

Sisters' Trip to Valle de Guadalupe Baja California

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If you frequent Mexican restaurants, you're probably used to menus offering Mexican beer, margaritas, and tequila shots. But Mexican wine? Nada. Zip. It's as though Mexican *vino* doesn't even exist.

That's what I thought until I traveled with my three sisters to Valle de Guadalupe, about 90 miles from San Diego across the Mexican border in northern Baja.

Visiting Valle de Guadalupe Baja California: the heart of Mexican wine country

I was blown away. Turns out, Valle de Guadalupe Baja California is the heart of Mexican wine country. Along with three neighboring valleys, the region offers more than 100 wineries. Not only that, but viticulture (the cultivation and harvesting of grapes) in northern Baja dates back centuries. Spanish missionaries established the first documented vineyard here in 1791.

And yet, only in the last decade or so has the word about Mexican wines leaked out. Thanks to its growing popularity as a destination among southern Californians as well as international travelers, accommodations are popping up all over the boulder-strewn hills and wide arid valley. This includes luxury resorts (Banyan Tree Valle de Guadalupe Resort, Spa and Winery will open in 2023) to little houses.

No wonder the International Organization of Vine and Wine has chosen nearby Ensenada for its 43rd World Congress in late October 2023. Some 1,000 wine professionals from more than 40 countries are expected to attend.



Visit Adobe Guadalupe Vineyards and Inn for wine tastings, a food truck, or riding Azteca horses. Inn guests enjoy full breakfasts and an outdoor pool.

Still, Valle de Guadalupe has a rustic, laid-back vibe, comparable, some say, to Napa Valley more than 30 years ago.

We stayed at Adobe Guadalupe Vineyards and Inn, a six-guest-room hacienda that recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. For three days, we bounced along rutted dirt roads and a couple of paved ones to visit vineyards. These ranged from boutique wineries to first-class operations with international fame. (Don't worry, we hired a chauffeured car for our most prolific day of tastings).

Valle de Guadalupe Baja California: A different type of wine region



Wine tasting at Solar Fortun, a second-generation boutique estate winery in Valle de Guadalupe Baja California

In contrast to some wine regions that specialize in a local grape, such as the Malbec in Argentina's Mendoza or the Norton in Missouri, Valle de Guadalupe's *terroir* supports an astounding variety of grapes, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec, Tempranillo, Grenache, Nebbiolo and Mourvedre.

Nearby valleys with higher altitudes are especially suited to whites. What's more, there's virtually no formal regulation or appellation for wine production, giving wineries free rein to experiment and develop their own blends.

While you can sample wine made from just one grape, it's the Wild West when it comes to blends: A single bottle of wine may contain Mourvedre, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot grapes.

That's what makes tastings here so fun. Well, that along with the different personalities of the various wineries. Of course, experiencing it with my sisters was the best part of it all.



My sisters at Finca Altozano, specializing in fresh seafood

For more information on Valle de Guadalupe, including its history and recommended wineries and dining venues, see Beth Reiber's article on *USA Today 10Best*:

[Intro to Valle de Guadalupe, the Napa Valley of Mexico](#)

What's appealing to the over-50 luxury traveler?

Visitors to Valle de Guadalupe Baja California are interested mostly in wining and dining, making it much more low-key than Ensenada, 25 miles away.

Accommodations are varied, ranging from upscale digs to boutique hotels, but they're also intimate and personable.

With most wineries closing at 5 pm and restaurants between 7 pm and 9 pm, nightlife means heading back to your hotel with a bottle of wine to enjoy the star-studded night sky.

Take note

You'll need a car for traveling in Valle de Guadalupe Baja California (if driving your own car, Mexican insurance is required). Hiring a chauffeured car is recommended if you're visiting more than two wineries in a day (most likely your accommodations can make reservations).

If you prefer not to drive in Mexico, shuttle services from San Diego are available, as are organized winery tours.

Reservations are required for tastings at many wineries (which you can make via their websites). Some accept walk-ins if there's room, and some have outdoor seating for customers simply interested in purchasing a bottle and enjoying it onsite. Tastings generally cost US\$20 to US\$25.

Summer is sunny and hot, with July and August the high tourist season. Beat the crowds and the heat by visiting in spring or autumn. In any case, be sure to have sunscreen and bottled water on hand.

In addition to restaurants, quite a few wineries offer food. Options vary from snacks to food trucks to formal restaurants. However, open hours vary (some might be open only on weekends in the off-season), so be sure to check.

Safety in the Guadalupe Valley Baja California

Despite concerns in some parts of Mexico due to crimes related to drugs and cartels, Valle de Guadalupe is a safe region for international travelers. In fact, it never crossed my mind that we should worry about danger to ourselves.

However, because we were traveling in my sister's cab pickup truck, we made sure to place our luggage in the locked cab whenever we stopped somewhere instead of leaving them in the bed, just as we would have done in the U.S.

Check the U.S. Department of State website for updated [state-specific travel advisories](#).

COVID-19 in Baja California

I have found personally that Mexico takes public safety measures with regard to COVID much more seriously than the U.S. during my recent trips to Mexico City last November and to Valle de Guadalupe in April.

As everywhere, strict mandates related to masking have waned, but in April most employees working at wineries and restaurants were masked. Of course, because they are eating and drinking, most patrons were not.

Check the U.S. [CDC website](#) for additional COVID-19 information.

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Four Sisters Visit Valle de Guadalupe Wine Country in Baja California



