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LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE

Bored of big cities and tedious commutes? Considering jacking in your job and starting something new in a place with a gentler pace of life? We have just the idea: start up somewhere slower. We visit Mexico, Indonesia and Sicily to find out how it's done.

Open city *Guadalajara*

Americana is one of Guadalajara's liveliest and most diverse neighbourhoods, where the gridded streets are lined with tall trees and old townhouses taken up with buzzy little bars and hotels. We're in the second most populous city in Mexico but you can still hear the birds chirp over the traffic and people move at an unhurried pace. Even the street-food vendors prepare workers' lunchtime *torta ahogadas* (sandwiches drowned in salsa) and fresh mango in a less flustered fashion than in Mexico City.

It's this big city's small-town feel and access to more affordable rent that has made the state capital of Jalisco a hotspot for entrepreneurs from Mexico, the US and further afield, all seeking a better quality of life. Between 2010 and 2020, the population in Guadalajara ballooned by 18 per cent to about 5.2 million. Since the pandemic began, the pace of arrivals has soared, partly because the cost of living in the capital, 550km to the southeast, has risen vertiginously.

1. Piedrafeugo
2. Guadalajara 90210
3. Designer Fabien Cappello
4. Artist Jorge Méndez Blake
5. Capello's studio
6. Edurne and Mirren Navarro of KarmeLe

Part of the city's allure is its bohemian artistic past as the birthplace of creative giants including architect Luis Barragán – a legacy that has endured to this day. "Here it is a community," says artist Jorge Méndez Blake about the city's buzzing creative scene. "We all go to the same framer." Méndez Blake was born and raised here but is part of a large and growing number of self-employed artists availing themselves of affordable studio space.

José Noé Suro, the founder of the Cerámica Suro factory, has worked with everyone from Ghanaian-British architect David Adjaye to artist Jorge Pardo and painter Sarah Crouner. He has been instrumental in drawing attention to the city, which he likens to Los Angeles in part because of the surrounding sierra.

"The scene here has a strong identity and that goes back to Barragán," says Aldo Alvarez Tostado, founder of home-ware brand Piedrafeugo. At the new showroom, there's also a residency space and a courtyard where Tostado hosts art events. It's one of the many new spaces to have opened recently.



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"It's very attractive to live in a connected city with a big cultural scene"

While the traffic isn't bad, getting around is also easier now that the city has a third metro line, which was added in 2020. Its construction cost more than €1.5bn, making the line the largest investment project in the history of Jalisco state. Meanwhile, the airport now serves more than 25 international destinations with direct flights from cities including Los Angeles, Panama City and Madrid, with a Colombia connection set to be added this year. The once-traditional city has become much more outward looking in part thanks to vastly improved internet access, a less conservative government since 2009 and an influx of new people.

"I can feel the change," says Alberto Lopez Corcuera, an artist who recently opened Guadalajara 90210, a contemporary art space in a former school in Colonia Americana. "Guadalajara used to be a



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super traditional city but in the past five or so years, everything has changed. The new generation is much more open.”

French designer Fabien Cappello, who relocated from London by way of Mexico City, agrees. “It’s very attractive to live in a connected city with a big cultural scene,” he says. Cappello followed his partner to Guadalajara and now works in a spacious, colourful, plant-filled studio in Alcalde Barranquitas, a quiet working-class neighbourhood just north of the city centre. “The older generation put Guadalajara on the map and now the younger generation can imagine creating within the city. That’s what convinced me that I could move here.”

The hospitality scene has improved too, with the opening of Grupo Habita’s comely Casa Habita hotel in Americana. “It doesn’t feel so saturated,” says Diego Villaneuva Plascencia, owner of Zuno Café, set in a mansion house in Americana. He moved here from Mexico City, where he had a popular design shop called Apt 25 in La Roma. He’s sitting in the banana-palm-filled courtyard of Zuno, on a yellow wire chair designed by his friend Cappello. “A lot of visitors are coming here and they don’t want to feel like they’re in Brooklyn,” he says, referencing the increasing Americanisation of the capital. At the front of the house, in a space that spills onto a tiled terrace, he recently opened the second Apt 25 shop, a beautiful wood-panelled room with royal blue carpets and shelves with goods such as ceramics by local creatives, as well as a few international brands. He hopes to acquire the rest of the mansion and open another restaurant in the coming months.

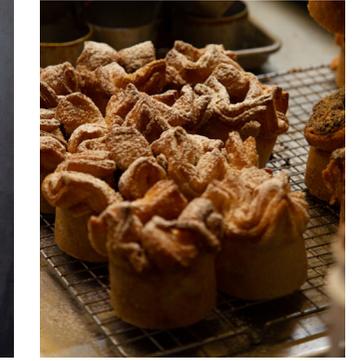
While many outsiders have rolled in, the restaurant is largely run by *tapatíos*

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(Jalisco natives), who never left or decided to move back home after honing their trade abroad, says José Alonso Martín Ocampo, partner of restaurant group Grupo Habana Negrita.

“We now have people coming here with cool ideas looking for places like this,” he says, gesturing to Salon Candela, an open-air cantina in the Seattle neighbourhood. A few streets away is Enora, a new coffee shop and restaurant that spills out onto a wide pedestrian-centred avenue opened by partners from the Risoma network. The locally founded group has a collection of cult restaurants including De La O and Pal Real.

Karmele, a bakery with exposed cement walls, wood shelves and basket lights, was opened by sisters Edurne and Mirren Navarro. Mirren, who recently did a stint at Hart Bageri in Copenhagen, launched her own bakery in her parents’ house in 2019. Today there’s a queue for freshly baked goods such as baguettes, cheesecake, cookies and *Karmelitos* (a riff on the Breton *kouign-amman* pastry), oozing with berries and chocolate.

But for all its new places and people, Guadalajara maintains a distinct identity. At Xokol, a restaurant in Santa Teresita run by two of the city’s youngest rising chefs, Óscar Segundo and Xrysw Ruelas, there’s something that feels close to the essence of what’s good about Guadalajara. The neighbourhood is full of tradition but close enough to affluent areas to be successful, says Ruelas. The restaurant, which recently moved, now has slick charcoal-coloured walls, a long, shared dining table and a vast open kitchen, where diners catch whiffs of smoke from the wood oven and open *comal* (clay griddle). It’s by far the most polished spot to open in the area but that seems to suit people: as does the nod to pre-colonial culinary customs and the use of heirloom corn from Segundo’s grandmother, whose portrait is proudly daubed on the wall.

“Whenever I’m at Óscar’s mom’s house, she gives me a tortilla as a welcome,” says Ruelas. Around the dining table it’s mostly families; way after 22.00, there’s a queue out of the door. “More and more people are moving to Guadalajara,” says Ruelas. “It’s a city that has so many opportunities.” — MHO

1. Salon Candela
2. Méndez Blake’s studio
3. José Noé Suro
4. Chef Xrysw Ruelas
5. ‘Karmelitas’ at Karmele
6. Cerámica Suro
7. Apt 25