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# Guadalajara for Beginners

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The best things to do for first-time visitors

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Mexico



Guadalajara is a great choice for clients interested in exploring art, cuisine and nightlife in one trip. // © 2018 Guadalajara Convention and Visitors Bureau

As Mexico's second-largest city, Guadalajara is graced with culture, history and 21st-century sophistication. Last year, in fact, the destination landed on Travel + Leisure's list of the top 10 cities in Mexico, Central America and South America.

Whether visitors are fans of art, cuisine, style or nightlife, there's enough to fill several days in this fascinating metropolis. Here's a primer on how to plan the perfect first-time visit to Guadalajara.

## Go Back in Time

Feature image (above): Take an easy side trip to Tequila on the Jose Cuervo Express. // © 2018 Guadalajara Convention and Visitors Bureau

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## The Details

**Guadalajara Convention and Visitors Bureau**  
[www.visitguadalajara.com](http://www.visitguadalajara.com)

The historic heart of Guadalajara is square one for most visitors, since a tour through this neighborhood helps to recount the city's storied past. Must-see landmarks include the 16th-century cathedral, which has two iconic spires; the Degollado Theater, a neoclassical gem that dates to 1856 (if you're lucky, you can buy tickets to see a performance inside); and Hospicio Cabanas, an imposing institution that was built in the 19th century to house disadvantaged residents. Today, it's a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a museum with exhibits that include murals by famed Mexican artist Jose Clemente Orozco.

### Take a Tour

For an easy overview of the most popular tourist sites, Tapatio Tour offers a hop-on, hop-off double-decker bus service, while other tour operators offer escorted and customizable packages. Guadalajara Food Tours, for example, offers "taste tours" as well as after-dark pub crawls.

### Shopping Around the City

Artwork, crafts and clothing are among the top finds in and around Guadalajara. Downtown, the San Juan de Dios market (also called Libertad Market) is so expansive that some say it's the largest indoor market in Latin America.

This dizzying multilevel site is packed with hundreds of vendors, who hawk everything from clothing, food and shoes to saddles, artwork and electronics.

Also great for shopping — on a slightly more upscale level — is the touristy neighborhood of Tlaquepaque, where finely made arts and crafts, carved wood furniture and ceramics are worth inspecting. Artisan works are also a draw in Tonalá, where furniture, glassware and ceramics are among the purchases prized by international visitors.

### Diverse Dining

Guadalajara has become something of a foodie hotspot. You can sample local favorites such as birria, a stew made with goat or beef, at several restaurants in the downtown area of Nueve Esquinas ("nine corners"). Or, dive into traditional Mexican fare at Casa Luna, a lovely restaurant in Tlaquepaque. For a trendier vibe, make a reservation at Hueso, a stylish venue with communal tables and decor that incorporates more than 10,000 bones. I Latina is another local favorite with the sophisticated set, thanks to its funky style and mouthwatering Mexican cuisine.

For an especially uplifting dining experience, visit Cordica 21, Mexico's first cafe staffed by people with Down syndrome. Operated as part of a school program, the venue serves light meals and tasty sweets for breakfast and lunch.

## **Where to Stay**

The city offers accommodations at several price points. [Stylish Guadalajara boutique properties](#) include Hotel Demetria and Casa Fayette, which is part of Grupo Habita. Large-scale hotels include InterContinental Presidente Guadalajara, Hilton Guadalajara and Hotel Riu Plaza Guadalajara. For uniquely regional accommodations, consider properties such as the scenic Hacienda Lomajim, which is set in the hills about an hour outside of the city.

## **Guadalajara Side Trips**

Several day trips provide interesting complements to any Guadalajara vacation. The top choice for most first-timers is the town of Tequila, birthplace of the eponymous spirit. Among the most interesting ways to arrive is via the Jose Cuervo Express, operated by the famed tequila brand. The company offers three classes of service; try the top-of-the-line Premium Plus, which features travel in luxury rail cars, complete with snacks and cocktails. A distillery tour and entertainment are also included. Other options include Tequila Herradura Express, a similar train service, and Casa Sauza, which produces Sauza Tequila and offers transfers from Guadalajara by helicopter.

Other popular side trip destinations from Guadalajara include Guachimontones, a group of hilltop, pre-Hispanic ruins that date to 350 B.C., and Chapala, Mexico's largest freshwater lake, which is lined with several cute towns, including the [expat-friendly Ajijic](#).