



El Museo Rafael Coronel



Plaza de Toros San Pedro



Mercado Libertad



Quinta Real Guadalajara

By Marci Mannis, Travel Editor

I think the one phrase my daughter will most likely remember me saying during her childhood is, “Life is short Breanna, so try not to have regrets along the way.” Life is about change, the choices that you make and how they will affect your life’s path.

As I reflect on my own life now, with the “Empty Nest” milestone only 6 years away and the magical sounding “Golden Years” not far behind, I am happy to say that I feel my life has unfolded quite beautifully. I am proud of the fact that there are very few regrets tucked away in my hip pocket. But indeed life is short, so I have decided to take my own advice and have resolved to tackle a few of those “I-wish-I would-haves” head on. The two that have always nagged at me are: not making the time to travel abroad and not continuing Spanish as a second language in college.

In the past year I have taken several trips to Mexico and explored many of the cities and towns sprinkled throughout. With each trip my Spanish has improved, making the travel experience that much richer and more meaningful.

My trips to Mexico made me realize how much I missed the language and how proud other cultures are of their past. The Mexican people have an intense respect for their country, their cities and their heritage. Their deep family traditions and indigenous foods are just a few of the reasons why I can’t seem to tire of this warm vacation destination.

Typically my sleeping quarters are not my main concern when I travel. Much to my surprise where I laid my head each night was actually what made my most recent trips to Mexico so memorable. Like the country, the history and sense of honor behind the Quinta Real Resorts is a story in and of itself. Experiencing this collection of boutique hotels was like discovering a treasure chest. Each and every property was like a finely polished jewel, unique to its city’s location, displaying a distinct personality and beauty.

Mapping out my Mexican itinerary was easy because I made sure to weave the Quinta Real resorts into my plans ([www.quintareal.com](http://www.quintareal.com)). The assistance each guest receives lives up to the old Mexican saying – *Mi Casa es Su Casa*. (My house is your house.)

Quinta Real **Guadalajara** is described as the “Perfect Balance between Art and Tradition.” The breathtaking architecture reflects the Colonial period and, like all their resorts, has an array of original Mexican colonial art dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Additional art has been crafted by Mexican artists and artisans, with each piece perfectly placed throughout the property. Spanning the centuries, the result is a perfect combination of Spanish and Mexican culture. An entire day could be spent wandering the resort and taking in all the pieces the owner has collected for his guests to admire.

Stepping out into Guadalajara from the resort is to experience one of the most cosmopolitan cities of Western Mexico. As Mexico’s second largest city, it is known as “The Pearl of Jalisco” and has a population of 1.6 million. Guadalajara is the home of the largest indoor market in Latin America, Mercado Libertad (Liberty Market) or Mercado San Juan de Dios (St. John of God Market) as the locals call it. Countless hours can be spent drifting down the narrow aisles. With over 1000 vendors to visit, I enjoyed blending into the Mexican way of life.

Slipping out of the city the next day for a little less commotion, I took a day excursion to the small town of Tequila to learn about how this country’s beloved national beverage is produced. Like the grape vines that produce California’s signature wines, the town of Tequila, established in the 1600s, has the agave plants to make their terrific tequila. With countless tequila distilleries I chose a label that my taste buds were familiar with – Jose Cuervo. Touring one of the oldest factories in Latin America, Cuervo en el Mundo – The World of Cuervo, was an educational and festive taste testing experience in a stunning rustic setting.

**San Miguel de Allende** is about a 4-hour scenic drive from Guadalajara. Casa de Sierra Nevada, operated by Quinta Real, is a particularly unique hotel in the heart of the city. Built in 1580, this stunning collection of 5 colonial houses have been restored and turned into spectacular guests suites each having their own personality.

With a population of 130,000 (10,000 being Americans!) this bustling colonial city never seems to sleep. This is a community that knows how to party and plans many *fiestas* throughout the year to prove it. Since the late 1500s San Miguel de Allende has been famed internationally for its shopping and wide variety of artisans. Dating back to the early 1600s it was considered one of the wealthiest towns in central Mexico because of this large range and influx of craftsmen.

As I walked for hours on the cobblestone streets it became clear to me that San Miguel de Allende was

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having an effect. The people are warm, friendly and painfully patient with their tourists! I felt like I fit in for the short time that I spent in this very safe quaint town. This is a city that would make an excellent destination for a summer immersion program.

One of the most captivating aspects of the Mexican destinations I explored were the fascinating stories that are woven into their history. For example – The state of Aguascalientes and the state of Zacatecas were once unified, until a single kiss sealed the deal of separation between the two states in 1835.

Having the opportunity to visit both capital cities within these two separate states was quite an experience. Once again I resided in the elegant Quinta Real Resorts where the art and history merged perfectly with the city.

**Aguascalientes** is a 230-year-old city and is on the verge of exploding with growth. The home of the largest Nissan plant in Latin America and a new NASCAR Track premiering in 2007, Aguascalientes is proving to be high on the charts for business trade and overall growth. Hosting the most important fair in Mexico every April, the National Fair of San Marco, this city is bursting with hospitality and warmth involving all their festivals and celebrations. In addition to being famous for its hot springs, this city is also known for its breathtaking sunsets. National Geographic’s placed it 4<sup>th</sup> in the world for the best sunsets without water. Exploring the colonial treasures of the city is a history lesson like no other, from the galleries and theaters to the temples and museums.

The last stop in my Mexican travels was to the city of **Zacatecas**. There was not a moment spent here that I did not feel like I was in the middle of a movie set. Checking into this Quinta Real Resort was like traveling back in time. The hotel was built directly on the ruins of the Plaza de Toros San Pedro (San Pedro Bullring). The bullring itself was constructed in 1866 and in 1987 it was re-constructed into a hotel. The collection of art throughout this property was simply breathtaking. You could not only feel the history in the walls but also see it hanging. Every space and corner is carefully designed to once again evoke the specific culture of the city in which it is set.

The colonial city of Zacatecas, made up of Canderá (pink stone) is one of the world’s main producer’s of silver. A relaxing and slow paced city makes for days of walking and sightseeing. The Zacatecans are the keepers of Mexican tradition, with the highest volume of museums and galleries per capita in Mexico. My personal favorite was the El Museo Rafael Coronel, the largest mask collection museum in the world. I was quite tickled when the curator of the museum knew Minnesota was *muy frio* (very cold) and it was the Land of *10,000 Lagos!* (lakes)

Returning to my homeland of 10,000 lakes in mid November from my Mexican vacation was to be reminded of the *muy frio* temperatures I would be experiencing in the months to come. On those cold, bitter days in *Mi Casa*, I will be practicing my *Español* and reminding my daughter how to *vive la vida al máximo!* (Live life to its fullest!)