

EXPLORING WINE REGIONS: MÉXICO

DISCOVERING MÉXICO'S QUALITY WINES AND PHENOMENAL CUISINE

Michael C. Higgins • International Exploration Society (Oct 1, 2024) • 978-0-9969660-6-1

Exuberant in covering Mexico's wine country and its splendid natural views, *Exploring Wine Regions: México* is an expansive travel guide.

Photojournalist and wine enthusiast Michael C. Higgins's *Exploring Wine Regions: México* is a vibrant guide to the nation's distinctive vineyards, wineries, wine-centered restaurants, and tourist destinations.

The fourth volume in a series focused on international wine regions, this book ventures to the Mexican wine-producing areas of Valle de Guadalupe, Guanajuato, and Querétaro. Descriptions of forty-eight featured wineries include pertinent information regarding their locations and websites. There's also guidance on the availability of tours and wine tastings, price ranges, and the Spanish-English fluency level of the owners and staff.

The book includes an extensive range of information. Historical notes about how vineyards and olive groves were first cultivated five hundred years ago, when Mexico was called New Spain, augment this work, as does extensive oenophile terminology. And there's information on how Valle de Guadalupe's latitudinal position and "diurnal shift" create conditions for distinctive wine production, and how colder evening temperatures influenced by the Pacific Ocean alternate with the everyday heat of the valleys.

The text is exuberant in covering Mexico's Baja California region and its splendid natural views, colonial churches and architecture, and museums. There's information about Ensenada's celebrated gray whales and the Pai Pai Ecotourism Park, too. And notes on the available accommodations, from "glamping" sites to haciendas and sleek hotels, round the guidance out.

For those with culinary interest, there's coverage of ocean-fresh seafood sold by street vendors and a rooftop restaurant's innovative tres leches cake, heightened by miso toffee and sake ice cream. At times, the book waxes poetic in introducing its chosen sites. Of the "magical" Casa Frida, named for Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, it notes that the underground tasting room is found by "following the scent of burning sage" and entering a "secret door that requires a special knock to open." Advice for getting around is also shared: hiring a local driver can be beneficial, the book notes, for navigating dirt roads and changing terrain.

On occasion, personal pictures are included among the book's multitude of color photographs—companionable insertions in a text marked by sometimes personalized advisory notes. For example, Higgins notes that he doesn't speak Spanish but still feels "very comfortable" in welcoming Mexico. However, an advisory regarding the overall safety of Baja California strikes a simplistic note: While the Mexican cartels exist and should be avoided, the book claims, most related problems befall travelers who are involved in "the drug or the weapons business."

A spirited travel guide for oenophiles, *Exploring Wine Regions: México* contextualizes an enduring and burgeoning wine industry within its fascinating cultural landscape.

Reviewed by Meg Nola
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