

This week's dream: A Tijuana you might not want to leave

Believe it or not, there's "never been a better time" to visit Tijuana, Mexico, said Patrick Symmes in *Sunset*. The famous border town suffered a wave of violence last decade when it was plunged into the nation's drug cartel wars, "but the misery years had a surprising effect": When the tourists fled, local artists and entrepreneurs moved in. I took a walk into Mexico recently to assess the changes (avoiding the hassle of getting a car back through the border crossing). Even on the city's main tourist drag, I didn't see the old regulars like U.S. Navy officers on furlough or gaggles of Southern California bachelorettes. What I saw was a new Tijuana emerging.

The scene hadn't completely changed. Mariachi musicians thronged at one corner looking to be hired, and the strip's pharmacies "hocked Viagra, Cialis, and dental surgery on demand." But a reformed police force has taken back control of the streets, the red-light venues were mostly shuttered, and



Tijuana's Misión 19 restaurant

I walked four blocks before I encountered a crowd of revelers—"Mexicans, young and old, dancing salsa in the courtyard of a pizzeria." Over the next two days and nights, I discovered that hip cocktail lounges and top-notch restaurants were springing up all over the downtown neighborhoods. At the bar La Mezcalera, I sipped top-shelf mescal amid a crowd of young Mexican

creative types. At Misión 19, the city's restaurant of the moment, chef Miguel Ángel Guerrero told me how a young city like Tijuana—which was essentially built on Americans' Prohibition-era thirst for booze—offered greater freedom for culinary experimentation.

By day, the city shows its confidence in new buildings like the "swooping" \$9 million Tijuana Cultural Center and the glass-and-steel skyscraper where Misión 19 is housed. Two blocks away, I happened upon a sight one day that gave me even more hope. It was a procession of six men on horses, followed by 21 nuns, followed by thousands of people—children, grandmothers, choirs, bands—all of them marching joyfully and carrying banners calling for peace. "They were taking Tijuana back."

At the downtown hotel Camino Real Tijuana (caminoreal.com), doubles start at \$133.

Hotel of the week



Irish medieval majesty

Ashford Castle

Cong, Ireland

Even after a major update, "Old World charms prevail" at this converted 13th-century castle, said Tracey Ceurvels in *The Boston Globe*. Gracious doormen, a stately dining room, and lush gardens await guests who traverse the majestic Irish countryside to stay here. The new owner updated the accommodations while restoring the hotel's beauty. The surrounding forest can be explored by horseback and is "rich with mystical, archaeological wonders." Just a short walk away stands Ireland's oldest school of falconry and the chance to bond with a bird of prey. ashfordcastle.com; rooms start at \$117 per person.

Getting the flavor of...

Newport, R.I.'s sports shrine

It's easy to overlook the Tennis Hall of Fame when you're walking around historic Newport, said Lindsay Talbot in *Condé Nast Traveler*. Located in a 19th-century complex with a "relatively modest" gabled façade, it can get lost amid all the Gilded Age mansions that crowd this seaside enclave. But pass through the complex's discreet arched entryway, and a "magnificent" tableau opens up: 13 meticulously manicured grass tennis courts framed by a piazza and the Shingle style, Charles McKim–designed clubhouse where the museum's collection is displayed. Inside, you'll find memorabilia, tributes to the hall's 240 enshrinees, and rackets from every era. But be sure to bring your own, as well as your tennis whites: Newport's historic complex is "a municipal sporting treasure akin to, say, the Old Course at St. Andrews in Scotland." At either, members of the public are welcome to play.

Resurgent Raleigh, N.C.

Five years ago, I'm told, North Carolina's capital was pretty dead, said Andrea Sachs in *The Washington Post*. Not now. On a recent visit, "I could hardly find a reason to leave" downtown Raleigh. A "whoosh" of new restaurants, galleries, and boutiques has brought new life to a city that formerly went quiet after dinner, and an array of vibrant free museums fully earns the city its nickname as "the Smithsonian of the South." It might be most fun to stop in at the City of Raleigh Museum during the cocktail party it holds on the first Friday evening of each month, but the exhibits are compelling at any hour. At the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, I was talked into petting a Madagascar hissing cockroach but enjoyed many other hands-on displays more. At the North Carolina Museum of History, I talked with a city native near a civil rights-era display—"a memory for her" and "a poignant moment for both of us."

Last-minute travel deals

Big-bird watching

Watch the spectacular annual migration of sandhill cranes in Steamboat Springs, Colo., at the Yampa Valley Crane Festival Sept. 12-14. Save up to 40 percent on lodging with Wyndham Vacation Rentals when you book by Sept. 10. www.steamboat-cranes.com

European cultural outings

Sample fine wine in Paris, or take a sommelier-led culinary tour in Rome. Rates are \$50 and \$65, respectively, a savings of 30 percent. A \$175 option includes dinner in London, tickets to *Phantom of the Opera*, and a backstage pass. citywonders.com

Oregon's stars

Take your kids to the scenic Pronghorn Resort in Bend, Ore., for a two-night star-gazing tour. The deal costs \$934 for a family of four and includes a starlit canoe trip with a naturalist guide. Book by Aug. 31 for stays through Sept. 30. pronghorn.ubergeresorts.com