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IN THE SPOTLIGHT: Degollado Theater

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Meet in Mexico

Guadalajara emerges as a unique hub for meetings and incentives. BY MARK CHESNUT

Guadalajara's rise as a MICE destination proves Mexico's increased international importance.

MICE: meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions

Mexico's second-largest city may have historic roots, but in the 21st century, Guadalajara is quickly carving a role as an important business hub. So much so, in fact, the media often calls this bustling metropolis "Mexico's Silicon Valley." It's no wonder international meetings and incentive groups now flock to the destination.

Recent business growth attests to this increased interest in Guadalajara, the capital of the state of Jalisco. Investments of about \$120 million injected life into nearly 300 Guadalajara startups since 2014 according to a *Washington Post* report this year. A variety of multinational brands — including HP, Dell, Oracle and IBM — maintain a presence here, making Guadalajara a key destination for a variety of business-oriented meetings. And the state's 12 universities also make it a source of talent for corporations and organizations around the country and abroad.

Guadalajara's rise as a destination for meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions is a sign of Mexico's increased importance on the international front according to Jaime Nelo,

a representative of IVI DMC2, which operates meetings and incentive programs in Guadalajara as well as other destinations around the nation. "Many Mexican cities are catching the international meeting planner's eye," he said. "The business and colonial cities of Mexico offer exponentially growing attractiveness."

Guadalajara proves especially important for international MICE activities according to Martha Paredes, director of sales, InterContinental Presidente Guadalajara. "It's a very strong business destination since it is home to the Mexican 'Silicon Valley' as well as Expo Guadalajara, which hosts conventions that fill the city." Indeed, Expo Guadalajara — covering more than 1.2 million square feet — remains the region's largest conference, exposition and event space.

A number of new hotels recently arrived in Guadalajara, and more are on the way. The 37-room Casa Fayette, a stylish member of Design Hotels, opened in 2015, as did the 93-room Solar de las Ánimas, an elegant Relais & Châteaux property in the nearby town of Tequila, a popular destination for incentive and meeting groups.

This year, new hotels in Guadalajara include the 142-room NH Collection Guadalajara Centro Histórico, located in the historic city center. The property features guestrooms with balconies as well as a rooftop restaurant with private dining space and impressive city views, and it offers eight meeting

EXPEDITIONS AND EXHIBITIONS: *Jose Cuervo Express train (top), dancers (middle) and Expo Guadalajara (bottom)*

PHOTOS: © GUADALAJARA OFCV

rooms and a total capacity of 475 people for meetings and events.

Also new this year is the 175-room AC Guadalajara Mexico, owned by FibraHotel and operated by Marriott International — part of a two-hotel deal that includes a new property in Queretaro as well. “Guadalajara and Queretaro are two of Mexico’s most vibrant cities, with an active arts scene and energetic urban culture,” said Tim Sheldon, president, the Caribbean and Latin America, Marriott International. The AC Guadalajara features an outdoor pool deck as well as a fitness center, library and lounge areas and free WiFi.

Still to come: The 255-room Hyatt Regency Andares Guadalajara will open in 2017 at the upscale Andares shopping complex with some 29,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space.

With its historic city center, numerous landmarks and rich past, it is no surprise Guadalajara offers an array of interesting choices for unique meeting and event venues. That makes it perfect for a variety of groups, says Fernanda Martinez, spokesperson, Guadalajara Convention and Visitors Bureau. “Guadalajara is an amazing destination for luxury travelers, as the city embraces a cosmopolitan feel that embodies Mexican culture and heritage mixed with a European and American flair,” she said. “It’s the birthplace of Mexico’s iconic traditions including tequila, mariachi and Mexican cuisine. Visitors enjoy the unique architecture and design of its colonial-style buildings and the local crafts produced by artisans in the nearby municipalities of Tlaquepaque and Tonalá. Within the metropolitan area of Guadalajara is the town of Tequila, where the world-famous spirit tequila is produced, and Lake Chapala, the largest lake in Mexico.”

Companies like IVI DMC2 help meeting planners organize private events at landmark venues, including the elegant Degollado Theater, which dates to 1856, and the equally Neoclassical Hospicio Cabañas, built in the 19th century to house orphans and others in need of public assistance. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, Hospicio Cabañas offers multiple spaces for private group events, and its interior displays eye-catching works by the Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco.

The 16th-century town of Tequila, birthplace of what is perhaps Mexico’s best-known spirit, makes another rewarding place for meetings and incentives. Groups can arrive via Sauza Tequilacopter, a helicopter service that operates from Guadalajara’s airport, or take the Jose Cuervo Express train, which brings groups to the Mundo Cuervo complex for private tasting sessions and tours; the facility also includes meeting and event space.

With so many unique possibilities, MICE groups headed to Guadalajara will likely come home with lots of lasting memories.

AC Guadalajara Mexico
achotels.marriott.com

Casa Fayette
designhotels.com

Guadalajara Convention and Visitors Bureau
visitguadalajara.com

Hyatt Regency Andares Guadalajara
hyatt.com

InterContinental Presidente Guadalajara
ihg.com

IVI DMC2
ividmc.com

Mundo Cuervo
mundocuervo.com

NH Collection Guadalajara Centro Histórico
nh-hotels.com

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