

SIMPLIE GOLDEN

— TRAVEL —

VALLE DE GUADALUPE

*Wine, architecture, and a valley shaped
by both nature and time.*

JESSICA NICHOLE

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TRAVEL —————

VALLE DE GUADALUPE

BY JESSICA NICHOLE —————

Long before Michelin stars and Diamond Resorts arrived in Valle de Guadalupe, the land was protected by the Indigenous presence of the Kumeyaay. The subsequent establishment of the Dominican mission and the arrival of foreign settlers are all part of a single history that has shaped the region's identity.





Valle de Guadalupe takes its name from Misión de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe del Norte (Mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe), founded in 1834 by Dominican friars. Despite the mission's short stint, it played a significant role in the establishment of agriculture. Between 1834–1840, agricultural practices included hand-planted orchards, olives, and Mission grapes. The grapes were hearty, drought-tolerant, and vigorous growers in the valley's Mediterranean microclimate. Before their arrival, whether the valley's dry, hot days and cool nights could support viticulture was relatively unknown. Fast-forward to today, the valley still contains descendants of the first varietal grapes carried to North America by Dominican missionaries nearly 200 years ago.



By 1905, the mission had been abandoned, and the valley was a blank slate. Russian Molokai immigrants (descendants of the Kars region of Turkey) sought refuge in the region. With little interest in ideologies and politics, they were permitted free entry into Baja California. The Russian families began cultivating the land through the mass introduction of wheat, alfalfa, bees, and vegetables. This was achieved through a communal farming infrastructure that included a pivot to commercial viticulture when the Russians transferred from wheat to European wine grapes.

Valle de Noche

Ultimately, the landscape today is highly dynamic. Unrestrained cellars balance precision with natural, low-intervention biodynamic fermentation practices, drawing travelers away from preeminent wine territories like Napa and Europe and instead placing them in Mexico's leading wine-growing area, Valle de Guadalupe. The debut of the Michelin Guide Mexico has further cemented the valley's standing, with dining establishments directly integrated into the vineyards, such as Animalón and Primitivo. Though my trip was intentionally designed around the leisurely experience of staying at my resort, and I never made it to either, their ancient oak trees, open fires, string lights, and massive communal tables seemed to capture something essential about the valley: a relationship between earth, fire, and communion.

“a relationship between earth, fire, and communion.”

Moving past official accolades, another tier of exceptional dining exists at Banyan Tree Veya. Atalaya may not have a Michelin star—yet—but it should certainly be on your list if you love a beautifully curated cocktail. I ordered the Noche de Valle, which translates roughly to “Night in the Valley.” Taking one look at the impressive cocktail placed in front of me, the name felt more evocative than descriptive. The bartender went on to explain that Noche de Valle is an interpretation of Valle de Guadalupe after dark: the dark liquid is the night, while the pale foam on top reads like the clouds, with a deliberate little trail of tiny green leaves across the surface. Finished with aromatic basil from the onsite garden, the cocktail visually complements the restaurant's panoramic hilltop terrace. The drink is inky, almost midnight black, while behind it you have the Valle landscape—huge windows with fading daylight filtering in, mountains, and vineyards.

For a more understated yet phenomenal experience, step outside the resort. When you step away from the pretense—and the reservations—you'll find the other side of Valle's story. Fluorescent lights, plastic chairs, and an open counter at a roadside taqueria. Taqueria La Principal—a highly popular, Michelin-recommended roadside taco stand—serves gloriously messy, chopped, charred beef piled high on a tortilla, scattered with diced white onions and cilantro. Nothing is delicately plated here. The appeal is in the juicy carne, fresh herbs, bright green salsa, and handmade tortillas—all meant to be eaten standing up while the juices from the meat and salsa run down your hand.



Where to Stay

In line with the valley's intimate tranquility, the beauty of most Valle resorts comes from how effortlessly everything settles into the surroundings. Luxury five-star vineyard resorts like Banyan Tree Veya Valle de Gauadalpe offer striking hillside villas, private plunge pools, in-villa fireplaces, and expansive views of the mountains and valleys below. Inside, the palette is deliberately quiet—warm wood, woven textures, and soft desert neutrals—so that the vineyards become the villa's most dramatic feature. Laying in bed, the vineyards feel remarkably close, like your room has been tucked into a hillside rather than built above it.

As someone who is intrigued by the idea of “meditating on nature,” the colors were what inspired me the most.

The ground was sun-warmed adobe—sand, clay, the pale brown of something that had spent all summer beneath an open sky. The vineyards move through olive, sage, and dusty rose, with little flashes of brighter green where nature is still reaching for the light.

What I appreciated most were the lounge areas nestled into the property. I loved spreading out on the terrace in the morning when all the farm animals were conversing. Off in the distance, I could hear a cacophony of goats, chickens, dogs, sheep, and cows. Life was unhurried; the resort's restaurants and facilities were still closed. In fact, the valley is fairly quiet Monday through Wednesday. Most of Valle's treasures emerge Thursday through Sunday when the flux of visitors looking for a wine country getaway settle in.



Alfresco Dining

My mornings outside the villa always started with breakfast at Adlea. There was something so special about sitting there, perched on top of a hillside overlooking the valley. The land beneath stretched out in warm layers—rows of grapevines stitched into the earth, dusty roads winding between them, and little homes and farms scattered wherever the land allowed. When my server arrived, I ordered the same thing every time: green juice, an iced latte, juicy ripe fruit, and chilaquiles. **I still daydream about those chilaquiles:** crispy corn tortillas, lightly simmered in salsa verde, topped with crumbled cheese, cilantro, and crema.

“There was something so special about sitting there, perched on top of a hillside overlooking the valley.”

Each dish on the menu felt like a daily special. One day, the black beans came with a sprinkle of queso on top and an avocado delicately sliced on the side. The next day, the salsa verde was swapped out for a sweet and smoky mole. As someone who stayed exclusively on the property, that was something I really came to value. It wasn't that there was one single “standout” dish on the menu; instead, I was dining like a local, following the daily rhythm of the vibrant garden harvest.



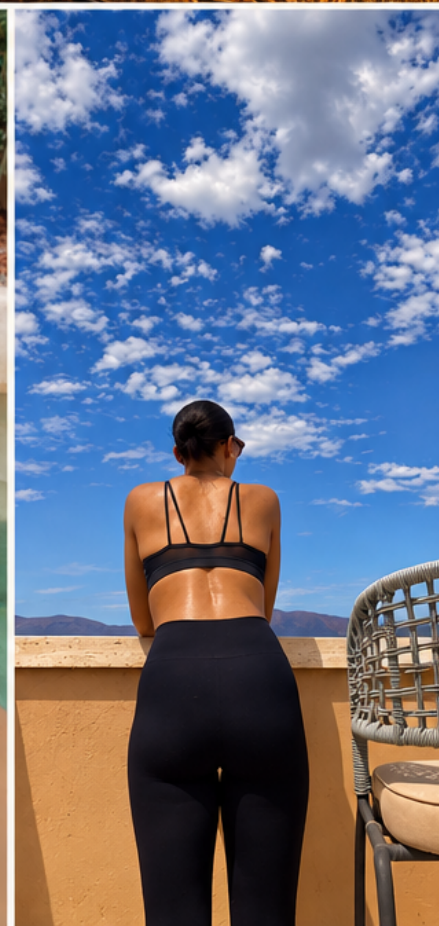
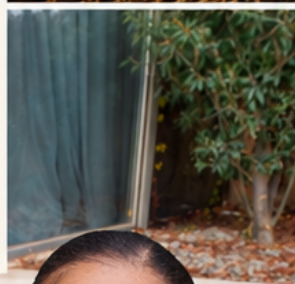
Evenings in the Valley

While breakfast slowly kickstarts the morning, a completely different ritual awaits at dusk. Sunsets in the valley are a canvas. As darkness settles over the vines, the sky seems to gather all the light—the pillowy clouds gleaming and the moon luminous above them. Thus, it is best to adopt a relaxed mindset during the evening. Dining al fresco, under the glow of the clouds, is highly encouraged. You feel deeply connected to the land, savoring a bespoke cocktail while gazing into the serene darkness. Or perhaps a sunset meditation hike for deepened mindfulness—focusing on the changing colors and fading sunlight filtering through the vines—is just what you need. Nature doesn't judge. The quiet isolation of the trail allows you to ask life's big questions and listen closely for the answers.

Regardless of how you choose to spend your evenings, deciding which Valle experience to enjoy has never been more rewarding. There are open-air dinners and late cocktails, evening dips in private plunge pools, and long, quiet hours with a novel and a glass of wine.

And there should, of course, be wine.

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This is Valle de Guadalupe, after all. Grenache thrives here, and it is worth tasting in the place where it grows. At Pictograma, I found myself particularly taken with the Grenache rosé, along with their sparkling wine—a reminder that in Valle, wine is not merely something poured into a glass, but another expression of the landscape itself.

But wine alone is not what makes the valley remarkable. There are other places in California and Mexico where you can spend an afternoon moving between vineyards and tasting rooms. What Valle offers is the starkness surrounding them: mountains rising from dusty earth, vines cutting green lines through an otherwise rugged landscape, and a stillness that makes the whole place feel somehow removed from time.

Perhaps that is what I kept trying to name while I was there.





TRAVEL

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