



## Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



### All aboard the Tequila Express!

by Amaru & Suzanne, January 19th 2009

Guadalajara is located in the heart of the Jalisco state... the state known mostly for its Tequila production...

After leaving the Mayan Riviera, we arrived in Guadalajara where we were picked up by our hotel **Quinta Don Jose** in Tlaquepaque (which is an area of Guadalajara). As soon as we checked in, we knew we were going to love our stay here. I mean, first of all... an airport pickup is bound to score some extra points isn't it?

Once we checked in we were given a tour of the place and it even had a pool (which we didn't use since it was just too cold). The room was lovely and what Suz liked the best was the fact that it had a filtered water container in our room. How good is that???

That afternoon we just strolled the streets of Tlaquepaque which turned out to be a lovely little area filled with lots of speciality shops (and a big plus because we didn't see a single of the standard souvenir shops anywhere).



**Tlaquepaque**  
A lovely part of Guadalajara



**Mariachi statues**  
Guadalajara is the home of the Mariachi!

But, the main reason we had come here was because this is the region where Tequila is made and a few days earlier, through our hotel (did we mention that we loved them?), had managed to book tickets for us on the famous Tequila Express.

Before we continue we should make one thing clear.... Tequila is made in or around the area surrounding the town of Tequila and just like Champagne, only Tequila made in Tequila can be called just that. However, the Tequila Express doesn't actually take you to the town of Tequila. It goes to a town about 15km outside of it named Amatlan where the distillery "Casa Herradura" (which makes the Herradura Tequila of course) is produced.

So, we didn't actually visit the ACTUAL town of Tequila....

Did we get a great experience nonetheless? You better believe it...

It all started at the train station before we were ready to board the train, a Mariachi band ("Los Toritos") showed up and started playing for us (the Mariachis are actually originally from this area in Mexico). We were then taken to our carriage and while we rolled out of Guadalajara we were told what they were serving during the trip. Basically it was an open bar with MUCHO Tequila, Tequila based drinks, soft drinks and snacks.... yes, it was an open bar ;)

The trip took around 90min since the train slowly chugs its way along the country side. On our way there we were given a history lesson about Tequila and of course, the Mariachis came back to play for us.



**Street food...**  
We love it!



**Suz found some homemade chips**  
They were good!

We were first shown how the "Jirador" cuts away the leaves from the Blue Agave plant to reveal the centre, the so called piña. Afterwards the piña is cooked for a few hours until it's ready to be squeezed of its liquids. This liquid is then fermented and then distilled and then we have Tequila.... simple isn't it ;)

Along with showing us how Tequila is made today we were also shown how it was made in the past...

Once the tour was complete we were assigned a table (yes, all the English speaking people had one table) and lunch was served which was a nice traditional Mexican meal.



**The pool at the Quinta Don Jose**  
Our home away from home

We walked up to him, pretty much just said we wanted some food, specified for beef tacos and were given the greatest taco we've ever had. It was so good that I had to have seconds (to start with). I was a bit curious of what the rest of the meats were that he was serving and he advised me that he had (among other things) tripe and tongue.

Well, I'm not known for being fussy about what I eat so I immediately ordered one tripe and one tongue taco. The tripe one was ok, nothing special about it but the tongue one was just divine. The meat melted in your mouth... I tried to get Suz to try some of it but she was discouraged when she saw them cut the tongue meat...

More for me I thought, and devoured both of them.... street food is just the best, and the absolute best part of it all came when we paid. The tacos were just about \$AUD 60 cents each!

Most of the tour was in Spanish, English was spoken as well, but the history lesson and such was all in Spanish and I had to translate it for Suz. We were actually a bit surprised about the people on the train. We had expected that there would have been mostly foreigners on the train but that wasn't the case. We can say for sure that at least 80% of the train was filled with Mexicans from around the country, here to learn something about their national drinks (and of course to sample the product as well).

Once we arrived in Amititan we were hearded into buses and taken to the hacienda. We were a small group of English speaking people that were all joined into one tour group.



**Fresh corn right of the grill**  
I love my corn!

It was now possible for those who wanted to have some more Tequila (well, if they insist) while we were being shown a traditional folklore dancing, of course with the Mariachi band playing as well.

At the end of the day we got back on the train and headed back to Guadalajara.... The trip lasts from around 11am to 8pm. It was well worth it... well, if you have any kind of interest in how Mexico's national drink is made then yeah for sure... we loved it!

That night when we got back to Tlaquepaque we didn't feel like a huge dinner so we decided to see what we could find along the streets. And just 100m outside our hotel we found our local Taco man!



**Dinner at our hotel**  
Entertainment included...



**I know, it's not very Mexican**  
But I love Creme Brulee

The next day we strolled around our area of Tlaquepaque for a few hours before we decided to head into Guadalajara centre to see what was there...

The city centre was beautiful as well with plenty of public squares and an impressive Cathedral. We even walked into the municipal building which is a good thing we did, as we found some impressive murals in there.

But, it's no Tlaquepaque so we headed back pretty soon and just stayed in our area for the remainder of our time in Guadalajara. We even had another dinner at our hotel and it just gets better and better.

The steak we were served is easily one of the best we've ever had and for dessert... Creme Brulee for the second time (I just love this dessert).

On our last day in the area we decided to try the local dish, "Tortas Ahogadas". The direct translation mean Drowned Cakes, but tortas can also mean bread or baguette. So what is it? It's a sourdough sandwich with meat that's drenched with a tomato, vinegar sauce. It doesn't sound very appealing we know but trust us on this one.... it's absolutely divine!

Somehow the sourdough bread doesn't get soggy by the treatment and is only wet on the outside. One funny thing though is that the bread contains a meat mixture containing some pork, chicken and beef.



**We're at the train station**  
ready to board the Tequila Express



**A Marichi band**  
played for us before we boarded

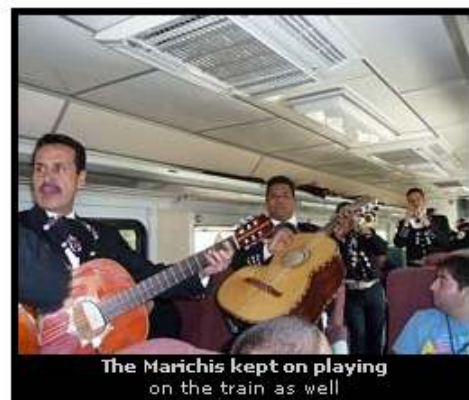
What Suz didn't know is that some of the beef is tongue. It was quite funny afterwards when I informed her of this fact... hehe!

Guadalajara, Tlaquepaque and the Tequila Express were all great. This turned out to be the best part of Mexico so far, and also by far the most authentic one as well, we actually felt like we were in Mexico now!

If the opportunity arises in the future we will definitely return to Guadalajara and Tlaquepaque and maybe that time we'll make our own way to the town of Tequila and visit some distilleries of our own choice.



**Do I look excited?**  
Trust me, I am =)



**The Marichis kept on playing**  
on the train as well



Suz and I  
in Mexican hats



My first Tequila of the day  
...the first of many!



Blue Agave fields  
We passed many of them...



We have arrived at our destination  
The "Casa Herradura" distillery



The "Jima" of the Agave  
Cutting away the plants



That's a lot of "piñas"  
And all of it and more is needed...



It's now time for the Agave plant  
to cook for a few hours



Who wants to have their photo  
taken with a donkey?



**And this is where the magic happens...**  
And Tequila comes to life!



**The old fashion way**  
It was all done by hand in the past



**Some of the historic**  
Copper containers



**One of the cellars at Casa Herradura**  
...that's a lot of Tequila



**We got some traditional**  
dancing to go with our dinner...



**These guys**  
are quite handy with their knives



**The train ride home...**  
and of course we had some Mariachis!



**Sampling some of the street food**  
We love the \$AUD 60 cent tacos!



The main square in Tlaquepaque



The garden at our hotel



One of the main streets of Tlaquepaque



Just walking the narrow streets...



There are so many shops like this one in this area



Plenty of skulls and skeletons for the Day of the Dead ceremony



Suz found a new friend in Tlaquepaque



Did anyone say Tequila? Just a brand or two...



My favorite Mexican beer  
... and one Añejo Tequila to go with it!



"Tortas Ahogadas"  
Translation: Drowned Cakes (or bread)



Sourdough bread that's drenched  
in a tomato, vinegar sauce



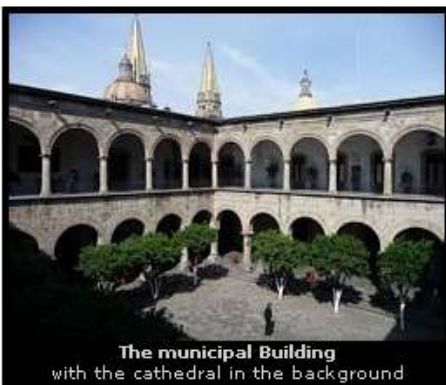
It's absolutely delicious...  
I do some simple street food!!



We're doing our own tour  
of Guadalajara center



An impressive mural  
found at the municipal building



The municipal Building  
with the cathedral in the background



Suz in front  
of another mural



This one is even more impressive than the other



Guadalajara Cathedral



On Sunday the bikes take over the streets of Guadalajara



Suz at the Chai Cafe



Guadalajara Another one of its many squares



Guadalajara as seen from the air...

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