

ESCAPE

# GIVING IN TO *Guadalajara*

FROM LASSO ARTISTS TO TEQUILA, MEXICO'S SECOND  
LARGEST METROPOLITAN AREA IS A FEAST FOR THE SENSES.

Text & photos: Steven Sereznai



**S**pinning tassos, the birthplace of tequila, colonial plazas, and mariachi bands are just a few of the delights that await the senses of visitors to Guadalajara, Mexico.

PAX recently got to experience these highlights during a four-day media visit. Guadalajara is the country's second biggest metropolitan area and the capital of the state of Jalisco, and like many urban centres, traffic often clogs its major arteries. Fortunately, getting around by cab remains both manageable and affordable, and once at its many picturesque areas, it becomes easy to forget that this is a bustling city.

Before getting on the plane, I recommend checking out [desoubrecentroga.com](http://desoubrecentroga.com). It's all in Spanish but Google Translate does a decent enough job for non-Spanish speakers like myself to navigate the site. Click on WALKS to explore walking maps that include Urban Art, City Light

(for nighttime views of lit-up architecture), LGBT, and Gastronomic routes.

The city's most famous destination is the Renaissance-style Cathedral right in front of Plaza de Armas (main square). Take note of the Cathedral's yellow and blue tile covered towers – the official colours of the city.

The square was once the site of executions and remains a centre point for public events, including concerts by the Banda del Estrada (State Band) on Thursday and Sunday afternoons. There's more than a dozen other historical sites within a few minutes walk, including the Palacio Municipal (Municipal Palace) and the Rotonda de los Jaliscienses Ilustres, with its statues of prominent men and women from Jalisco.

Amidst all the historical buildings I couldn't help but take a moment to appreciate the "running

man" street crossing lights, which I considered much more honest than the more conventional "flashing hand" that futilely warns impatient pedestrians to wait. Instead, as these lights counted down, the walking stick figure went from a steady pace to a sprint.

My next stop was the highly recommended area of Tiequepaque, a very reasonable 70 pesos (\$5.00 CAN) taxi ride away from the Cathedral. As I got in the cab I suddenly realized that other than pointing at the word "Tiequepaque" in my iPhone notes, I actually had no idea where I was going. Fortunately the driver didn't need a precise address, and when he dropped me off, he pointed vaguely at the picturesque Parroquia de San Pedro Apostol (San Pedro Apostol Parish), which is in the austere style of the Franciscans who built it.

It was the perfect starting point to just wander around, enjoy the low-key feel of locals on park

Again, a beautiful brick pedestrian-only street like this in Europe would be mobbed. This was wonderfully free of crowds.

benches drinking their late morning coffees. A place this picturesque in Europe would have been filled with camera-toting tourists, but in Tiequepaque there were no crowds, and my maple leaf ball cap definitely made me the odd man out. All the same, the area was prepared for this hapless Gringo. I happened upon a tourist booth and asked for directions for the shopping street that fellow journalists had specifically recommended.

Most Mexicans I met spoke little to no English, but his was perfect, and it turns out I was only a block and a left turn away from my primary destination, Calle Independencia (Independencia Street). ➔



Again, a beautiful brick pedestrian-only street like this in Europe would be mobbed. This was wonderfully free of crowds. I slowly wandered amidst the street sculptures and a bevy of shops that featured a broad range of art and housewares that ranged from colourful crafts to sleek modern designs. The prices were remarkably reasonable. When I tried to buy a wrought iron and blown glass hummingbird I thought it was 450 pesos (about \$30 CAD) each. That was actually the price for five of them.

To round out my Guadalajara experience I was happily taken to the city of tequila along with about 40 of my fellow journalists to experience the birthplace of Mexico's most famous alcohol-based export. It was about an hour bus ride to reach the quaint town, which was surrounded by fields of succulent agave plants.

For the full experience, visitors may want to consider the "Jose Cuervo Express," a

There's more than a dozen other historical sites within a few minutes walk, including the Palacio Municipal (Municipal Palace) and the Rotonda de los Jaliscienses Ilustres...

specialty train that travels from Guadalajara to Tequila. When we arrived traditional dancers were performing in the town square, and a lasso artist twirled his rope about himself, hopping in and out of the loop.

Tequila can easily be done as a day trip but for those looking for a more relaxed itinerary with an overnight stay we were shown the newly built hotel Solar de las Animas. It's modeled in a quaint style that matches the town perfectly, with stark white interior walls that give full attention to the antique-looking furniture, and beautiful touches like the blue



and white porcelain signage/room numbers throughout.

Steps away we toured La Rojena tequila distillery, where we witnessed the agave distillation process, such as the chopping of the pino (which looks like a giant green and white pineapple) into halves. This is then baked to convert the starches into the sugars that will be fermented.

The facility's interior was painted in fresh yellows and blues, with black guard rails accented in gold, and so immaculately maintained it almost felt like a set (though it was fully functioning, from the pulp that was being off-loaded into a dump truck to the fermentation tanks and aging barrels).

From there we were taken to the open-air El Centenario de Lazaro Galardo. With paths meandering amidst a sculpture park, it was a

beautiful spot for our banquet under the stars. Amidst margaritas and sips of tequila in shot glasses we feasted on a buffet of beef filet with aged tequila, octopus tacos, pork leg in mole sauce, churros, and "black zapote sweet" [basically a persimmon compote].

As more than one person put it, "I would love to get married here." And they do indeed do weddings. ■