

WANDERINGS: SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, GUANAJUATO, MEXICO

This colorful 16th-century colonial town invites visitors to share in its cultural delights

WRITTEN BY Rosemary Carstens



It's not easy to describe what it feels like to arrive in San Miguel de Allende for the first time. There is nothing else like this enchanting town, situated at 6,200 feet in the Colonial Highlands of Central Mexico. Known for its beautiful 16th-century Baroque architecture and its role in the Mexican War of Independence, the city's historic *centro* is a UNESCO World Heritage site. This charming city has attracted visitors and emigrants from around the world, and 10 percent of its estimated 80,000 residents today are expats.

In addition to its well-preserved and fascinating architectural history, San Miguel is known for its year-round mild climate; its winding cobblestone lanes lined with buildings and courtyard walls painted in hues of red, yellow, orange and blue; and an abundance of cultural activities available to residents and visitors alike.

Art in all its manifestations is everywhere, from galleries to individual studios and workshops, with openings and exhibitions almost every night during the busiest seasons. One of the most popular spots for art, food and shops is the trendy **La Fábrica la Aurora**, an old textile mill turned art center. A



This page, from top: A mesmerizing vista of San Miguel de Allende at dusk. Photo: Rosewood Hotel | The bar at Hotel Matilda offers an inviting atmosphere for cocktails. **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** Colorful courtyard walls along a San Miguel cobblestone street. Photo: Rosewood Hotel | The entrance to Terry Ann Tomlinson Gallery is an interesting mix of art and architectural details. | The Rosewood Hotel reflects the artistic traditions of this historic town. Photo: Rosewood Hotel | Street musicians serenade passersby.



Map: Daphne Gilliam



Clockwise from top left: The dining room at Enrique Olvera’s Moxi restaurant at the Hotel Matilda is elegant and serene. | Art even exists poolside at the Hotel Matilda. | The iconic Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel is a symbol of this World Heritage City. Photo: Rosewood Hotel | The Restaurant on Calle Sollano offers patio dining and refreshing takes on staple favorites. | Casa de la Noche is a historic San Miguel bordello.

few other favorites for art lovers are **Moyshen the Gallery**, showcasing contemporary works by Mexican and Latin American artists and works by Mexico's Golden Age masters; **Casa de la Cuesta**, a not-to-be-missed mask museum; and the gallery and innovative home of local paper artist **Terry Ann Tomlinson**, open on Wednesdays and by appointment.

Nearby, **Galeria Atotonilco** is a world-famous folk art venue with most items for sale. While there, visit the **Sanctuary of Atotonilco**, a UNESCO World Heritage site sometimes called the Sistine Chapel of Mexico. Built in the 1740s, the church's exterior is plain white, but its interior walls and ceiling are a colorful explosion of murals and frescos depicting the life of Christ.

Art is only the beginning of the excitement in San Miguel — there's also live music, literary *salas* and conferences, lectures, film festivals and a constant array of *fiestas*, parades and processions throughout the year.

Among the city's many pleasures are its countless interesting accommodations. There's the top-of-the-line **Rosewood**, with its luxurious rooms and suites, elegant accoutrements, half-dozen restaurants and spa facilities. And there's also the stylish, smaller, thoroughly modern **Hotel Matilda**, with its captivating indoor waterfall and comprehensive contemporary art collection. And, among my favorites because of its more casual Mexican charm, **Casa de la Noche**, a former historic bordello. With 14 rooms and a warm and friendly staff, this intimate setting is a great option for conferences, groups and painting workshops. It offers a constant round of art and



Collector's Rendezvous on the **CLARK FORK**

Quinn's Hot Springs in Paradise, Montana on May 17th - 19th and You Are Invited.

The Rendezvous is an interactive art event where collectors are educated in different aspects of art creation & investment while having the opportunity to foster relationships with premier Western artists & industry experts, including Andy Thomas, Brent Cotton, Joe Kronenberg & Ben Pease. Quinn's Hot Springs Resort provides the perfect setting to enjoy amazing cuisine and relax in revitalizing mineral pools on the beautiful Clark Fork River in Paradise, MT.

Space is limited, so please contact us for an information packet with show details. Additionally, there will be an exclusive opportunity to acquire rare works by legendary artists such as Charles Russell, Frederic Remington, Edgar Paxson, John Fery, & Taos Founders.



Brought to
you by:

The
Coeur d'Alene
galleries LLC
Western • Wildlife • Traditional Art
Since 1986

(208) 667-7732 | CDAGalleries.com
213 E. Sherman Ave, | Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814



The Swamp (detail), 2015, oil on canvas, 60 x 40

**JAUNE
QUICK-TO-SEE
SMITH** *In the
Footsteps of My
Ancestors*

**MARCH 23 -
JULY 16, 2017**
*Catalog available
March 23rd*

*With support from
**THE ANDY WARHOL
FOUNDATION
FOR THE VISUAL ARTS**
and others.*



Clockwise from top: A romantic evening view from the Luna Rooftop Tapas Bar. | The 1826 Restaurant bar offers a diverse selection of tequilas. | At the Rosewood, guests sleep in comfortable luxury. Photos: courtesy of Rosewood Hotel

cooking classes, yoga, massage and art exhibitions.

Trish Brock, a former Coloradan who has resided in San Miguel for nearly five years, suggests that people visiting for a week or more should consider renting a house instead of staying in a hotel. “Many homeowners who aren’t here full-time rent their houses out,” she says. “The benefits are numerous — all the comforts of home, staff to take care of your needs, and kitchens for those times you want to stay in.” Brock notes that it’s often a less expensive option, particularly if you are coming with friends and family. “I recommend working with an agency so you know what you are getting,” she says. “I have rented at least 20 houses here during the years when I was organizing painting workshops and vacationing on my own prior to moving down. I know each of the agency owners, and the houses they represent are beautiful.”

As with places to stay, dining in this exceptional city offers so many options you must move here to have any chance of exploring them all. Rooftop terraces overlooking the city are popular choices for taking in the views as the sun sets and stars begin to punctuate the evening sky. Jan Pogue, a retired publisher from Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, who once visited and now lives in San Miguel, suggests **La Azotea**, with the caveat that, “It gets packed, so arrive there at about 5 p.m. and order tapas and drinks to savor as you wait for night to fall.” Reviewers rave about the jicama tacos.

Other good choices for unique culinary experiences are **The Restaurant**, **Áperi**, **La Parada**, **El Vergel** (for breakfast or lunch) and the very special **Zumo**.

Many of these restaurants specialize in fresh, organic ingredients and feature skilled chefs offering innovative creations.

Most locals are reluctant to reveal their favorite out-of-the-way places, but you don't have to go fancy to get great food in San Miguel. Try **Don Taco Tequila** — low key, small, great tacos and margaritas — one block off the *jardin*. Or there's **Hidalgo 50**, a lovely, quiet family-run bistro.

Whether arriving by day or by night, the stunning sight of the towering **La Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel** is the first indication you should prepare to be caught up in the city's magical spell. It's one of the most photographed churches in Mexico. It was originally constructed with a traditional Mexican façade, but its current Gothic façade is thought to have been inspired by such European churches as Antoni Gaudí's *Basílica de la Sagrada Família* in Barcelona, Spain. It lies at the heart of San Miguel and is an historic monument to the region's importance. In front of the church is the Plaza Allende, referred to by locals as "*el jardin*," a popular meeting place where people gather to listen to music and enjoy the everchanging parade of passersby. For those interested in architectural history, walking

tours with knowledgeable guides leave the *jardin* every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Sometimes referred to as the "City of Love," San Miguel is a popular destination-wedding site. Religious ceremonies generally take place in the Church of San Francisco, Posada de las Monjas or La Parroquia, with receptions ranging from upscale events at the Rosewood to beautiful settings in other hotels, restaurants and private *villas*. Jesús Aguado, a reporter with the local newspaper, *Atención*, estimates there will be more than 650 weddings held here this year. Professional wedding planners offer everything from shocking to flamboyant or simple, and each has his or her own local staff and attendant style. Pogue says that part of the charm of sitting in the *jardin* on a Saturday afternoon is seeing the beautiful brides all in white (or the traditionalists in blue), wedding parties in attendance, often accompanied by photographers and *mariachis*.

And for wedding guests and visitors alike, there's no shortage of things to do in San Miguel. Walking tours exploring the history and food of the city are a perfect way to acclimate, and the Sunday home tours take you behind

Creighton Block GALLERY



GREG WOODARD

Rattler's Revenge-Red Tail Hawk

32H X 57W 28D | Woodwork

Creighton Block Gallery | Town Center | Big Sky, Montana | 406.993.9400 | creightonblockgallery.com



A charming cobblestone street leads to La Parroquia.

those inviting courtyard walls. A variety of art, cooking and Spanish classes can also fill your days.

Daily flights from the U.S. carry visitors to León's Del Bajío International Airport (BJX) or Querétaro Intercontinental Airport (QRO). **BajiaGo** shuttles to and

from San Miguel can be booked online and should be arranged in advance.

High season runs from November through April and attracts many escaping snow and ice. The weeks leading up to Easter are packed with an astounding number of events, along with flowers in bloom and pleasant temperatures. Summer months are also lovely, with mild temperatures and relief from hotter climes. Fall is *fiesta* season with special celebrations planned for Independence Day, All Saints Day and Day of the Dead. From every angle, in every season, San Miguel de Allende is unforgettable. ■

Former San Miguel de Allende resident, **Rosemary Carstens** is a freelance writer, blogger and art consultant who writes for national publications and provides communications services at wordsandpaint.com.

if YOU GO...

ATTRACTIONS

BajioGo airport shuttle:
Jesús 11 Centro: +52.415.152.1999;
bajioGoshuttle.com

Casa de la Cuesta: Mask Museum, reservations needed: Cuesta de San Jose 32;
+52.415.154.4324; maskmuseumsma.com

Chamber Music Festival: July/August:
Hernández Macías 75; +52.415.154.5141;
festivalsanmiguel.com

Día de los Locos: Parade with costumes, music and candy, June 12; atencionsanmiguel.org/2014/06/13/the-history-behind-los-locos

El Charco del Ingenio: Botanical Gardens & Nature Preserve; +52.415.154.4715; elcharco.org.mx/Ingles

Guanajuato Film Festival: International films celebrated in July; giff.mx/en

Instituto Allende: Art and Spanish classes:
Ancha de San Antonio: 22; +52.415.152.0929;
instituto-allende.edu.mx/en

La Biblioteca: Bilingual library with central sign-up for many tours, events and local information: Insurgentes 25;
+52.415.152.0293; bibliotecasma.com

La Fabrica la Aurora: Art & design center:
Calz de La Aurora; fabricalaaurora.com

La Gruta Hot Springs:
Carretera San Miguel de Allende, Dolores Hidalgo (outside the city); +52.415.185.2162;
lagrutasp.com

Penzi Weddings: Event planners
+52.415.152.2840; smapenzi.com

Santuario de Jesus Nazareno,
Atotonilco: sacredsites.com/americanos/mexico/sanctuary_of_atotonilco.html

Taste of San Miguel Food Tours:
Correo 58; +52.322.181.7196
sanmiguelfoodtours.com

Tianguis de los Martes: Large Tuesday market where tourists and locals mingle:
Arcos de San Miguel

GALLERIES

Gallery Atotonilco: Camino Antiguo Ferrocarril: 14 +52.415.185.2225; appointment needed; folkartsanmiguel.com/index.php

La Fabrica la Aurora: Calzada de la Aurora; fabricalaaurora.com

Moyshe Gallery: Fabrica La Aurora:
Local 4 C; +44.415.154.4314; moyshegallery.com

San Francisco Gallery: Calle San Francisco 1; +52.415.152.0552; galeriasanfrancisco.com

Terry Tomlinson Gallery of Contemporary Handmade Paper Art: Open Wednesdays: Terraplen 29;
+52.415.152.2616; terryanntomlinson.com

ACCOMMODATIONS

Casa de la Noche:
Organos 19; +52.415.152.0732;
casadelanoche.com

Hotel Matilda: Aldama 53; +52.415.152.1015;
hotelmaitilda.com

Premier San Miguel House Rental & Concierge: Aldama 10-B Zona Centro:
646.536.7634; premiersanmiguel.com

Rosewood Hotel: Nemesio Diez 11:
888.767.3966; rosewoodhotels.com

San Miguel House Rentals:
713.589.3524; san-miguel-house-rentals.com

Vacation Homes San Miguel:
512.853.9416; vacationhomessanmiguel.com

RESTAURANTS

Áperi: Quebrada 101; +52.415.152.0941;
aperi.mx/en

Don Taco Tequila: Calle del Dr. Ignacio Hernández Macías: 83; +52.415.154.9608

El Vergel: Camino a la Alborada 17;
+52.415.110.2254; elvergelsma.com

Hidalgo 50: Calle Hidalgo 50;
+52.415.152.4290; facebook.com/hidalgo50

La Azotea: Umanan 6 (upstairs from Pueblo Viejo restaurant); +52.415.152.4977

La Parada: Recreo 94; +52.415.152.0473;
laparadasma.com/pa-llenar-el-tanque.html

The Restaurant: Calle Sollano 16;
+52.415.154.7862; therestaurantsanmiguel.com

Zumo: Calle Orizaba 87-9;
+52.415.152.0489; zumosma.com