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LUXURY TRAVEL

Mexico Has Its Own Wine Country—And It's Amazing

This unsung wine region in Baja California has it all, from cutting-edge wines to glamorous hotels.

by Archana Ram

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Six hundred miles south of Napa Valley, just past Tijuana, lies a series of lush green vineyards that are turning out some of the world's most exciting New World wines. The main highway is quiet and dusty, and the landscapes are dotted by rock-strewn hillsides and grazing cows.

But turn onto any side road and you'll start to unearth the many gems of Valle de Guadalupe, Mexico's first, burgeoning wine region. There are restaurants with international acclaim, stylish boutique hotels, and sprawling wineries—most with panoramic views—where you're as likely to mingle with locals as with the winemakers themselves.



Encuentro Guadalupe, a sustainable (but incredibly stylish) resort in Valle de Guadalupe
Photographer: Luis Garcia

For wine lovers in-the-know, Mexico is buzzing. Two decades ago, you could count Valle de Guadalupe's wineries on both hands. By 2012, there were about 50 of them. Now, Baja's Ruta del Vino boasts more than 100 wineries.

Despite the exponential growth, Valle de Guadalupe still has a low-key feel that's reminiscent of a pre-commercial, pre-tourism Napa.

"All of the wineries here are family-based," says Fernando Perez Castro, owner of Valle's La Lomita and Finca La Carrodilla wineries. "We all live here. When you visit a winery, there's a great chance you'll see the owner or winemaker or the son of the owner hanging around."



Deckman's en el Mogor, one of Valle's hottest restaurants
Photographer: Cintia Soto

Getting there is easy. You can drive two hours south from San Diego or fly to Tijuana. Once you're in Baja, you can use UberValle to get around; it's an Uber service that dispatches private drivers to chauffeur you all day long, from Tijuana's airport to the wineries to dinner or beyond. It's a common approach for San Diego- and L.A.-based day trippers and weekend visitors, though well-heeled nationals from Tijuana are also pouring in.

Here's a guide to the best in food, wine, and hotels—if you want to hit them all, plan to stay for four or five days.

Where to Sample



Finca La Carrodilla, one of Valle's top wineries

Source: Finca La Carrodilla

Valle de Guadalupe's regional climate is similar to Bordeaux's and Rioja's, albeit more arid. So it's no surprise that well-ripened, jammy blends of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are among the most popular pours. That said, mono-varietals are the area's current obsession.

Start with the Nebbiolos from Las Nubes and L. A. Cetto, one of the region's oldest and most respected wineries. Then head to Finca Carrodilla, the only winery in the region that uses certified organic grapes. Its Cabs and Shiraz are high in demand, and best enjoyed on their leafy rooftop garden.

Make your last stop Decantos Vinicola, noted for its modern, minimalist architecture and groundbreaking techniques; it uses gravity, rather than mechanical decanting, to transfer wine from tank to barrel, which helps maintain the integrity of the wines' aroma, flavor, and color.



Nightfall at the trailblazing vineyard, Decantos Vinícola
Source: Decantos Vinícola

These wines aren't just good by local standards—top sommeliers in the United States are also buying in.

“I love pouring a glass of [Mexican] wine and not telling someone where it's from,” says Greg Majors, who worked as Tom Colicchio's wine director at Craft in New York before joining San Diego-based [Blue Bridge Hospitality](#). “Then you tell them it's from Mexico and their eyes pop.”

Where to Eat



Drew Deckman in his open kitchen
Source: Deckman's en el Mogor

Restaurants are seasonal and fiercely farm-to-table, with some of Mexico's most noteworthy chefs in the kitchens.

In the case of Deckman's en el Mogor, Georgia-born chef Drew Deckman—who studied with Paul Bocuse and was executive chef of the Michelin-starred Restaurant Vitus, in Berlin—is front and center at the glorified campsite restaurant, where he grills grass-fed meats and vegetables picked from the property's on-site garden.



Oysters at Corazon de Tierra
Photographer: Fernando Carmela

At Corazón de Tierra, the restaurant at the hacienda-style bed and breakfast La Villa Del Valle, chef Diego Hernandez's tasting menus are made up of modern Mexican dishes like pig's trotters dusted with onion ashes. It's the only Valle restaurant to be featured as one of Latin America's Best 50 Restaurants since that list debuted in 2013.

Where to Sleep



Bruma, one of Valle's first chic stays

Source: Bruma

The roads in Valle may be dusty, but the accommodations are anything but. Look to the many design-forward boutique properties for proof.

Bruma, the brainchild of eight childhood friends, is a year-old 75-acre property that includes a five-bedroom bed and breakfast (dubbed Casa Ocho), pool, spa, and event space, with a winery and restaurant opening soon. Decked out with beautiful tile work and wood detailing, it feels like a log cabin turned art gallery, with design led by famed local architect Alejandro d'Acosta.



An eco-villa at Encuentro Guadalupe

Source: Encuentro Guadalupe

Modernity is the guiding principle at Encuentro Guadalupe, which opened in 2012 and offers 20 sustainably built lofts and villas on a rocky hillside. The hotel bar is a hip hangout for well-to-do Tijuana and hipster SoCal travelers.

Chefs are getting in on the hotel game, too. Tijuana-bred chef Javier Plascencia, who runs the Valle restaurant Finca Altozano and numerous hotspots throughout Tijuana and San Diego, opened Finca La Divina last year. The six-room bed and breakfast feels more like a glamorous Airbnb, complete with pool, grill, and four more bedrooms coming by the end of 2017.



In the cellar at La Lomita

Source: La Lomita