



mejores visitas

Five Latino Cultural Hot Spots

BY LILLIAN AVILÉS

Headling into the summer, families will begin to consider vacation spots. Rich in culture and diversity, these cities sit at the top of our list of Latino friendly destinations.

DISTRICTO DE CULTURA: MEXICO CITY

Cosmopolitan and sophisticated, this city boasts the largest number of museums in the Western Hemisphere! The chic flair of cafes, bars and restaurants in neighborhoods such as Polanco, La Condesa and Zona Rosa offer an unlimited amount of venues for wining and dining. With Mexico's bicentennial just around the corner, the city is undergoing a variety of development projects such as a major overhaul of Plaza Garibaldi (Mariachi Square), the construction of a tequila and mezcal museum, and the construction of the Bicentennial Arc, a new monument on the city's main boulevard, Paseo de la Reforma. Must sees include the Anthropology Museum, Frida Kahlo Museum, Chapultepec Park, the expansive Zocalo (main square) and a visit to the National Palace for the murals of Diego Rivera. Unique to this vast city are specialized tours on gastronomy, cantinas (typical Mexican bars), and tours for children. They can be arranged with transportation and English speaking guides via tour firms such as Omextur (<http://www.omextur.com.mx/>).

Another must see is the magnificent archeological complex of Teotihuacan, a UNESCO World Heritage site just over an hour outside the city center, where tourists can visit the largest pyramidal structures built in the pre-Columbian Americas dating to 200 B.C. A guided tour is highly suggested to obtain a deeper understanding of Mexico's indigenous past and long history of a strong dedication to nature, flora and fauna.

Where to eat: The restaurant scene in Mexico City is hot and the flavors and options range from mouth watering street side taco stands (*taquerias*) offering slow cooked seasoned meats served on warm small corn tortillas, to celebrated nuevo Mexican cuisine establishments such as Pujol (www.pujol.com.mx) and chef Ricardo Muñoz's Azul y Oro restaurant (Tel. +52-5622-7135).

Where to Sleep: Just off Paseo de la Reforma and newly launched this year, Mexico's Hotel St. Regis (www.starwoodhotels.com) delivers world-class customer service. Guests are greeted by name with a flute of Veuve Clicquot champagne and each floor includes a personally appointed butler. In the heart of the upscale Polanco neighborhood surrounded by chic shops and restaurant, Las Alcobas (<http://www.lascalcobas.com>) offers a deluxe boutique option. Rooms are decorated with handcrafted *alebrijes* (colorful wooden sculptures made in Oaxaca), artisanal organic soaps, and a mini bar stocked with tasty Mexican treats. This property boasts two restaurants, Barroco and Dulce Patria, both serving creative Mexican cuisine developed by highly acclaimed chef Marta Ortiz from the well-known Aguila and Sol restaurant.

CULTURE CAPITAL: WASHINGTON, D.C.

Our nation's capital is a treasure trove of outstanding museums, the majority of which are free! Most of the Smithsonian complex of museums are located around the grassy stretch between the Capitol building and Washington Monument known as the "Mall." Without paying an entrance fee, visitors can explore 19 museums such as the Natural History and Air and Space museums. Touring the extensive network of exhibits can seem endless so be sure to investigate what museum best fits your interests at <http://www.si.edu/>.

Neighboring monuments, such as the Vietnam Veterans and Lincoln memorials, offer respite from being indoors along with gorgeous vistas and captivating displays of historical figures and events. Excellent for families, the National Zoo, located in the northern neighborhood of Woodley Park, houses more than 400 species of animals in a 163-acre park including permanent indoor and outdoor exhibits such as the Giant Panda House.

Spring kicks off with the famous Cherry Blossom festival and summer months include a series of cultural events hosted on the Mall. A favorite activity for locals is Jazz in the Garden, held late May through early September, featuring free live jazz performances that take place from 5-8:30 p.m. in the Sculpture Garden in front of the National Gallery of Art. For informa-

tion on activities and a calendar of events visit <http://washington.org>.

Where to eat: Marvin (www.marvindc.com), located in the heart of D.C.'s U Street Corridor, offers fresh takes on southern classics such as country fried chicken and waffles. Jaleo (www.jaleo.com), closer to the Mall is one of the best places for authentic Spanish tapas. A large selection of wine is available to pair with Spanish favorites such as *datiles con tocino*. The Tabbard Inn (www.tabardinn.com), also a boutique hotel, is an institution in D.C. for those seeking a classic all-American brunch in an elegant atmosphere. Their Bloody Marys are just perfect as are brunch selections such as toasted pecan waffles.

Where to sleep: Steps from the Smithsonian complex of museums, the Mandarin Oriental (www.mandarinoriental.com/washington/) is an excellent option for groups and families. Its strong brand name delivers excellent customer service, a top-notch glamorous restaurant, an urban retreat spa and large comfortable rooms with excellent amenities. Hotel Palomar (www.hotelpalomar-dc.com), part of the trendy lifestyle collection of Kimpton Hotels, is located in the lively central neighborhood of Dupont Circle in Northwest D.C. This pet friendly hotel offers a gym, pool, restaurant, in-room spa services, and pre-arrival concierge service.



PARIS



SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE



C'EST LE CULTURE: PARIS

The city of lights and its enigmatic architecture and monuments continually draw visitors from around the world but what's really wonderful about this majestic city is its constantly changing art scene. If you've already experienced Paris' hallmark museums such as the Louvre and Musée d'Orsay, opt for visiting temporary exhibits such the new display on famed French designer Yves Saint-Laurent at the Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux Arts de la Ville de Paris through August 29, 2010, or those at more than 70 museums open to the public.

For a simple and very Parisian pleasure, put on your comfortable shoes and explore the city's gorgeous neighborhoods, like Montmartre, grand boulevards, colorful markets, and lovely manicured parks. Enjoy a *café crème* at an outdoor café on Ile Saint-Louie or in the Jardin des Tuileries and sit back and people watch. Wind down with live jazz and a cocktail or glass of smooth Pomerol from Bordeaux at Les Dessous de Ginette, a charming little bar behind the touristic hustle and bustle on 4 Rue du Faubourg Montmartre.

It's hard to tire of the Paris Opera House. As a beacon of art and culture in the city with an elegant and lush décor visitors can enjoy a host of operas, ballets, concerts and recitals. Try visiting in the fall when the crowds of tourists die down and the weather is temperate.

Where to eat: Les Deux Magots (www.lesdeuxmagots.fr) on Place Saint-Germain-des-Prés continues to be the place for people watching,

a fresh salad, croquet, or sandwich accompanied by crisp glass of Sauvignon Blanc. If you'd rather be seen, then head to the upscale hotel and restaurant Plaza Athénée (www.plaza-athenee-paris.com) on the über chic Avenue Montaigne for a glamorous setting to savor haute French cuisine at Alain Ducasse au Plaza Athénée amongst a who's who of the international jet set.

Where to sleep: Hotel Westminster (www.warwickwestminsteropera.com) is a grande dame of a hotel close to the Paris Opera House, the Tuileries, and Place Vendome. Its décor is elegant with high ceilings and large bathrooms. An excellent place to enjoy a lengthy and delicious lunch after a day of sightseeing and shopping, the property's Le Céladon restaurant boasts one Michelin star. To explore the whimsy of the left bank, the very cozy Melia Colbert Boutique Hotel (www.solmelia.com) is wonderfully positioned on 7 Rue Hotel Colbert just steps from the Latin Quarter and a few blocks from Notre Dame.

ARTISTIC ENCLAVE IN CENTRAL MEXICO: SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

An artist enclave and recently named UNESCO World Heritage Site, this colorful colonial town dates to the 1600s and offers a vast array of art exhibits, theatre, and street performances along with an ongoing stream of celebrations where the city lights up with fireworks and merrymakers line the main square and streets such as King's Day, Day of the Dead, Christmas Posadas, and Holy Week.

A walking tour of the town's historic center is recommended to visit the major sites including the signature pink Parroquia. Since the historic center is relatively small, visitors quickly grasp their way around and can walk for hours exploring the city's colonial architecture and parks. Art admirers will find delight in Fabrica La Aurora, a textile factory that has been tastefully renovated into a complex of art galleries showcasing local artists. Charco del Ingenio Botanical Garden, a wonderfully managed 250-acre nature reserve, is within minutes of the historical center and offers hiking and walking trails, guided tours, workshops and special events such as Temazcal sessions (indigenous cleansing steam baths) and full moon ceremonies. Less than 30 minutes driving from the town are several thermal springs with curative mineral waters such as La Taboada (www.taboada.com.mx) and La Gruta, where you can spend the day "taking the waters" along with enjoying the peaceful countryside.

Where to eat: For Mexican classics you can't



go wrong with El Correo (Tel. +52 415-1524951). For a more upscale dining experience Restaurante Xipal, located inside Hotel Casa Rosada (<http://www.casarosadahotel.com>) offers haute Mexican cuisine. For non-Mexican cuisine Mezzanine Bistro (<http://mezzaninebistro.wordpress.com>), run by a dynamic French/Portuguese duo and longtime residents of San Miguel de Allende, serves delectable Mediterranean cuisine with a changing price fixed menu along with a-la-carte options.

Where to sleep: El Meson Hotel (www.botelelmeson.com) is just steps from the main square (Jardin). Tastefully designed with artisanal decorative pieces, rooms are situated around a charming courtyard and outdoor pool, making accommodations quiet in this very central location. The newest luxury B&B on San Miguel's hotel scene is SonjoWasi Villa (<http://www.sonjowasi.com>), a unique four-bedroom property that is an exclusive upscale oasis surrounded by extensive gardens. This property lends itself to romance with its large rooms, hand carved fireplace and outdoor pool and gazebo. Rates are a steal for this level of exclusivity and service and begin at \$265 per night including breakfast, tax and service.

CATCH WIND OF THIS CULTURAL CITY: CHICAGO

Chicago is a bastion of art and culture in the Midwest offering an impressive assortment of free summer festivals, public art, famed museums, signature modern American architecture, and lively jazz clubs. Enjoy free international, classical, and jazz concerts at the Frank Gehry pavilion in the summer (www.millenniumpark.org). SummerDance, an outdoor summer dance festival, runs June 17–August 29, 2010 and features dance lessons and live dancing on a 4,600-square-foot open-air dance floor in the Spirit of Music Garden in Grant Park (601 S. Michigan Ave). Occurring every Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening, from 6–9:30 p.m., and Sunday afternoon, 4–7 p.m., admission is free. Additional summer festivals include Viva Latina Fest, Blues Fest/Jazz Fest, Celtic Fest, and the Puerto Rican Parade and Music Festival held every June in Humboldt Park.

As one of the nation's best cities for jazz music, the venues to enjoy this sultry, soulful and smooth genre are endless. The Green Mill Jazz Club (www.greenmilljazz.com) has hosted numerous jazz celebrities and has a tumultuous history with Chicago's mob scene. Also a top liner on jazz scene is The Jazz Showcase (www.jazzshowcase.com) with national jazz acts each week.

The National Museum of Mexican art displays ongoing colorful exhibits showcasing Mexico's diverse art and culture. Pilsen, a mostly Mexican neighborhood is home to some excellent art galler-

ies that can be toured on the second Friday of each month (http://chicagoartsdistrict.org/secondfridays_main.asp).

Where to Eat: Chicago is a mecca for foodies and dining options are endless, from their all-American hot dogs, Italian and Indian cuisines, to the new wave of molecular gastronomy. Alinea (<http://www.alinea-restaurant.com>), located in Lincoln Park, recently won the award for the best restaurant in the Western Hemisphere and serves innovative fusion cuisine. Fans of fusion will love Vermillion (<http://www.thevermillionrestaurant.com>) that serves creative combinations of Latino and Indian cuisines. May Street Café (<http://www.maystcafe.com>) in Pilsen serves delicious Nuevo Latino food.

Where to sleep: For the crème de la crème in luxury accommodations look no further than Chicago's Four Seasons Hotel (www.fourseasons.com/chicagofs) located in the center of downtown just steps from chic North Michigan Avenue shops. Accommodations have been recently renovated and the views of Lake Michigan and the city's skyline from this property are fantastic! For a more youthful and trendy experience the new Hotel W (www.starwoodhotels.com) is located in the middle of the famed Chicago Loop. Rooms are comfortable and the lobby's hip bar and restaurant serves creative cuisine in an innovative space. ●