

Puerto Vallarta a popular destination

Friendly people and beautiful scenery provide a great experience for visitors

By Mansoor Ladha

Scotland has its whisky or scotch to brag about while Mexico has its tequila, immensely popular with tourists and locals. A tequila-tasting excursion is a must when you visit Puerto Vallarta, one of Mexico's top tourist destinations.

On a recent visit to Puerto Vallarta, we were able to register from the hotel tour desk to participate in a tequila tour where we were able to learn how tequila is made and taste different brands of Mexico's national drink. Mexico is the only place in the world where agave is grown, harvested and distilled into the drink that is favoured by millions locally and abroad.

Caution should be exercised when taking tequila tours because there are some excursions which promote a particular tequila brand and basically, they are tasting tours promoting a particular brand of tequila.

Tequila, the distilled beverage made from the blue agave plant, is primarily found in the area surrounding the city of Tequila, 65 km northeast of Guadalajara. The Mexicans usually serve tequila neat while most of the world take it as a shot with salt and lime. The liquor is recognized and registered as a Mexican product and protected through NAFTA in Canada and United States.

The planting and harvesting agave plant has remained unchanged by modern machinery and relies entirely on centuries old know-how by Mexican farmers called jimadores, who have passed their skills from generation to generation.

Located on the Pacific coast, Puerto Vallarta boasts some of the finest beaches and all-inclusive resorts. It offers everything to budget travellers to those seeking something extra such as fine dining and spas. Most resorts are reasonably priced, offering fun activities such as snorkelling, kayaking and boat rides, and restaurants serving French, Italian and Mexican cuisine. Evenings are spent either attending bars, discotheques and clubs or staying in the hotel to enjoy entertainment offered by management.

Desiring a change from the resort routine, we opted for an authentic Mexican entertainment and dinner provided by Timor Tours. Our adventure began with a scenic ocean cruise across the Banderas Bay to the isolated cove of Las Caletas. As the sun began to set and darkness descended, we were able to enjoy the glittering lights along the coastline.

My wife and I were able to get a table by



PHOTOS BY MANSOOR LADHA

An all-inclusive holiday resort with a beach in front provides an ideal place to swim or relax.

the water and were thrilled by the sound of the ocean hitting the rocks nearby. The place provides a romantic dinner setting under the stars.

After dinner, we were summoned by native drums to the torch-lit outdoor amphitheatre to enjoy a breathtaking theatrical performance of Rhythms of the Night. The exhilarating spectacle depicted stories of ancient civilization told through music and dance performed by one of Mexico's most innovative and contemporary dance troupes. The magical evening ended with a nightcap and dancing under the stars.

Puerto Vallarta has also become synonym for romance, becoming a wedding and honeymoon destination for couples. The city has become famous for its glorious sunsets, enticing newlyweds. During one's vacation, Puerto Vallarta will definitely provide lots of excitement, fun, relaxation, tranquility, delicious food, friendly people and close contact with nature.

Dubbed as the sixth most popular resort in the world, Puerto Vallarta is a small, colonial city nestled on the shores of Bay of Banderas, the largest bay in Mexico and second largest in North America, surrounded by a tropical jungle.

The city's downtown area is concentrated on the town plaza and the landmark Church of Guadalupe. Visitors should



Coconut water is very popular among tourists. A vendor prepares to cut a coconut.

definitely take a walk along old Vallarta and Malecon, the heart of the town, which is the historic centre and its main tourist attractions — a one-mile long promenade or boardwalk. On one end of the waterfront

boulevard is the large outdoor amphitheatre which holds live entertainment and outdoor functions. This is also the place you will find the Friendship Fountain with its three dolphins by sculptor James Bottoms. The boardwalk is also a favourite place for artists, painters and sea sculptors.

Canadians are drawn to most destinations in Mexico, but Puerto Vallarta is one of their favourite tourist destinations, attracting approximately 500,000 Canadians annually.

In an interview with the Canadian Daily Press, Agustine Alavarez, director of the Puerto Vallarta Tourism Board, said: "We're very proud of our destination. We believe we are the most authentic Mexican beach destination in the country."

"We've been called the friendliest city in the world, and it's true. It's safe and it's very authentic. I'm talking food, the people and the natural experience."

Agreeing with him, Alvaro Garciarce, president of the Puerto Vallarta Hotel Association, said visitors will feel very welcome and find an endless list of attractions to keep them busy.

"We have the mountains. We have the sea. We have the town and most importantly we have friendly people. They're always smiling. We also have food and culture. It's very authentic, you can taste the real Mexico here. It's also very safe when compared to some other cities."

Puerto Vallarta tourism officials recently unveiled a number of key tourism projects which includes construction of a new mega cruise pier scheduled to open in March 2018. Combined with the pier, there will be a large "authentic" Mexican shopping centre and a new aquarium, which will be the largest in Latin America.

"Our commitment to the cruise industry is strong, and we will make history with this port. It will be one of the icons of Puerto Vallarta," according to Port official Carlos Gerard.

Mansoor Ladha is a Calgary-based travel writer, columnist and author of "Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan's Shia Ismaili Muslims." His second book, "Memoirs of a Muhindi," is scheduled to be published by Regina University Press in 2017.



Puerto Vallarta is famous for its sunsets and provides a romantic setting for couples like the one couple above.