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5
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SHAPING THE FUTURE

VIRGIN VOYAGES CEO TOM MCALPIN • 5 THINGS DEFINING
MILLENNIAL TRAVELERS • THE SECRETS OF MEXICAN WINE
DIGITAL DEEP DIVE • DESTINATION NEXT



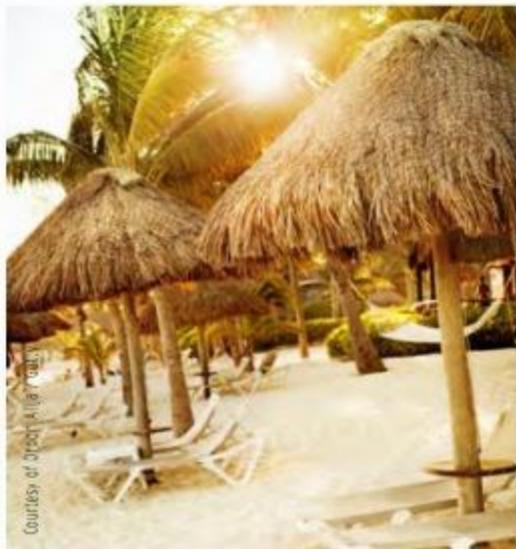
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IF YOU AND YOUR CLIENTS ARE DONE WITH THE ARTIFICIAL AND READY TO EMBRACE AUTHENTIC, THERE'S NO BETTER PLACE THAN MEXICO. THE COUNTRY OFFERS OFF-THE-BEATEN PATH DESTINATIONS AND EXPERIENCES THAT SHOWCASE ITS UNIQUE CULTURE, COLORS AND CUISINE.

WORDS: WENDY GILLETTE



Merida is about a four hours' drive from Cancun and first-class, comfortable buses are the easiest way to get there. It's the capital and largest city in the Yucatan peninsula and is rich in history, founded in 1542 with obvious European influences. Tall colonial homes dot many streets, many of them with colorful facades. Horse-drawn carriages line up in the main square outside the soaring Catedral de San Ildefonso, the oldest cathedral in the Americas. At night, the square and surrounding areas come alive. "It has events most of the year," says Rybicki. "There's music playing, or local dance."

The historic buildings and monuments alight, artists sell their wares and teams play games of Mayan fireball. Historians say the game used to end in death for the losers. These days, it's

still played with a ball on fire, but the outcome isn't so dire. To see what's left of the Mayan civilization, the UNESCO World Heritage Site Chichen Itza is only about 90 minutes away, but the Uxmal, Mayapan, Oxkintok and Dzibilchaltun ruins are closer and less crowded.

Serenity by the Sea: **PUERTO VALLARTA**

A relaxing escape for all ages in a picturesque city.

Puerto Vallarta's magic quickly soothes even the most stressed traveler. There's plenty to do, from whale watching in the Pacific, to baby sea turtle releases to more far-flung adventures.

"What is unique about Puerto Vallarta is it's a little town, very charming, with cobblestone

streets, white houses," says Rocio Lancaster-Jones, Jalisco's undersecretary of tourism. "But in the back, we have the mountains."

That's where you'll find hiking trails and more high-octane activities like ziplining, horseback riding and ATV tours. The city also has become a mecca for gastronomy.

"They were working for, I would say, 30 years, bringing international acclaim back to the area," Lancaster-Jones says. "So, I really recommend a tour of their restaurants."

Food tours can be combined with sightseeing of Puerto Vallarta's Old Town and its mile-long Malecon. Or buy tickets to "Rhythms of the Night," from a Cirque du Soleil co-creator, about the Aztec creation story, performed in an amphitheater reached by a cruise at sunset.

The city is easily accessible, with strong air connectivity: 18 airlines flying to 38 international destinations, including 19 in the U.S., though more visitors than ever are cruising to Puerto Vallarta. Lancaster-Jones says the number of ships increased 38 percent last year. And Vidanta is Mexico's first-ever luxury cruise line, launching this year with stops planned in the city.

Jalisco City Life and Traditions: **GUADALAJARA**

Clients who love traditional art, music and tequila will love exploring.

Guadalajara is a taste of big city life in the state of Jalisco, the second largest metropolis in Mexico. But those who live there are proud of the traditions of their forefathers.

PUERTO VALLARTA QUICK FACTS

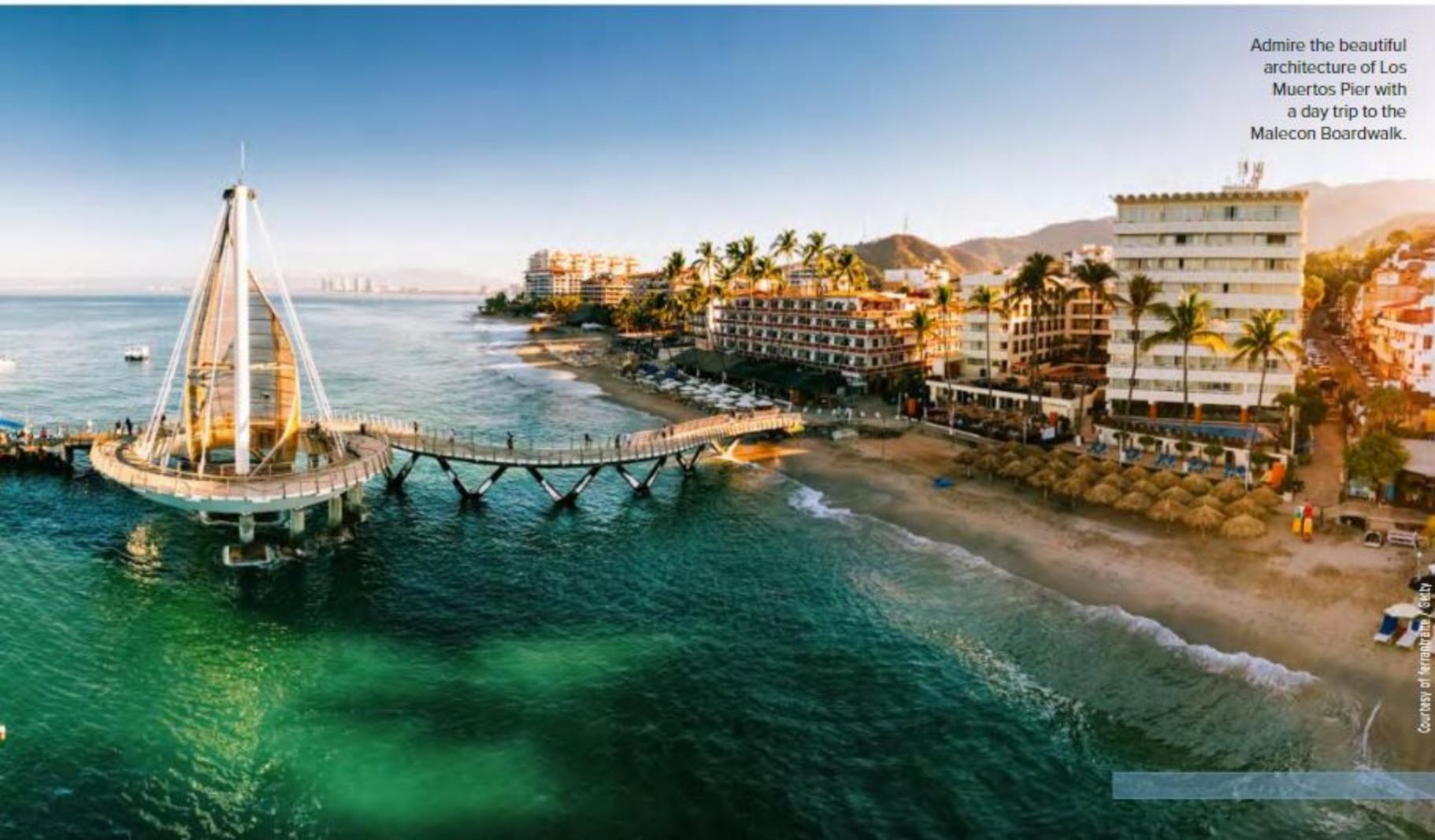
Future Hotel Opening:

The adults-only Hotel Amapa will bring Old Hollywood glamour to the historic Zona Romantica this spring.

Local Experiences:

Take the "Fiesta in the Mountains" tour to visit rural areas to learn about local customs, take a day trip to the town of San Sebastian del Oeste to see Spanish architecture dating back to the 17th century.

Admire the beautiful architecture of Los Muertos Pier with a day trip to the Malecon Boardwalk.



Courtesy of Terratravel/Getty



Adventurous eaters and beach bums will love exploring the colorful and historic Oaxaca City.

OAXACA QUICK FACTS

Local Experiences:

Take a surf lesson in Puerto Escondido. Visit villages near Oaxaca that specialize in crafts such as wooden animals, black pottery and weaving. Hike around the Hierve de Agua and take a swim in the petrified waterfall, located an hour outside Oaxaca.

mezcalería to learn how mezcal, tequila's smoky cousin, is produced.

There are direct flights to Oaxaca from Dallas, Houston and Los Angeles. Add on another half hour to get to the beach, taking Aerotucan's daily flight to Puerto Escondido. It's where surfers will find some of the biggest waves in the world. New Yorker Amy Hardy visited in 2002 and moved there three months later, opening a boutique resort hotel, Villas Carrizalillo, with her husband. Twelve rooms and a restaurant are perched on a cliff overlooking Playa Carrizalillo bay.

"I just fell in love with the town," she says. "When I would leave New York, it would take me a week just to relax, but you get here and you immediately relax. Something about this place, it's just very calming. It's a small town, but it still has everything you need, and a lot of transients. It's off-the-beaten path, so the people that you meet are very interesting, different."

Water sports — including fishing, paddle boarding, kayaking and horseback riding to hot springs or waterfalls — consume most days. There's a bioluminescent bay to visit at night and a tourist center filled with restaurants and bars.

"In the 17 years we've been here, I don't feel it's changed very much," Hardy says. "It's still very authentic old Mexico. You still go downtown, the Mercado, and it's all locals."

"We always say it has the best of both worlds," says Lancaster-Jones. "We have the traditional part. We are the cradle and birthplace of mariachi, of tequila. At the same time, we are considered the Latin American Silicon Valley. We have about 200 universities throughout the city. We are a city that offers everything."

The tourism sector is also exploding.

"We are growing very quickly with 23 hotels opening in 2019 and 2020," says German Ralis, Jalisco's secretary of tourism. "They will make the city more attractive."

They're bringing 3,000 new rooms to the city, from business to boutique hotels.

Guests can explore a budget-friendly city and its huge range of authentic activities. Browse San Libertad Mercado, the biggest indoor market in Latin America. This year, Mexico's national sport, charrería, similar to rodeo, takes center stage as the first competitive group, Charros de Jalisco, celebrates 100 years. Watch

a Sunday afternoon practice or tour the stables and even ride a horse at Lienzo Charros de Jalisco Arena. Pair your equine encounter with a mariachi performance and a tequila tasting, which of course makes every tradition just a little more fun.

Paradise: OAXACA

Adventurous eaters and beach bums will rejoice. Start in Oaxaca City with a very empty stomach, since this is Mexico's foodie center. UNESCO lists Mexican traditional cuisine as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, on par with French gastronomy. As you tour the city's plentiful food markets, Mercado Benito Juárez, Mercado 20 de Noviembre, and Mercado de Artesanías, sampling mole, grasshoppers, tamales, tasajo (thinly sliced beef), tlayuda (tortilla pizza) and Oaxacan cheese, the range of the cuisine reveals itself. Then stop by a

GUADALAJARA QUICK FACTS

Future Hotel Opening:

Boutique hotel Casa Reborá in a 1934 home with a pink bar, coming in March.

Local Experiences:

Visit the town of Tlaquepaque to take a clay artisan class and visit art galleries, sign up for a taco gastronomy tour, drive 45 minutes to the town of Tequila to see its birthplace and learn how it's produced at a few of the 200 distilleries in the region..

