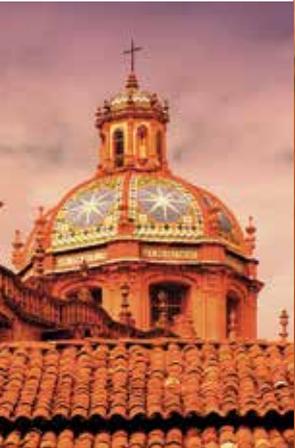


Clockwise from right Locals in their sombreros; tequila; try a margarita onboard; calavera souvenirs for sale; Mexico's stunning coastline; church in Taxco



# ENJOY THE MEXPERIENCE



Immerse yourself in the cultural wonderland that is Mexico, says **Samantha Wilson** – there's nowhere like it!



**M**exico's vast lands are awash with its varied and proud cultural heritage, which is usually celebrated with a fervent *¡salud!* and a glass of tequila. The balmy and beautiful Pacific coast, where large resorts give way to secluded villages, wildlife havens and desert landscapes, is a cultural melting pot, bringing together all the different flavours of Mexico for you to sample...

**SLOW IT DOWN** Outside of the busy resorts, a blissful and traditional way of life ambles slowly on. In shady plazas, outside rustic cafés and in the shadow of great colonial churches, Mexican locals carry on with their daily life unchanged for decades – why not join them? From old Mazatlan's colonial charm to San Jose del Cabo and its 18th-century architecture, take a delightful step back in time to a deep-rooted history and laid-back way of life. Or, if you fancy a thrill or two instead, look out for the cliff divers while you are in Mazatlan – locals dive throughout the afternoon.

**PICK IT UP** Mexican markets are the heart of daily life, combining a dazzling swirl of colour, spicy scents, fruity flavours and weird and exotic trinkets. Creatures of the deep make appearances at La Paz fish market, spiky and ornate fruit decorates the Loreto Farmers Market and handicrafts from across the country paint a charming picture of its cultural heritage: silver from Taxco, glass from Jalisco and hammocks from Merida can be found alongside traditional leather *huaraches* (sandals), *calavera* skull souvenirs and vibrant pottery.

**GO EXPLORING** Getting lost amid the region's hideaways and experiencing the rustic yet tropical vibe is to really understand Mexico's Pacific coast. *Pangas* (water taxis) shuttle visitors to the secluded idyll of Yelapa, a short ride from Puerto Vallarta, where car-free streets just beg to be walked barefoot. Todos Santos, an hour from bustling Cabo San Lucas, oozes quaint village life, unspoilt beaches and surfing bohemia, while Stone Island is a favourite haunt of locals who come to lounge on the sprawling sand beaches.

**BE ENTERTAINED** The notes of traditional ballads waft along on the warm breeze as mariachi bands entertain locals and visitors in the restaurants, cafés and seafront promenades. Dressed in traditional *charro* outfits the brass and string ensembles perform to the crowds, adding a sweet and undeniably Mexican tune to a rosy pink sunset. *Zocalos* (main squares) are the heart of cultural and political life in Mexican towns and a likely place to bump into a live mariachi band.

**TEQUILA TIME!** Few things are more Mexican than a glass of locally distilled tequila and a chilli-infused burrito, and locals are hugely proud of their fiery culinary ancestry. While the tequila worm isn't top on everyone's list, the region's seafood should be and local eateries – from gourmet restaurants to beachfront, thatched-roof *palapas* – cook up fresh, sweet shrimps and seafood in more ways than Mexicans have fiestas. Wash it all down with a glass of Mexico's finest, straight up if you can, just as the locals do. *¡Ay carumba!*

## SIPPING RITAS

If downing tequila seems like a dreadful waste, you should probably be sipping margaritas instead. Enjoy Mexico's favourite cocktail with us onboard, where there are speciality margaritas to choose from. From the 24K Gold Rita made with 1800 Tequila to the Melon Margarita made with melon liqueur, you'll be spoilt for choice!



➤ **SEE FOR YOURSELF...** Fancy immersing yourself in Mexican culture? Then turn to **page 21** for cruise information.