

# Girls TRIP!

*Two good friends  
experiencing the trip  
of a lifetime!*

*-by Joan Tucker | photos by Paul Papanek-*

It was looking like a quiet week coming up, so I called my best friend Susan and said, “Let’s hit the road. We need a “girl’s trip!” She’s always ready for any adventure I dream up and immediately signed on. It had been three years since my husband, Paul and I had visited Valle de Guadalupe – the wine region just east of Ensenada. It’s a safe and easy four-hour drive from LA. Even though I’ve been there many times, this would be my first “girl’s trip” and Susan and I wanted to find someone to plan something new for us.

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A few minutes of Googling turned up EXPLORE VDG – a boutique agency that specializes in luxury travel to Valle de Guadalupe. They seemed like the perfect fit, and I emailed them right away. Eli and Kara, the owners of the company, got back to us immediately and began planning our getaway. They asked us all the right

questions: where have we been before? (many places!), what do we like? (food, wine, a spa!), not like? (hiking!). In a few days, after adding and subtracting and shifting things around, they sent us an incredibly detailed itinerary that showed us they had really listened! It was going to be like our first trip to the Valle again but this time, with a guide who would meet us at the hotel and be with us the entire time!

Mexican car insurance and our visas in hand, we piled all of our endless stuff into Susan's SUV and on the drive down gossiped about friends and family, listened to our

favorite Motown Pandora station, and just caught up with each other. Leaving LA early put us at the San Ysidro border crossing in no time. Going through was a breeze; there's usually no traffic going south late morning.

The easy drive on the toll road from Tijuana to the turn-off to the Valle got us to our first stop right on time: lunch at Bruma Wine Garden. This was just the beginning of what would turn out to be many unexpected destinations that EXPLORE VDG arranged for us.

Alisa, a darling redhead in a cute green swinging midi dress (this is a girl's trip,

**(BELOW)** | Being greeted at Bruma Wine Garden by Alisa. Negroni at Bruma Wine Garden. The "broccamole." Shrimp, octopus, and squid ink pizza with side of roasted vegetables. Toasting at Bruma Wine Garden.



and I can't help but notice these things) led us to our table under the shade of old olive and oak trees - just the right way to begin our trip south of the border. After a welcome Aperol spritz, we both took a deep breath, relaxed, and looked over Chef David Castro's intriguing menu. With our waiter's help, we zeroed in on one of Bruma's special appetizers - Broccoli-Guacamole. Served with the best corn chips (seriously) I've ever had - vivid green and smooth and topped with a touch of locally produced olive oil. Of course, we immediately renamed the dish Broccamole.

Next came fresh halibut ceviche...heaven! A plate of perfectly grilled and thinly slice vegetables served with a hint of fresh goat

cheese and a slightly spicy Oaxacan pepper sauce followed. And then...the pièce de résistance...a pizza from the wood-burning oven tucked into a corner of Castro's open kitchen, topped with grilled octopus and shrimp with squid ink splashed around the rim of the crust. This food was fantastic - fresh, bright, original, and modern.

Somehow, we pried ourselves away from the table, hugged Alisa goodbye, and began our drive to the family-owned Hotel Entre Viñedos by Hotel Boutique Valle de Guadalupe. The Hotel, located in the heart of the Wine Route in Ejido El Porvenir, is bordered by some of the most renowned vineyards and restaurants in the Valle. Thank you, thank you, thank you EXPLORE

**(ABOVE)** | Our rooms looked out onto the pool at Hotel Entre Viñedos. The pathway to our rooms at Entre Viñedos. Our room at Hotel Entre Viñedos.

VDE! We loved this hotel! Our master suites with king size beds had a separate sitting area, good lighting, an enormous shower with a big rain shower head, and a fire pit on the front porch. The rooms looked out onto the pool with beautiful chaise lounges surrounded by a field of newly planted grape vines. Believe me, we could have stopped our

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**(BELOW)** | Grabbing some pool time at Hotel Entre Viñedos. Joan and Susan walking to the bus at Cuatro Cuatros. The welcome cocktail at Bar Bura at Cuatro Cuatros. At Bar Bura overlooking the Pacific.

trip right there and then but, after a couple of hours of chill time, our guide and driver Luis Garcia, arrived to whisk us away for cocktails, dinner, and sunset at Bar Bura, the rustic cliffside bar high atop the vast Cuatro Cuatros development.

Between the vineyards of the Valle and the Coast of Baja California, Bar Bura is the only bar and restaurant in the area that offers a 180-degree view of the sun setting into the Pacific. Luis dropped us off at the bar's "bus

stop" and after a hair raising - but so much fun - twisting and turning 10-minute ride up the mountain road, we arrived.

The spectacular sunset was waiting for us as were our perfect margaritas and a light dinner. Day one was coming to a close and Susan and I were already having a fabulous time.

Day two started at the uncivilized hour of 8:30 AM. "Why?" I whined as we climbed into Luis's SUV. "We're on vacation!" He just smiled and said, "You'll see when we get there." After a short drive down the highway, we turned onto a steep packed dirt road and as we crested the top, we could see where we were headed. "There" was La Cocina de Doña Esthela. The giveaway was the line of cars filled with people at the bottom of the hill

waiting to get into the parking lot. Named in 2015 by FoodieHub, "The Best Breakfast in the World," it's been visited by Anthony Bourdain and Gordon Ramsey and Rick Bayles - and now us. We were excited!

The sprawling restaurant consists of several buildings and dining rooms and plenty of outdoor seating. The multiple kitchens, the restaurant, the gift shop, the farm, and the garden are all family run and overseen by Doña Esthela herself who we met as she was standing over an enormous bowl of masa, effortlessly forming little balls of the stuff into tamales. As busy as she is greeting and chatting with guests and overseeing the whole operation, that kitchen is still her happy place.

Our breakfast began with cups of rich



dark coffee "a la olla" - Mexican ground coffee traditionally brewed in a large clay pot and flavored with cinnamon and raw dark sugar. Of course, we had to start with her famous corn pancakes - thick pancakes that were semi-sweet from the corn and slathered in butter with syrup on the side. "Oh, just one for the two of us please!" I whispered to the waiter - until somehow, we heard ourselves asking out loud for another one while we waited for the arrival of Doña Esthela's Sinaloan *machaca con huevos*, served with a side of refried beans and house-made fresh corn tortillas. This was the best *machaca* I've ever eaten.

Were we finished? Not by a long shot. We had to try another house special: the Borrego Tatemado. I know this sounds crazy - and yes! crazy good! Lamb cooked underground for hours, shredded with one of Doña Esthela's secret sauces. We begged for mercy, but the Madame wasn't having any of it. After we ate way too much (there's never "enough" according to Doña Esthela) we laughed, we took pictures, and Doña Esthela insisted we take home a bag of her freshly made tamales - and perhaps a jar of honey and maybe some olives that were being sold at a little stand in front of the restaurant. "Oh Susan, look at these cute refrigerator

**(ABOVE AND BELOW)** | Morning toast at Doña Esthela's with coffee "a la olla." Watching Doña Esthela making tamales at La Cocina de Doña Esthela. The olive oil for sale. Doña Esthela with her famous tamales. The amazing *macha con huevos* and shredded lamb at Doña Esthela's.

magnets...and that apron! And don't we need some Valle olive oil?" Luis pointed to the endlessly long line of people waiting for tables, gave us his Mona Lisa smile, and said

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**(ABOVE AND BELOW)** | That red hat that Susan had to have! Joan peruses one of the many roadside stands in the Valle selling local olives, olive oil, honey, and more. Joan scores at the segunda! Always time for an ice cream stop! Roadside shopping is one Joan's fave things! She has to have that brown dress! Late night at the churro stand!

it was time. We groaned, followed him to the car, expanded our seatbelts and took off.

On our way back to the hotel, I quietly started humming "Girls just want to have fun." Susan started to join in but suddenly shouted "Stop! I see a hat I must have!"

Luis quickly pulled over to a roadside

stand filled with colorful hats and belts and dolls, and it took Susan about two minutes to try on and buy the red straw hat that was totally her. We happily continued onto a *tienda de segunda* (second-hand store) where I picked up some vintage glass nesting bowls, a pair of men's jeans that I figured would look great and funky on me, a huge package of different colored thread, and a few other doodads. I'm easily amused. I must confess that this roadside stop turned into several stops during our trip. Ice cream, churros, a little Mexican dress - EXPLORE VDG was doing a brilliant job, and all their plans were exceptional, but when the spirit moves us, and a cute something just pops up - well..!

Before I go any further, a few words about

our guide Luis. Wow! Not only is he a terrific guide and driver and loads of fun, but he's also a wealth of information about the deep history and the different indigenous cultures of the area. Plus - he's also a vintner in his own right with his own boutique winery - FundaMento. EXPLORE VDG scored huge points assigning him to us! Even after our brief time together, we knew that we were in great hands!

We both thought that a little pool time was in order. Our air-conditioned rooms were very seductive, but we quickly put Esthela's tamales in the little in-room fridge, changed into our bathing suits, grabbed a bunch of magazines, and gracefully plopped down on a couple of the shaded chaises and



thought about swimming off our million-calorie breakfast.

Time moves both quickly and slowly in the Valle. Before we realized it, Luis found us poolside to remind us of our garden tour with Michelle Lyle, one of the owners of Boutique Hotel Valle de Guadalupe. She designed, runs, and teaches yoga at Luna Del Sol, the hotel spa (more on that later), but the garden is her real passion, and she was excited to share it with us. Well - Susan didn't want to leave the pool, so it was just me.

Michelle and I, both in our wide-brimmed garden hats, walked through rows of organic herbs, eggplant, endless tomatoes, watermelon, different squashes, and even sweet corn as she described the learning curve

she went through in creating this little oasis. In addition to supplying their restaurant and bar with vegetables and herbs, her goal is to produce a line of herbal wellness products for her spa.

All that walking and exploring in the garden gave me just a little bit of an appetite. Susan joined me at Fuego, the hotel's upstairs open-air restaurant. The Mex-Med menu was a fun read and we zeroed in on the salads. I had the Fuego Salad - a very cool take on a Caesar salad. Susan went for the Heirloom Tomato Salad with Luna Garden heirloom cherry tomatoes and lettuce leaves. Our waiter couldn't believe it when we turned down his offer of fresh homemade sorbets but the wine tasting that EXPLORE

**(ABOVE)** | Michelle Lyle walks Joan through the vegetable and herb garden at Hotel Boutique Valle de Guadalupe. Eggplants are just one of the many crops in the garden at Hotel Boutique Valle de Guadalupe.

VDG had organized for us at Emevé Vineyard with Daniel Lonnberg - one of the valley's most prestigious winemakers - was starting to sound better and better. After all, it's always wine o'clock in the Valle.

This was our first official wine tasting

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**(ABOVE AND BELOW)** | Emevé. Part of the Emevé vineyards. Daniel Lonnberg trying to explain wine to Joan & Susan.

of the trip. Although Susan and I happily drink wine, neither of us is particularly knowledgeable on the subject. The opportunity to explore wine with Daniel was a very special treat. Originally from Chile and a graduate in Oenology from the University of Chile, he has built an excellent reputation for himself since coming here in 2004, developing blends for many of the top Valle wineries.

We were ushered down the stairs into a private tasting room that was so impressive we thought for a moment that they wanted us to buy the vineyard. Daniel, along with Emevé's sommelier Brenda Martinez, presented us with five different Emevé wines, starting with a new white wine he created named Isabella - a blend of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier. Three varieties later, we ended with Los Nietos - "a big, luscious wine," Daniel explained to us, "with an intense hue of red and complex aromas of berries and flowers with slight hints of coffee and tobacco."

As if I could taste any of those subtle flavors - but I loved it!  
Daniel, a real artist, was happy to share



his how and what and why of blending and mixing and smelling and thinking and daydreaming about wine. "Ultimately," he said, with a knowing smile, "it's all about the grapes."

*"It is well to remember that there are five reasons for drinking wine: the arrival of a friend; one's present or future thirst; the excellence of the wine; or any other reason."*

Leaving Emevé, I asked Susan "Ready for dinner?" "Oh! I couldn't eat a thing," she replied. Knowing Susan as I do, and hearing this answer countless times over the years, I winked at Luis and we headed up into the hills to Equinoccio Restaurante. EXPLORE VDG knew what a foodie snob I am and choreographed this evening



with Chef Rafa Magna, one of the Valle's top chefs. With a commanding view of the entire valley, dinner was insane. I started with the fresh scallop tiradito with scorched cucumbers and green apples. Susan, since she wasn't hungry, went for the beetroot salad with goat cheese and roasted pine nuts. She cleaned her plate. She always cleans her plate. Onward we went. With a sudden new-found appetite, Susan ordered the creamy risotto with Cremini mushrooms and black truffles while I happily dug into the beef and shitake stuffed tortellini.

At this point Chef Rafa suggested that we split a New York steak with Cauliflower puree and baby carrots. Did I mention

the wonderful wines that he paired with our meal? Honestly our heads were exploding with tastes and sensations. We were having a ball.

Since once again, Susan "just couldn't," I dipped into a desert of a perfect little beetroot biscotti with fresh Greek yogurt and Macadamia nut cream. She forced herself to join me. Two espressos and a couple of small glasses of dessert wine completed the meal. Bravo, Chef Rafa! And bravo, EXPLORE VDG!

Luis carefully led these two happy campers back into the car and didn't even mention the words "tomorrow" or "breakfast."

Was I dreaming or was that really Luis



**(ABOVE AND BELOW)** | Beef and shitake stuffed tortellini at Equinoccio. Amazing scallop tiradito at Equinoccio. A yummy, smokey mezcal drink at Equinoccio. The perfect little beetroot biscotti with fresh Greek yogurt and Macadamia nut cream. The entrance to Encuentro Guadalupe - the home of Toba.

texting me the next morning saying that he was at the hotel and waiting to take us up to Toba, the modern restaurant nestled into the mountains above the sophisticated

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**(ABOVE)** | The view from Toba is one of the best in the Valle. Chef Andres Truillo with a tray of freshly-made Madeleines. Insane corn pancakes at Toba! The best, crazy-good cinnamon roll ever at Toba! Joan (left), Chef Andres Truillo, and Susan (right).

Hotel Encuentro, for – yep - you guessed - breakfast! The newly opened Toba, helmed by Chef Andres Truillo and his wife, the celebrated pastry chef Vanessa Franco, is the restaurant exclusively for the hotel's clients. To our delight, EXPLORE VDG arranged this visit for us.

Susan and I were both hoping for a carb-free day. Ha ha! Mexican cappuccinos

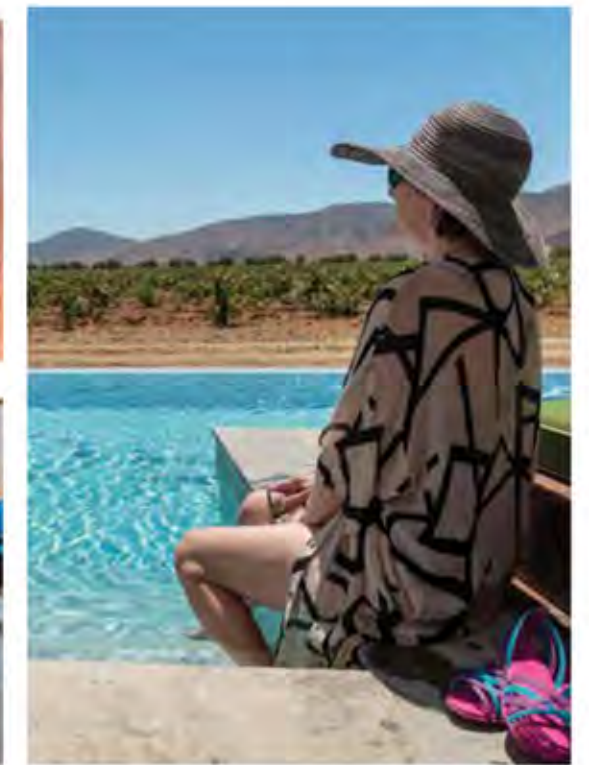
and Chef Vanessa's cinnamon "roll" extravaganza, the size of a small car, was bursting with every flavor you could ask for from The Best Cinnamon Bun on the Planet (so say I). We thought we'd be good and just order fruit, but a huge chocolate babka arrived at the table (did *we* order that?), as did a scrumptious cheese omelet made with smoked butter, a sprinkle of herbs, and a locally sourced queso doblecrema from the famous Ramonetti cheese maker up the road in Ojos Negros. The remains of that fierce babka was wrapped up for later (just in case). Sugar-high and extremely happy, we looked longingly at the beautiful pool below the restaurant wishing we could grab a quick dip - but EXPLORE VDG had another trick up their sleeve.

### The Spa Experience at the Luna Del Sol Spa

Luna de Sol is a spectacular spa, yoga and healing center on the grounds of Hotel Boutique Valle de Guadalupe...right next door to our hotel, Entre Viñedos.

How perfect was this? First of all, the spa was gorgeous. Michelle has amazing taste and, just like her garden, she's put her heart and soul into the project. The design combines a very modern sensibility of stone, light woods and comfy white and beige furnishings with a relaxing vibe scented by natural herbs from the garden.

With an endless view of the vineyards, it is impossible to not sink into the here and now. The choice of treatments was mind blowing. We both opted for the deep tissue



massage. I selected the lavender oil while Susan went for the sage. We were shown into the luxe changing room with showers and lockers where we were given towels, robes and slippers and, after a quick shower, our massage therapists escorted us to our treatment rooms. Everything about my massage was just right. I loved it. I did have a hard time peeling Susan off her table, but our experience included a few more hours to relax in the spa's private pool, jacuzzi and steam. And we did.

Back in the room, I checked my email and loved seeing another note from Kara checking in and making sure that we were having a great time. I felt very well-taken care of!

Next on our agenda was a late afternoon wine tasting at Lechuza, a family-owned

boutique winery whose wines are carried at some of the top restaurants in the US and Mexico. We were greeted by Kris Magnussen Shute, Lechuza's owner and wine maker, who led us to our tasting on her beautiful and expansive patio. A tray of local cheeses, olives, and sun-dried tomatoes was the perfect choice for our late-afternoon tasting of three of her exceptional wines. After she filled our glasses with the vineyard's Royal Blush 2020 Rose, an unexpected blend of Cabernet, Merlot, and Tempranillo – we made a toast to "us!" The wine was a beauty. We continued with their 2016 Vuelo – Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay – which, with its light mineral taste, was ideal for this warm summer afternoon. Lechuza's Stainless Steel 100% Chardonnay was the last of our afternoon whites. It struck me that

**(ABOVE AND BELOW)** | Luna de Sol Spa and Hotel Boutique Valle de Guadalupe. Tasting some of Kris Magnussen Shute's Lechuza wines on the patio of the vineyard. Lechuza's 2016 Vuelo – Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay – which, with its light mineral taste, was ideal for this warm summer afternoon. One of Lechuza's wines that we didn't get to taste - but we bought it anyway!

the wines, like Kris, are modern, surprising, and a little rebellious. It was the perfect way to end our visit.

But was it?

Susan was suddenly nowhere to be found. Kris suggested that we look in the boutique and of course, there she was, excitedly rifling

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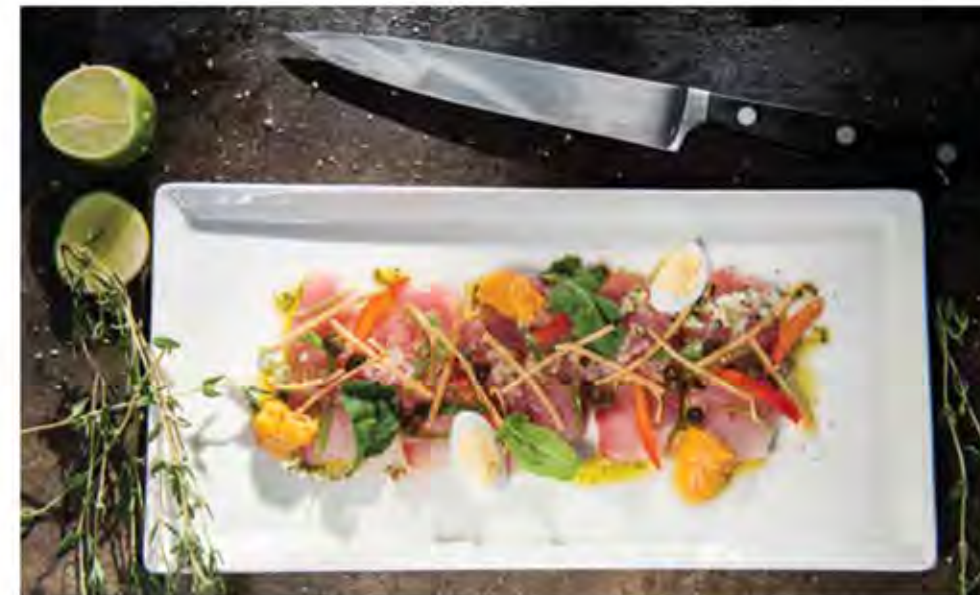


**(ABOVE AND BELOW)** | Kris Magnussen Shulte of Lechuza Vineyards talks about her wines. Susan and Joan compare locally-made pool covers in the Lechuza gift shop. Leaving Lechuza with our bag of goodies! Just before sunset at Deckman's. Drew Deckman, hard at work as usual.

above the valley and seems to overlook the whole world. A beautiful sunset was a sure bet. Drew Deckman is one of the most well respected and loved chefs in the Valle. He founded his intimate restaurant under an enormous oak tree overlooking El Mogor's beautiful vineyards 10 years ago, and his original open-air, wood-fired kitchen is still the focal-point of the place. Like an orchestra conductor wearing heavy duty goggles, Drew is the center of attention, overseeing the creation of some of the tastiest and most refined and personal food in the area. Drew is an old friend of ours; Susan and I met him on a golf course in La Paz about 16 years ago (but that's another long story) and we've been friends ever since. He knew we were coming and he was ready for us. The restaurant, always packed with locals, visitors, food lovers, and visiting chefs feels like an amazing party that you've

been invited to. We happily put ourselves in Drew's hands which is always the best thing to do at Deckman's. Exciting dishes began to appear at our ringside table and the super cute waiters were happily describing everything. We split a dozen local Baja oysters, an order of yellowtail crudo with sea urchin and ponzu, and the octopus with lentils, aioli, and mixed tomatoes. We thought we were running out of steam, but Drew knows us better than that. An order of corvina fillet with eggplant puree and baby calamari was delivered along with his famous short ribs and a platter of grilled vegetables from his own garden. We waved the white flag. Drew was playfully not happy with us but at the end of the evening, he and Paulina - Drew's wife and manager of this whole amazing operation - joined us for deserts - olive oil cake with tomatillo meringue and sage ice cream, chocolate cake topped with maple ice

cream and almond brittle, and a chocolate mousse with ranch cream and fresh berries. Sitting around the table talking about food, the world, their families, our families, was wonderful. It was a fantastic evening. Our next and sadly last day started with a trip to Alvéolo Casa del Pan. Once again EXPLORE VDG knew just what we would love. Alvéolo is up a small dusty road just off the main dusty road in the town of Guadalupe. As we walked up to the screen door, we were greeted by the owner, Gisella Isidoro, and the smell of freshly-brewed coffee and baking bread. The farmhouse-Mexican-rustic style of her retail shop is lined with jars of homemade jams and marmalades, tapenades, local honey and olive oil, bags of Oaxacan coffee, homemade granola, and all kinds of irresistible goodies. The smell of that baking bread - one of my weaknesses - led us through an open door



into the bakery...the heart of the business. In 2014, her husband Rafa Magana - yes that same Chef Rafa - convinced her that the Valle needed great bread, and she's baking it. Her crew was busy mixing and kneading and baking and filling the racks with rustic sour dough loaves, ciabattas, olive breads, raisin breads, dinner rolls, sweet cakes and cookies and corn muffins and everything that I love. Now, Alvéolo Casa de Pan is a full-on family owned and operated commercial bakery providing breads to most of the high-end restaurants in the valley. While Susan and I sat outside on the front porch with our coffee and yummy little cinnamon coffee cakes and jams, several vans with restaurant names we recognized were making their daily pickups. Gisella, a very warm and inviting woman, has worked hard and devoted herself to creating what is considered, by her growing list of customers,

one of the best bakeries in northern Baja. Needless to say, Susan and I left with armloads of - well - everything. EXPLORE VDG wisely chose The Adobe Guadalupe Winery Experience as the finale of our fabulous trip. Tru Miller, the owner of this magical place, is considered The Grande Dame of the Valle and recently celebrated her 25 years here with a huge fiesta. As Luis guided us into the cava, we were surprised and delighted to find that it was

**(ABOVE AND FAR RIGHT)** | Yellowtail crudo with sea urchin and ponzu at Deckman's. Corvina at Deckman's. Gisella's rustic olive bread at Alvéolo Casa Del Pan. Who doesn't love a bakery?

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**(ABOVE AND BELOW)** | Breakfast at *Ovéolo Casa Del Pan* - local olives, homemade tepanades, jams, granola and, of course, Gisella's breads! Gisella Isadoro - owner of *Ovéolo Casa Del Pan*. Walking towards the cava at *Adobe Guadalupe* for our wine tasting. Our wonderful guide, Luis, takes us through the wine tasting at *Adobe Guadalupe*. A vintner with his own boutique winery, Luis had worked for *Adobe Guadalupe* on and off for years.

Luis himself - who has worked with Tru and Daniel Lonnberg for years - who would be leading us through the wine tasting.

He started us off with Uriel, a dry crisp Rose that in Tru's words "beters your mood on a hot summer day." True to Tru's word, it gently cooled us off and prepared us for the next wine - Miguel, a rich delicate easy drinking red. Next up was Kerubiel, a French style Chateauf-du-Pape with a full body and a Mexican zing. Then Luis, surprised us

with the complex personality of Serafiel. She has floral notes and hints of dark blueberries and chocolate and like Tru, is powerful and elegant with a spicy touch. We finished the tasting with Gabriel - one of the most loved of the Adobe Wines. The Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Malbec blend *a la Bordeaux* is velvety and dark and deep. Aged twelve months in white French oak barrels, Gabriel is big and bold and really delivers.

Afterwards, we met up with Tru in her enormous art-filled living room. Her story is long and deep and very inspiring, but let's jump into the present and our wonderful afternoon.

Tru loves and is loved by the Valle and is happy to share all the inside stories and gossip. As we got to know each other a little better, the three of us snooped around her grand hacienda. We looked at her boot closets - yes, there's more than one (dressy

and not dressy) - the scarf walls (summer and winter), and photos of her friends and family.

Soon, we were invited to a cozy lunch that was served in the dining room. Of course, it was delicious but, for us, the afternoon was all about Tru. A fearless survivor who has faced many hardships and tragedies, she's a woman who never says no to life and honors each day with a big, easy laugh.

After lunch we settled into the kitchen to taste the newest additions to her portfolio. Susan selflessly declared herself the designated driver, so Tru and I started with her new mezcals *Lucifer Especial*. After extensive research and several trips to Oaxaca, she found the perfect artisanal *mezcalero* to bring her *Lucifer* to life. In a tall slender bottle with a bright red devilish label, it's pure, it's clear, it's smooth and it's my new favorite mezcals. Next, we sampled her *Tia Tula Tequila*. Made in Jalisco from 100%



blue agave and proudly dedicated to women, it has a beautiful honey color and a soft but strong flavor. The name, taken from the 1921 novel by Miguel de Unamuno about an intelligent, willful and yet vulnerable, woman who declares "it is better to choose than to be chosen!" is a tequila that comes from Tru's heart - as is everything that she touches.

Well, here we are. Our visit with Tru Miller was the last adventure of our action-packed trip. Were we ready to head home? Not even close. As the poet Anonymous said "Wine flies when you're having fun." And we had so much fun. EXPLORE VDG planned a perfect long weekend for us, and we loved every crazy hour of it. We felt comfortable and welcomed everywhere we went. It must be the water...or the air...or the wine...or the food...or the wonderful people we met. The Valle is a very special place.

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Some details: EXPLORE VDG can either plan a self-driving itinerary for you or, like they did for us, assign an amazing driver/guide and car to take you everywhere. There are a number of ways to get to the Valle. First - get to San Diego - fairly easy from almost anywhere in the US. Once there, rent a car at the airport and drive across. It's about 30 minutes to the crossing from the airport. You'll have to purchase Mexican car insurance and EXPLORE VDG can help you with that. Note that not all US car rental companies allow their vehicles to be driven into Mexico so make sure that you check first.

Or - make your way to the San Ysidro border via Uber, taxi, or the San Diego

**(ABOVE AND BELOW)** | Sitting in the kitchen with Tru Miller - the Grand Dame of the Valle. Tru Miller's latest projects - *Lucifer especial mezcals* and *Tia Tula Tequila*. Susan (left), Luis, and Joan (right).

Trolley from downtown. You can then walk across and rent a car there. EXPLORE VDG has a great relationship with National Car Rental in Tijuana, and National can pick you up and drop you back off at the border.

If you choose to have EXPLORE VDG supply a car and driver, they can pick you up on the Mexican side of the border.

Whichever way you choose, make sure that you have a current passport, and despite what you might read on the Google, you do need to stop at Mexican immigration to fill out an immigration form and have it stamped. If you're staying a week or less, it's free. **El Fin!**

