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booming segment to your clients**



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Mexico

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Playtime in Guadalajara



Mariachi music was born in Jalisco, the state where Guadalajara is located.

This business destination offers leisure travelers a rich array of **historic and cultural attractions**

By Mimi Kmet

It's affordable, accessible, ever evolving and offers a blend of modernity and cultural attractions. That's the message Guadalajara tourism officials are promoting to U.S.-based agents and their leisure clients. Known as the Silicon Valley of Mexico, the city welcomes plenty of business travelers Monday through Thursday, according to Fernanda Landa, manager of public relations and promotion for the Guadalajara Convention and Visitors Bureau (GCVB). So tourism officials are promoting weekend travel to attract leisure visitors and entice business travelers to stay longer and bring their families.

The GCVB is working with hotels to offer special weekend rates for many of Guadalajara's 23,000-plus accommodations, which span all budgets, Landa said. Even high-end accommodations are affordable, she added, citing the recently opened 257-room Hyatt Regency Andares, "where you can have a nice suite for \$280 in high season." In low season, that rate drops to about \$180, due in part to favorable exchange rates for U.S. travelers, she said.

Other new and upcoming properties in the metropolitan area include the 350-room Hard Rock Hotel Guadalajara, which is scheduled to open March 2018. Mundo Cuervo, the tourism and hospitality division of famed tequila company Jose Cuervo, opened the 93-room, luxury Hotel Solar de las Animas in the nearby town of Tequila in 2015 and is converting two former Cuervo family homes there into boutique hotels. Opening dates are not yet available.

On the air front, more than 30 nonstop flights from throughout the U.S. include service from Austin, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, New York-JFK, San Francisco, San Jose and Seattle. And flights are as short as two-and-a-half hours from California. "We're super connected and super close," Landa said. "We like to say you can have breakfast in the U.S. and lunch with us."

Once in Guadalajara, visitors can explore the city by taking advantage of the growing subway system, the third line of which is projected for completion in late summer 2018, connecting Guadalajara's downtown tourist area with areas outside the city, she said.

Despite its high-tech persona, Guadalajara preserves its rich culture and history. "We combine culture, traditions and the modernity of a big city," Landa said. "You can experience the real Mexico. For example, the city and its surroundings are known for their haciendas – historic, affluent homes, some of which have been converted into boutique hotels while maintaining their original designs."

Travelers visiting Guadalajara's historic center will find such architectural jewels as the 16th-century Catedral de Guadalajara, which combines neoclassical, Baroque and Gothic styles; and the 19th-century Hospicio Cabañas hospital complex, which is adorned with murals by artist Jose Clemente Orozco. In addition, open plazas dot the city. Among them is Plaza de los Mariachis, where visitors can listen to live mariachi music while sipping tequila and munching on local specialties, like torta ahogada ("drowned" sandwich) and shredded birria (spicy stew).

Mariachi music and tequila are among the three major Mexican traditions – the third is charros (Mexican cowboys) – that were born in Jalisco, the state in which Guadalajara is located. The city celebrates these traditions with events such as the annual International Mariachi Festival in August; charro pageants and competitions; and attractions like the Jose Cuervo Express, a luxury train that takes passengers from the city to the Cuervo agave fields and La Rojeña distillery in the town of Tequila for a tour, tastings and a Mexican show.

Historic downtown Guadalajara offers museums, theaters and cultural centers, including the Cabañas Cultural Institute, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. On Avenida Chapultepec, visitors can ride on a calandria (single-horse carriage) or stroll past historic houses designed by famous architects, such as Luis Barragán, and dine at an array of restaurants and food markets.

In addition to casual eateries, Guadalajara offers a slew of high-end restaurants with regional and international menus, Landa said, adding that Lula Bistro, Hueso and Alcalde are among the best in Mexico.

Among the leisure travelers Guadalajara is attracting are families, Landa said. The GCVB also is targeting women interested in bachelorette trips, because of the tequila tours and region's considerable number of spas and shopping opportunities. Additionally, its haciendas are a big draw for weddings and romantic vacations, she added.

To help U.S. agents sell Guadalajara, the GCVB is working with Mexico-based destination management companies (DMCs), which are also tour operators, to bring more visitors from U.S. cities with direct flights. Those DMCs pay 10 to 20 percent commission, Landa said. U.S.-based wholesalers that offer Guadalajara vacations include Mark Travel, Classic Vacations and Delta Vacations (through MLT).

The GCVB also hosts agent events in major U.S. cities and approximately four fam trips a year.

Beyond the Core

While much of Guadalajara's appeal is its historic core, the city's other areas have their own allure. Among them:

The Zapopan area is the heart of Guadalajara's financial district. Visitors will find gleaming office buildings, hotels like the recently opened Hyatt Regency Andares Guadalajara and shopping centers. The neighborhood has its own historic center, with attractions like the 17th-century Basilica of Our Lady of Zapopan and the Art Museum of Zapopan.

Local and regional artisans sell their handicrafts in the quaint village of Tlaquepaque, seven miles (25 minutes by car) from Guadalajara. There are plenty of galleries and museums and a variety of restaurants. Visitors can stroll through Hidalgo Garden, check out art collections at El Refugio Cultural Center and enroll in ceramic or blown-glass workshops.

– Mimi Kmet



The picturesque village of Tlaquepaque is located seven miles from Guadalajara.