sun sink.

A short walk into town will get you to Cafe Pacifico for freshly squeezed juices and coffee as well as Indigo, an Argentinean restaurant that serves steaks with chimichurri and homemade empanadas. On the beach is La Mexicana, a no-frills restaurant that offers local fare such as grilled fish and homemade tacos served alongside classic Mexican beers like Tecate and Modelo. If you came here to surf, head 20 minutes north of town to La Saladita Beach, one of the most popular area surf spots thanks to its long breaking left and gentle waves for beginners. The cluster of casual beach bars features live music, making this festive beach a great spot to sink a postsurf beer. Beyond La Saladita, there are numerous other hidden surf spots to be discovered. Spend enough time in Troncones and a local might divulge a secret location or two. —MARY HOLLAND

## San Miguel de Allende

**THERE'S A DEFINITE ROMANCE** about San Miguel de Allende. The colorful façades of homes and shops line

winding cobblestone streets. An ornate pink cathedral pokes up from the city center. Ice cream carts attract crowds, while other vendors offer corn, fruit and Mexican snacks. Mariachis—and an occasional *mojiganga* (giant puppet) or two—roam the well-landscaped Plaza Principal. You might even come across a group of *quinceañera* celebrants taking photos in one of the parks.

Located almost smack dab in the middle of Mexico, this UNESCO World Heritage Site has long been a destination for those wanting to experience a different side of the country—something apart from its beachy coastal hubs. For decades it's been an expatriate haunt, welcoming those willing to embrace local life. Weekenders drive in from Mexico City, knowing they'll find an escape from the craziness of the capital. Artists come to commune with like-minded souls. The draws are many, but high marks go to the laid-back ambiance, a creative community and food culture that honors tradition but isn't afraid to play.

For a stay with an authentic pedigree, check into Hacienda El Santuario, near the historic core. Built around three courtyards, the former convent is adorned with Mexican design elements, arts and crafts. Hand-hammered tin mirrors and bright Talavera tiles decorate the 33 unique rooms; molcajetes (mortars) in all shapes and sizes sun themselves on an upstairs terrace; ceramic skulls and figurines peek out from nooks and crannies. Every morning in the tree-filled, open-air patio, guests are greeted with a traditional breakfast—*chilaquiles*, eggs, beans, fresh fruit, homemade jams, breads. Many of the herbs and vegetables are the epitome of local fare, coming from the rooftop garden.

Walking is the best way to get a feel for the city. Start at its most famous monument, the flamingo pink, neo-Gothic Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel, whose spires rise into the sky like stalagmites. Love it or hate it—and there are plenty of people on each side—it's become a true symbol of San Miguel. Then indulge at the spot for churros and hot chocolate, Café San Agustín, or at Panio, a bakery beloved for its Mexican pastries, before exploring the many shops and art galleries nearby. Afterward, make your way past the Church of San Francisco and Plaza de la Soledad to Mercado Ignacio Ramírez, a busy food market selling fresh produce, drinks and prepared foods such as tortas and tacos. One block beyond is a souvenir-hunter's dream: the Mercado de Artesanías. Knickknacks and handmade crafts share space with stalls selling colorful textiles, silver, ceramics, clothing and much, much more. Art-lovers will





want to take the 10-minute walk north to Fábrica la Aurora, a textile factory turned creative hub that puts the emphasis on local artists and makers, who fill the boutiques, galleries and workshops with their wares.

As dusk falls, plan to be at Luna, the Rosewood Hotel's rooftop bar, where you can kick back with a cocktail made with local Casa Dragones tequila while watching the plummeting sun spray pastel colors across the horizon. Keep the Instagram-worthy city views going with dinner upstairs and outdoors at the Mediterranean-focused Trazo 1810, the slightly hidden La Azotea—the jicama tacos are a must—or the always-hopping Quince, where the fiesta will rage into the wee hours. —JENNIFER BUEGE

## Valle de Guadalupe

**FROM THE OPEN-AIR RESTAURANT** Almadraba Tapas Bar, Valle de Guadalupe's prized vineyards stretch out toward the cloud-crowned mountains in the distance. It's a view seemingly made for camera lenses. As you sit in the warmth of the sun, a jaw-droppingly affordable white wine blend from Casa Pedro Domecq—cold and refreshing with just enough acidity—is the perfect pairing for chef Ruben Barrau's tostada, a bountiful dish that layers tuna with portobello mushrooms, caramelized onions and a drizzle of white truffle oil. The indulgent moment recalls a languorous afternoon that has been emblematic of wine country in Napa, Tuscany and Rioja. And now, finally, in Mexico.

There's an undeniable buzz surrounding Valle de Guadalupe, as Mexicans and discerning foreigners alike have become enthusiastic about the local winemaking. Viño has been here since the 19th century thanks to Valle's elevation and Mediterranean-esque microclimate that have made its land favorable for growing red grapes. But the quality of the commercial production has only recently improved, elevating the hospitality scene in the process, too. And thus, newly christened hot spots such as Almadraba welcome thirsty weekenders who come from all over. After all, San Diego and its international airport are only a two-hour drive along the country's Pacific coast.

But while the juice and tourism have been getting better and better, the unpretentious charm is still there, making the region all the more desirable. The beautiful villas of Encuentro Guadalupe, perched on a craggy hill, might seem all-too-chic when you find out that Rihanna once bought out the entire property. But all of that is immediately forgotten at its newly opened Raw Oyster Bar, where 26-year-old autodidact chef Melissa Navarro creates whimsical twists on seafood. Her exuberance about an oyster burger featuring deep-fried oysters lightly coated with tempura batter spiked with squid ink is infectious. She names it her favorite as her sister, Stafi, who oversees the tasting room, arrives with a surprisingly bright Tempranillo; like all wines that Encuentro makes, this one is only available here.

Limited availability is the name of the game in Valle, which doesn't yield enough fruit to accommodate the boom of wineries. At hip Vena Cava, designed by Alejandro D'Acosta with reclaimed fishing boats and a pond lively with ducks, owner-winemaker



Phil Gregory says that he could be bottling much more than he is, but the crippling demand for Mexican grapes has forced him to keep his numbers low. Gregory's property remains one of the most popular in the valley thanks to his commitment to experimentation. Batches of grapes could become a natural wine, while a chardonnay might be bottled as an orange variety.

And that's what makes Valle an exciting proposition for wine lovers: Even with stunted resources, its makers are keeping apace with global trends. Finca la Carrodilla, whose farms are certified organic, is adopting biodynamic practices—all of it a first for Mexican wineries. From its rooftop garden, sipping on a bold and lightly spiced syrah (only 3,000 bottles were made), the Mexican flag visibly waving in the middle of the vineyard, it seems like it's on the cusp of something bigger. —CHADNER NAVARRO

## Tequila

**FOR THE UNINITIATED**, the birthplace of a spirit known for its herbaceous potency might conjure up visions of endless, boozy indulgence. And, naturally, touring the homes of historic brands such as Jose Cuervo and Casa Orendain shows off the sensory experience of making tequila, like the earthy-sweet aroma of roasted agave hearts. (Back in May, Sauza launched a Skywalk that allows visitors to see the bottling process, too—a first for distilleries in Mexico.) But beyond the walls of these facilities, the town of Tequila unveils hidden layers that intoxi-





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Dining at Troika Food Truck near Vena Cava winery in Valle de Guadalupe; Lo Sereno hotel in Troncones; The beach at Lo Sereno; A common area at Lo Sereno; Octopus with adobo sauce at Augurio restaurant in Puebla; Adobe Guadalupe Vineyards & Inn in Valle de Guadalupe.

cate in entirely different ways.

Located 40 miles northwest of Guadalajara, Tequila is one of Mexico's Pueblos Mágicos, or magical towns, and is surrounded by lush nature—from a mountain range with a volcano revered by pre-Columbian communities to agave fields that stretch out to the horizon, shrouding the town with a bucolic charm. The fields were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006, and at Hotel Solar de las Animas, a Relais & Chateau property in the heart of town, getting an up-close and personal experience of the prized crops that put Tequila on the map can be done on horseback. A meandering trot through the plantations lays bare the agricultural splendor of the agave while a guide delves deeper into the industry it created for Mexico. There's also the opportunity to add on a visit to a *talabartería*, or a saddlemaker, who still hand stitches *montura charra* saddles—a wide-seat version that allows for more comfort over long distances. Local riders might even design theirs to hold the machetes they use to cut up the agave plants—the very first step in the tequila-making cycle. —CHADNER NAVARRO



**AFTER AN EASY TWO-HOUR DRIVE** from Mexico City, many first-timers to Puebla find themselves wondering how they didn't stumble upon the ancient metropolis before. Its narrow old streets, fringed with colorful colonial buildings and serene

squares, make it feel like a small town, though it's the fourth-largest city in Mexico. And despite its village feel, the city has a buzzing and contemporary food and cultural scene, which is finally back on its feet following a devastating earthquake in 2017.

In 2016, the Museo Internacional del Barroco opened as an exhibit space for the Baroque arts in an extravagant white building designed by Pritzker prize-winning architect Toyo Ito. Also that year, the Teleférico de Puebla—a cable car that soars above the city—was unveiled, providing tourists with panoramic vistas of the area. But what really helped cement the city as a travel hot spot was the opening of the Hotel Azul Talavera, set in a collection of historical buildings in the downtown area. The hotel's 78 rooms are cool and elegant, with stone walls, tiled arches and wrought iron beds. From the rooftop pool and bar, the views of the city are staggering.

In the downtown area below, Puebla's food scene also has been making a name for itself with mole poblano, an ancient local dish that's probably been around since, well, the Aztecs. At restaurants such as the supertraditional El Mural de los Poblanos and the more contemporary Augurio, diners can sample the thick, chocolatey mole as well as other local plates like octopus in adobo, washed down with glasses of mezcal. On the outskirts of the city, in Cholula (a 30-minute drive away), is one of Puebla's most astonishing sites: Tlachihualtepetl, also known as the Great Pyramid of Cholula, the largest pyramid known to exist today. It is one of the most important archaeological sites in the Americas and, even better, it isn't crawling with tourists. —MARY HOLLAND ▼