Guadalajara: Through the Eyes of Three Locals

Posted by Kwin Mosby | Nov 8, 2023 | 0

Alex Serratos, Diva Nova, and Claudio Limón call Guadalajara home.

More than 4,000 athletes from over 40 countries are currently competing in the Gay Games XI in Guadalajara, Mexico. Although touted as an epic LGBTQ+ sports event, organizers encourage straight allies to compete as well.

Initially, Hong Kong was the host city for Gay Games 2023 (November 3-11, 2023), but due to the COVID pandemic and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, organizers decided to choose runner-up Guadalajara as the host of the majority of the festivities, giving the city less than two years to prepare for the events and thousands of competitors and spectators to converge on the city.

The Federation of Gay Games makes it a point to choose host cities that may not be LGBTQ+ friendly, like Hong Kong, but its co-host city is on the opposite end of the spectrum.

GAY GAMES XI·2023
Guadalajara
JUNTXS CREANDO HISTORIA
MAKING HISTORY TOGETHER
MÉXICO
Jalisco

(Photo Credit: Gay Games Guadalajara 2023)

(Photo Credit: Gay Games Guadalajara 2023)

Guadalajara is located in Mexico's Jalisco state, where same-sex marriage is legal, and laws exist to support LGBTQ+ equality and curb hate crimes. Jalisco is also the first and, at the moment, the only Mexican state to recognize trans kids' and youth rights to choose their legal identity. All of these reasons why the Guadalajara is an appealing destination for LGBTQ+ vacationers.

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We connected with entrepreneur and community activist Alejandro "Alex" Serratos, drag performer Diva Nova, and artist Claudio Limón who not only offer some insight into the city's diverse LGBTQ+ community but also encourage all people to visit Guadalajara even after the Gay Games have come to an end.

Alex Serratos Creates Space for All People

(Photo courtesy of Alex Serratos)

Alex Serratos with his dog Totopo
(Photo Credit: Kwin Mosby)

(Photo courtesy of Alex Serratos)

Most people outside of Guadalajara may not know **Alex Serratos**, but he's well-known even in social circles beyond the LGBTQ+ community. He is one of the key influential leaders who helped with the bid to secure Guadalajara as a host city for the Gay Games, which eventually happened albeit co-hosting some of the events. The city secured the Gay Games, but Serratos redirected his attention to focus on the sports event's cultural programming which included fashion shows, workshops, performances, parties, art installations, and a bazaar that features LGBTQ+ communities and products. In a nutshell, 60 events for the 10-day event were planned – thanks to Serratos and his team at **Prohibido**, an LGBTQ+ arts and culture group.

When asked why queer folx should visit Guadalajara, Serratos explained that it's hard for him to say because he's lived in the city for his entire life. He added, "I feel very lucky to live here because I feel safe, feel free, feel accepted, and I work with many people in the community who are working to make it an even better place."

At an early age, Serratos – a free spirit, who doesn't like labels – created a book fair with classmates in high school and created cultural festivals while a college student. He's always been connected to both the arts and culture community and the LGBTQ+ community.

In addition to his role as a community builder, Serrato manages to spend time with his son and his adorable dog, Totopo, but his energetic personality offers some insight into the busy man-on-the-go persona – always enterprising and a forward-thinker.

Food at Peligro (Photo Credit: Kwin Mosby)

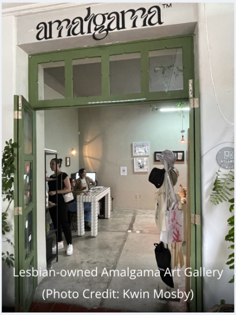
Peligro restaurant (Photo Credit: Kwin Mosby)

French toast at Peligro (Photo Credit: Kwin Mosby)

Once the owner of Petite Hotel located in the city's gayborhood of Colonia Americana, he now owns **Pinches Pizzas Peligro** and **Peligro**, a restaurant that started as a small coffee bar five and a half years ago.

"I have many friends who work in the food and beverage business, but I used to be very careful about it because I respect their jobs and the industry, so I decided to focus on the creative and cultural side of the business," said Serratos.

The building, where Peligro restaurant resides, is also home to the lesbian-owned art gallery Amalgama, an architecture studio, a fashion brand, and Antiturista, a business that creates branded maps for tourists and locals who want to immerse themselves in local shops, art, culture, and special events.



Lesbian-owned Amalgama Art Gallery (Photo Credit: Kwin Mosby)

Amalgama Art Gallery (Photo Credit: Kwin Mosby)

ANTITURISTA
Antiturista Office (Photo Credit: Kwin Mosby)

He explained, "The first map was **Guadalajara Central**, which means downtown Guadalajara or the city center. We have the LGBT Guadalajara map and a Contemporary Art and Culture map. We have **Zapopan/Providencia**, which is the west side of the city. We have **Tlaquepaque**, which is the east side of the city; we have **Chapala**, which is the lake; and we have a map for the town of **Tequila**."

The current maps are available at several establishments around the city. For tourists looking for local things to do and see, you can check out Antiturista's **website** and look for an Anti-Turista agenda published every Thursday, highlighting what locals enjoy doing as well as niche events such as smaller concerts (usually not mainstream artists), poetry readings, ceramic workshops, or to join a group dog owners for a walk around the city. Serratos said they are working on a map for Puerto Vallarta and Los Altos de Jalisco. He added, “It’s also a good way to meet people.”

Creating LGBTQ+ safe spaces and informative resources for cultural enthusiasts are all ways Serratos continues to make Guadalajara a welcoming, inclusive place for locals and tourists alike.

Diva Nova Champions a New Wave of Drag Artists

(Photo Courtesy of Diva Nova)

(Photo Courtesy of Diva Nova)

Ammy Johel Lepe Casillas, better known as **Diva Nova**, is creating space for new drag artists in Guadalajara. Diva Nova was born more than three years ago; however, she just celebrated her one-year anniversary in July as a full-time *hyperqueen* or a female drag artist. According to her, the local drag scene saw an increase in women as drag performers last year with a few winning notable competitions, herself included!

At first, Diva Nova didn’t take her drag performances as seriously until she won the third edition of the **Guadalajara Drag Project** last year (2022), giving her more visibility and the opportunity to make her life as a drag artist a viable career option. Her fate was “practically written in the stars,” and she recalled having artistic flair as a child.

Now, as a full-time drag performer, Diva Nova shares the stage with her “transgender sisters.” Even though she feels fully accepted by the LGBTQ+ community and her status as a drag artist has been elevated, there was a time when she didn’t feel that way.

(Photo Courtesy of Diva Nova)

(Photo Courtesy of Diva Nova)

At the beginning of her career as a drag artist, she worked at a bar where, according to her, the owner, a cisgender gay man, never truly supported her career, and even worse, the crowd made it a difficult space for a hyperqueen to work.

“He (the bar owner) was psychologically violent to me. It was a popular bar always full of gay cis men, who frequently made misogynistic, disrespectful comments about female genitalia that made me experience gender dysphoria as a result.”

Despite her initial experience, Diva Nova believes the city she calls home is ideal for drag artists. “Guadalajara is without a doubt a place full of talent and a good place for drag performers—more people are working as drag artists. The city has a growing drag scene that’s known for innovative performances that attract an international crowd.”

(Photo Courtesy of Diva Nova)

(Photo Courtesy of Diva Nova)

Just FYI, if you’re an international visitor or a curious local looking for the best drag shows in the city; Diva Nova recommends visiting **Xiquito Baresito**, located on Avenida Chapultepec. She added, “As for nightclubs, **Xico Antrx** and **Babel Club** have some of the best performers in the city.”

You can catch her performing at all three places and at **El Jardin de Pichina**, too! If you’re lucky enough, you’ll get to see Diva Nova’s jaw-dropping performance floating around the bar on rollerblades lip-synching to the Pussycat Dolls’ “Hush Hush.” It’s a not-to-be-missed sight to see.

Claudio Limón Artistically Celebrates Life and ‘Good Vibes’

(Photo Courtesy of Claudio Limón)

(Photo Courtesy of Claudio Limón)

(Photo Credit: Javier Ortega)

In addition to a vibrant community of drag artists, Guadalajara is also home to creative queer artists like Claudio Limón, an artist who calls his work “Mexican Pop with a native style.” Art has always been a primary focus in his life.

Even as a child, he recalls drawing all the time with inspiration from his father, a sign painter, and his mother, a fashion designer. “That’s where my passion for art comes from. The creative ambiance in my home was always there,” he said.

Looking at his work, art aficionados may not know it, but Limón’s inspiration comes from life and things around him including Mexico’s people, culture, and folklore. And at the heart of it all—“happiness and good vibes” and maybe living in Guadalajara—inspire his paintings, too.

(Photo Courtesy of Claudio Limón)

claudio limón
2020
(Photo Courtesy of Claudio Limón)

(Photo Courtesy of Claudio Limón)

Limón enjoys painting what he calls “simple things” and using “bright colors to express” his feelings. It’s not surprising that emotions are a passionate source for his creativity, especially after he revealed the longtime connection between him and his husband, who met in their hometown of Arandas at ages 15 and 9. Coincidently, his husband’s mother – now Limon’s mother-in-law – taught the art class where they met.

They would lose touch, meet again 14 years later at a bar in Guadalajara, and would not reconnect again until bumping into one another after they separately decided to move back to their hometown of Arandas.

He explained, “It was a coincidence. We started dating in Arandas and then we moved to New York together. After three years of dating, he proposed to me at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. I remember we went to a concert to see the British music band, The Irrepressibles, who sang the song "Two Men in Love." It was during the song, that exact moment, my husband turned around and asked me if I'd marry him."

(Photo Credit: Javier Ortega)

(Photo Credit: Javier Ortega)

(Photo Credit: Ivan Rizo)

The following year, the couple tied the knot at City Hall in New York City, and it's that love, happiness, and joy that oftentimes becomes a reoccurring theme in Limón's work. Currently, he's working on large murals for clients in Mexico and California, and he's working with Mexican actor Diego Boneta on a joint project for the **Fuck Cancer Foundation**.

If you're visiting Guadalajara, Limón urges LGBTQ+ visitors to explore the city's art scene. "You should visit **Hospicio Cabañas**. It's a special place that features amazing murals created by one of the best muralists in Mexico, Jose Clemente Orozco. I also recommend visiting MUSA (**Museo de las Artes**), a small local museum where you will find great exhibitions."

Click here for more travel inspiration and LGBTQ+ experiences to help you plan your trip to Guadalajara.