

## MEXICO TRIP 2017

January 11-19 Round trip 1545km

Comala – Cofradia –Tequila – Aguascalientes – Tonalá - Lake Chapala -Autlán

As always another perfect day for a drive. Our venture took us via the Toll ( Cuota) road.

In less than 2 hours we bypass Colima city and locate the Casa Blanca Hotel (Our host Rosa is English speaking) downtown Comala.

What a nice hotel (c\$45.00) situated near central square and our favourite spot for drinks. When you order a beer they bring countless appetizers at no charge.



Watch out for the bread man. He always sells his tasty buns. My body doesn't need it.

I am on the hunt now for Huaraches: classical hand made sneakers using old tires for the soles. We located the shop nearby and found exactly what I wanted. I now have a pair with Dunlop on the soles. I found out later they leave rubber marks in the floor so I'm only allowed to wear them outside.



We have a brief rest and make our way to project Amigo in Cofradia to visit the children we sponsor and see the handy crafts they have for sale.

It's very heart-warming to see the lovely children and know that Project Amigo and Rotary has been such a major part in their lives.



We have a nice breakfast prepared by Rosa. We meet a couple of gentlemen who spend much of the year traveling Mexico. Byron tells me about a lotion he uses for sore knees - a combination of oils and marijuana. He gave me a little bit to try (you rub it on) and damn, it works like magic.



We take the free road that connects to the quota road at Ciudad Guzman. Nice ride as we pass many excellent spots for Randy to take pictures of the Colima Volcano.

We also pass by a Castle. Apparently unfinished as the owner ran out of money. He had visions of being elected to governor and that didn't happen.

We witness our first police take down near our turn off to Tequila, at the outskirts of Guadalajara. Police had two Mexican men on their knees with guns at their heads. Their cars had the doors and trunk open so it must have been pretty serious.

## Day 2 & 3 - Tequila

Arriving in Tequila is like entering Napa Valley only you see blue Agave instead of wine groves. The roads into town are under construction so it takes a little maneuvering to find the Real Hotel c\$54.00 only a block from central square. We have been before and it was aa nice as ever.



We had hoped to see author Douglas Denison however he has moved to Talpalpa to write another book on Magic towns of Mexico.

Plenty to take in. The Sauza museum tells the story of one of the original Tequila distilleries of Jalisco, Mexico. Note; if it's not blue agave then it's not Tequila. We have a look at the letters John Wayne wrote to Mr. Sauza.

Recently they sold the company to the Japanese who plan to build a 3000 capacity conference Center. Douglas tells me the prices in the area will skyrocket - that's partly why he left.

The cafe near central square has the best breakfast in town. Easy to find it's right on the corner. The next day we tour Jose Cuervo and have Tequila tasting in their distillery. What an education that was. We are now experts on how to taste & drink Tequila in thin stemmed glasses.





Our tour was most enlightening. It was good see how Tequila is made.

- The life of tequila begins in the fields that you see throughout the area. The agave are harvested after 8 years. The leaves are removed leaving a large root that resembles a large pineapple. They are shipped to the distillery - at that point the 25 pound pineapples are chopped in half and placed in a oven. When they are cooked they grind the mash and add water and yeast. (Years ago a man stood naked in the mash - his body's bacteria helped to initiate the fermentation - Yuk). After the tequila is placed in large stainless vats. From there they are stored in oak kegs. This process can take up to 4 years depending on the grade. The longer they remain the darker the colour and specialty of the grade. In Jose Cuervo the finished tequila is transported to Guadalajara for bottling and packaging.

What a clean and organized facility they have.



Our dining highlight was the Real Mariano Restaurant. it's only a half a block east of the church and easy to find. Try the chicken and cream - it's great. The shrimp dish comes in at second place. The Mariachi band was a real treat. 4 songs for 100 pesos. This was definitely a major highlight in Tequila.



Morning and off we go intending to take the cuota road through Guadalajara. However we didn't get far as a tour bus was on fire blocking the road.



That caused a bit of back tracking but thankfully we had no problem navigating through Guadalajara. It's a big city of around 7million people. I found they don't do great Job of signage.

## Days 4 & 5 Aguascalientes

What a clean city. Over a million population and considered the auto center for Mexico. The Nissan plant is huge. They employ 83000 people and produce a car every 37 seconds. Mercedes Benz is spending a billion dollars on a new production plant.

We arrive at our hotel the Casa Jardine after many diverges. They are tearing up many roads in city center and it took a lot of this way that way before we found the magnificent Hotel.



What a treat this was. A mansion that was converted to a fine hotel. We each had a beautiful suite. Our friend Francisco kindly recommended it. "As a boy his friend lived there."

Francisco's daughter in law Lesley picked us up the following morning to give us a tour and take us to their private club. Pretty nice to say the least. Golf / tennis/ Olympic swimming pool plus a dining room fit for royalty. We had a fantastic brunch, and afterwards we got a brief tour of the area they live in. All new homes with a gym and swimming pool. Pretty nice - no wonder she loves it there. Not bad either when you have a maid and driver.

We had hoped to get a tour of the Nissan plant but unable due to short notice. No big problem had a great lunch and on the road again.



Day 6: Tonalá.

Damn these GPS's had one hell of a time navigating into town. The new roads really mess up my navigating. Almost said to hell with it and bypass the place like I did the last time we were in this area.

Anyway after all back tracking we find our lovely hotel Casa Las Paloma's - modern, clean with secure parking. Only a block from the main shopping avenue.

We are tired so an early night getting our strength for looking and shopping. Early to rise and locate the best breakfast place to town not far from the main drag.

Tonalá is the mother load of everything for the home. Most made as you watch them.



You really need a couple days to visit plus a cube van to haul it home in.

Well one day worked and we were on our way late in the afternoon.

Day 7 lake Chapala.

We arrived as we have many times before at the lovely QQ B&B not too far from the water front.



We parked the Jeep and went to the same rooms we always have. Time for a Wine break on our terrace, and rest now.

We head over to our favourite restaurant and be darned they close at 7:00pm Well we go next door and guess what - it was better. We now have a new favourite restaurant.

Judy and I shared a molcajete while Randy and May had a fish dish.

May had experienced Endless margaritas the last time and found the road and steps too steep to navigate home, so she wisely had coke this time.

Day 8 Autlan.

Up and on our way after a tasty breakfast at QQ followed by a walk along the beach front. After that a Slow drive through Ajijic and a 3 hour snaking mountain drive through to Autlan.

We knew our hotel the Villa Real c\$54.24 would be nice as we had brunch here a number of times over the last 4 years. However we were blown away as it is now easily a 5 diamond plus hotel.

The rooms are spectacular to say the least. You have to be there to see how beautiful the facility and rooms are. Our room had 4 balconies/whirlpool in the bathroom/ detailed to the 9's We sat on our balcony and sipped wine and marvelled at the view.





For dinner Randy arranged to have dinner for 4 brought to our room. Their restaurant isn't finished yet so they had it brought in from town.



What a great way to end a fantastic trip.

Our return home was a lovey mountain drive



A stop for fruit and vegetables and home for happy hour and the school benefit dinner being held at our place.

A trip to remember.

Ron