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Beyond Magazine
September
2016

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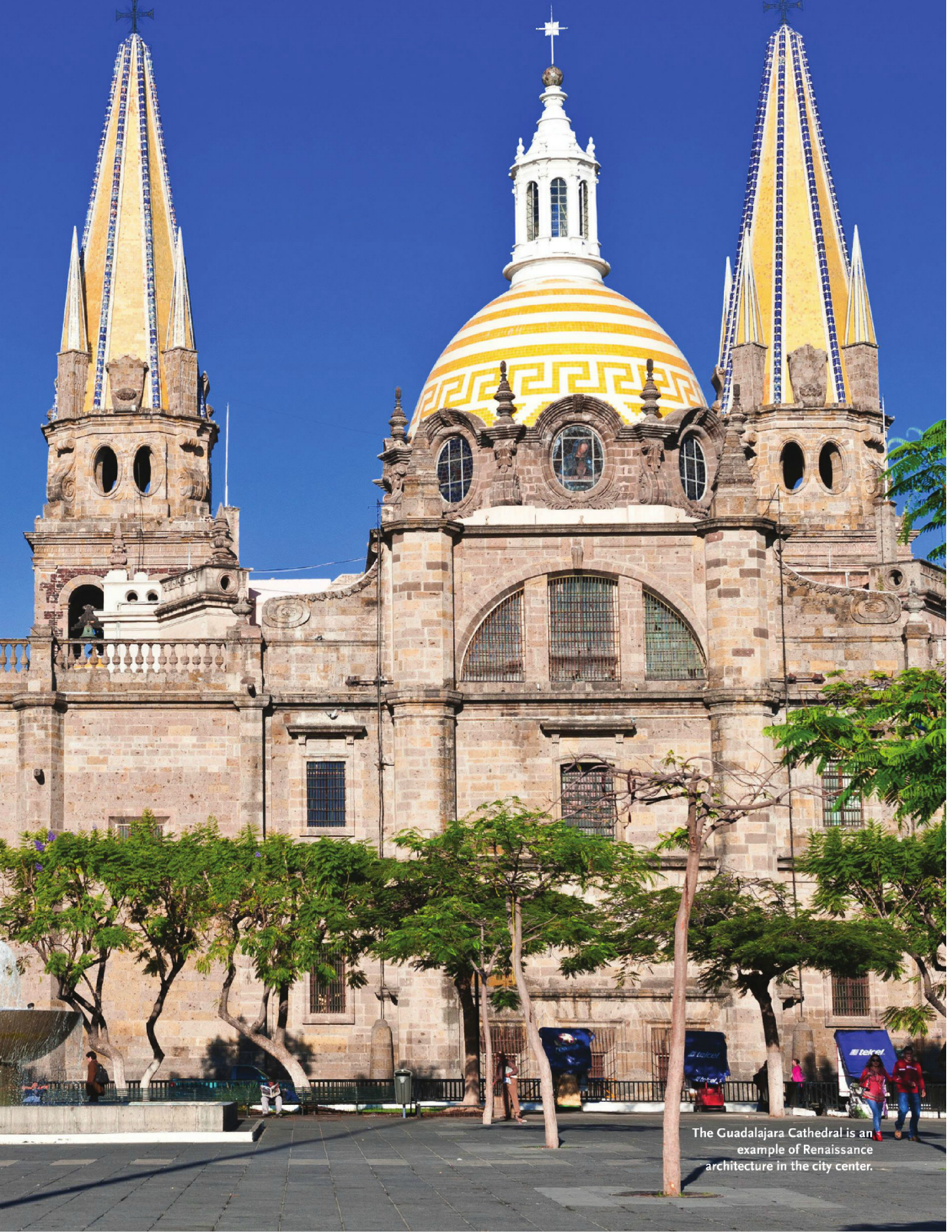


EDUCATION: Encouraging students to aim high, *p. 72.*

NFL PREVIEW: An action-packed season ahead, *p. 60.*

MEXICO: From colonial charm to beachfront adventures, *p. 100.*





The Guadalajara Cathedral is an example of Renaissance architecture in the city center.



Mariachi singers will serenade you for a small tip.

HEART OF JALISCO

AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES
IN GUADALAJARA
BY ALEX PULASKI

BRIGHT TANGERINES, VERMILION TOMATOES and ripe mangoes are among the first to catch my eye in Guadalajara's **Mercado Libertad**. Continuing through the three-story downtown market, which is also known as Mercado San Juan de Dios, we are met with an instant sensory feast. We breathe in the aroma of simmering pots of stewed meats, listen to the bustle of vendors and customers, and admire colorful fabrics and decorated guitars hanging on the walls.

With more than 3,000 stalls in nearly half a million square feet on three levels, the colorful market contains everything from mod-

ern conveniences to age-old items such as powder "spells" designed to resolve work, finance or romance issues.

The market is also the place to sample two of Guadalajara's specialty dishes—*birria*, a goat stew (it can also be made from beef), or a *torta ahogada*, a "drowned sandwich" soaking in a spicy tomato broth. My wife and her sister seem mesmerized by assortments of Mexican candies stacked in sugar-laden chunks.

For centuries, Guadalajara has thrived as one of Mexico's cornerstone cities. It is constantly evolving and in some ways chic, yet



CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT, ERICH SCHLEGEL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; GREG VAUGHN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; ALEX PULASKI

Clockwise from upper left: A farmworker cuts leaves off an agave plant. Colorful fruits and juices are displayed at Mercado Libertad. Casa Luna restaurant offers live music in its courtyard.

Orozco is considered one of the greatest Mexican muralists, along with Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, and his subjects range from Spanish conquistadors to politicians.

it retains a sense of the past in its splendid architecture and art. Through these, visitors catch a glimpse of the country's rich culture, fascinating past and vibrant present.

In many respects, Guadalajara, the capital of the Mexican state of Jalisco, embodies Mexico's heart and soul. Tequila was born in this state, as were mariachi music, Mexican rodeos known as *charreadas*, and even sombreros.

Today, the Guadalajara metropolitan area remains a focal point of Mexican handicrafts, from glass trinkets costing a few pesos to elaborate furnishings worth thousands of dollars. The city is also Mexico's third-largest economic producer, excelling in computer manufacturing, jewelry production and agriculture.

The Centro (downtown) consists of a series of walkable plazas, where you will find families shopping and children splashing water in fountains.

We delve into Mexico's past at the **Hospicio Cabañas**, a former hospital and orphanage that is home to 57 works by muralist José Clemente Orozco.

Overhead, Orozco's most renowned fresco, *Man of Fire*, shows a man rising from flames. We examine this and each fresco carefully to appreciate how Orozco creates illusions of perspective. As we pass by, they seem to move: A wheel rotates, heads turn and streets change angles.

Two more of Orozco's famous works—one of Father Miguel Hidalgo sparking Mexico's independence movement from Spain in 1810, and one of Hidalgo liberating Mexico's slaves—can be seen a few minutes' walk away at the **Palacio de Gobierno**, an impressive Baroque structure completed in 1774 that houses government offices and is open to the public.

Other noteworthy sights in the city center include:

- **The Guadalajara Cathedral**, a magnificent Spanish Renaissance-style church completed in 1618 after decades of work.
- **The Teatro Degollado**, a Neoclassic marvel, finished in 1866, that today hosts performances and is home to the Jalisco Philhar-



A *calandria*, or horse-drawn carriage, will give you a scenic tour around Guadalajara while the driver describes the sights.

the sights, including Nueve Esquinas neighborhood, named for the nine corners created by intersecting streets.

monic. Reputed to be one of the best-preserved and most ornate theaters in Latin America, it's open to visitors from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M., Tuesday through Friday.

- **Plaza de los Mariachis**, a triangular plaza where the troubadours begin to gather in the late afternoon and play songs into the night for a nominal fee.

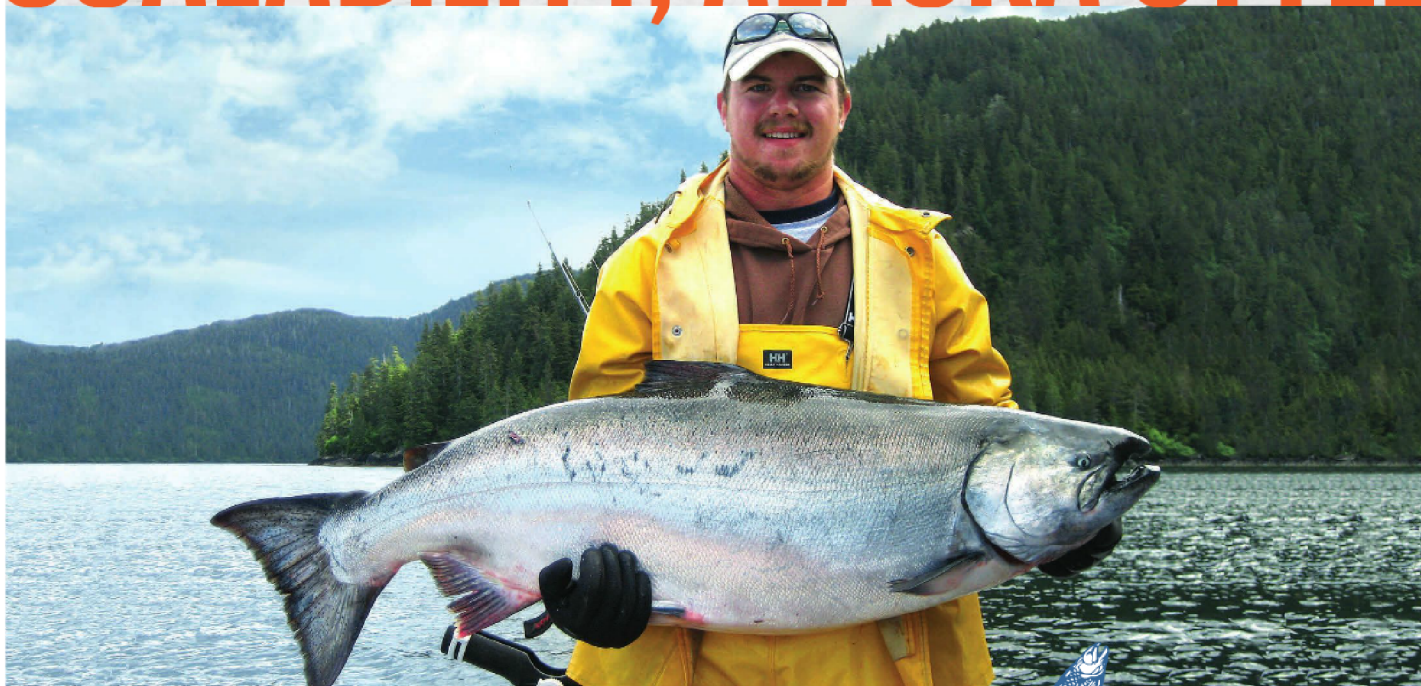
- **Horse-drawn carriages** known as *calandrias*, which stand waiting in the city center, their drivers ready to describe a tour of

EXPERIENCING TEQUILA

As U.S. sales of tequila have doubled over the last 10 years, the state of Jalisco has experienced its own tourism boom. It's only about an hour by car from Guadalajara to the city of Tequila, and a variety of tour operators offer organized day trips.

We opt for a tour with Clayton Szczech, a self-styled tequila connoisseur. He guides us around the area, where we watch a *jimador* harvest the agave plant from which tequila is made.

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WHEN YOU GO

Lodging

Villa Ganz Boutique Hotel: The onetime mansion retains its gilded charm and is remarkably affordable, starting at about \$80 a night (877-232-2218; en.villaganz.com).

Casa Fayette: Enter the sophisticated hotel through its lobby in a renovated 1940s Art Deco mansion before making your way to the sleek, modern rooms above (+52 333-679-2000; casafayette.com).

Dining

Casa Luna: Dine on contemporary Mexican food in a lantern-lit courtyard while a band plays. The passion fruit margaritas are spectacular (+52 331-591-4735).

La Tequila: This restaurant serves tequilas by the dozens and offers a savory salsa made tableside (+52 333-640-3440; latequila.com).

Tequila Tour

Experience Tequila: For a tour of Guadalajara and Tequila, guide Clayton Szczech is native in English and fluent in Spanish (503-922-1774; experiencetequila.com). —A.P.

Later, we see the production areas at the small-scale **Tequila Fortaleza** distillery, which still uses stone *tahonas* (circular grindstones), instead of modern-day mechanical rollers, to crush the agave.

It's not necessary to leave Guadalajara to get a taste of tequila, however. **La Fuente**, an old-school bar in the city center, is so well-known that there is no sign outside. It's a great place to sample a variety of labels and styles, ranging from young silver tequilas to barrel-aged *reposados* to the complex, smooth *anejos*.

The namesake drink is also showcased at **La Tequila**. This upscale restaurant impressed us with dishes including warm salsa made right at the table, and a tender flank steak served with melted cheese, chorizo, cactus bits, beans and guacamole. The complimentary dessert,

a refreshing lemon sorbet, is served with a whisper of—you guessed it—tequila.

TOURING TLAQUEPAQUE

Home to street after street and shop after shop filled with intricate handicrafts, the suburb of Tlaquepaque, about 3 miles southeast of the city center, merits at least an afternoon to explore.

Colorful, handmade beaded bracelets are available at the indigenous Huichol shops that line **Calle Independencia**. We wander through stores that sell everything from fine leather to handmade clothing to tile work known as *talavera*.

On one corner in Tlaquepaque, the spectacular **Voladores de Papantla**, or flyers, suspended by ropes, cast themselves from the top of a pole and spin around it. The flyers perform several times a day, and sell souvenirs afterward.

When you are in need of refreshment, the **Casa Luna** restaurant has a picturesque courtyard, ideal for enjoying a cerveza or a bite to eat. As late afternoon melts into evening, dozens of lanterns sway overhead and bloom with light, competing with the stars overhead.

To finish the evening, we head to Tlaquepaque's garden courtyard known as **El Parian**, where colorfully clad mariachi singers serenade our group for a small tip. For visitors who don't know which song to request, a perfect choice is *Guadalajara*, an homage to the city, concluding with these words: *Guadalajara, Guadalajara! Tienes el alma mas mexicana.*

The words ring true: This city does have the most Mexican of souls. ▲

Alex Pulaski writes from Portland.

Alaska Airlines offers daily service to Guadalajara from Los Angeles and San Jose. For more information or to book tickets, visit alaskaair.com or call 800-ALASKAAIR.

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