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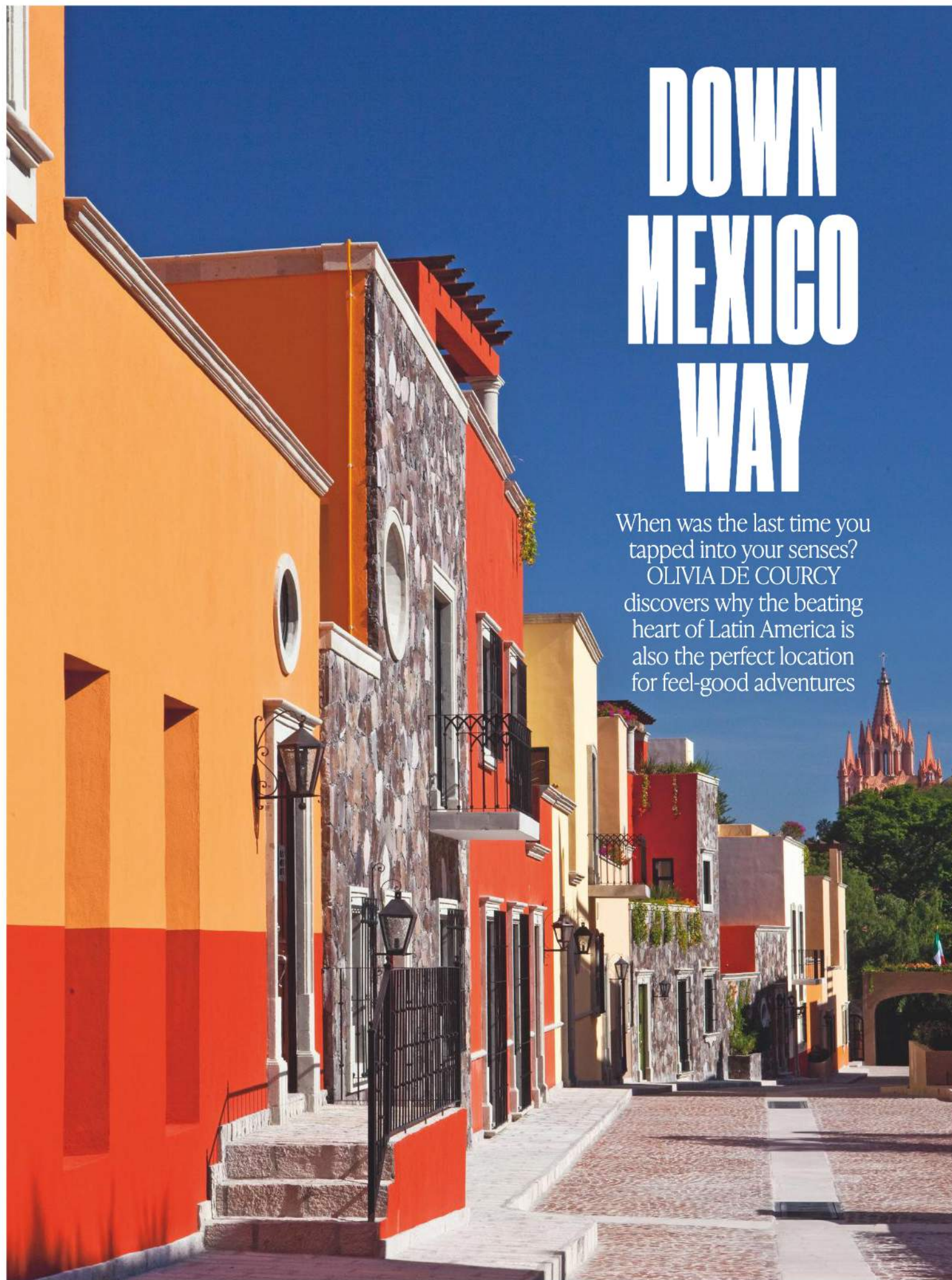
PHOTOGRAPHY
DANIEL BENSON

LONDON CALLING

Burberry electrifies the capital as Daniel Lee
brings new energy to the British icon



This page: The accommodation at Rosewood San Miguel de Allende is painted in sumptuous colours, reflective of the rich local hues. Opposite page: A three-bedroom Rosewood Residence overlooks a picturesque street in the Mexican city



DOWN MEXICO WAY

When was the last time you tapped into your senses? OLIVIA DE COURCY discovers why the beating heart of Latin America is also the perfect location for feel-good adventures



children skip home from school along streets where no two buildings look the same. Local architecture is famously not shy of colour, and I quickly find La Casa Azul (The Blue House), where Frida Kahlo spent most of her life, which has now been turned into a museum. Its cobalt-blue walls – behind which are artworks, memories and even the ashes of Mexico’s greatest female artist – and bright-green windows and doors can be seen from way down the street.

While downtown, I head for the bright lights of Xochimilco, a district in the south of the city that’s home to gondola-like boats that glide along the canals. These last remnants of a vast water transport system built by the Aztecs are accompanied by canoes offering Micheladas (cocktails made with beer) and freshly steamed empanadas, while a mariachi band lingers on standby, eager to serenade you (for a small donation).

About an hour from the centre of the capital is the ancient city of Teotihuacan. This UNESCO World Heritage site – which dates back to AD500 – is both spectacular and eerie. One can almost feel a soft vibration in the air, traversing the vast avenue connecting the pyramids, from past lives. And the Palacio de Quetzalpapálotl still contains original Mesoamerican murals,

including the feathered serpent god featuring vibrant red pigments produced by the cochineal, a tiny cactus-dwelling insect.

Four hours’ journey northwest into the highlands sits the small Spanish colonial city of San Miguel de Allende. It’s pristine and historic, and art undoubtedly has a significant presence here. I explore the artisan market, discovering woven Oaxacan textiles, glassware, handcrafted jewellery and intricately decorated pottery; alternatively, you can dip into art galleries featuring delights hidden behind small doors along cobbled streets dotted with dwellings painted in orange, yellow and red.

A quick WhatsApp to Monserrat – my assigned butler at the Rosewood hotel – results in me securing a seat at Luna Rooftop, the hottest bar and restaurant in town. It turns out the best way to see the city is from up high – armed with the sharpest grapefruit Margarita around – not least for the view of the pink neo-Gothic church, resembling something out of a Disney film.

Mexico City is famed for being a foodie hotspot, and my first taste >

WHAT TO PACK



The Jacksons tote bag £75.60



Ultra Violette Supreme Screen Hydrating Facial Sunscreen SPF 50+, 50ml, £34



Loewe Smooth Pavé Screen sunglasses £380



Lululemon cap £75



Noble Panacea The Brilliant Radiant Resilience Moisturizer 30 x 0.8ml, £210

The Beauty Halls, Ground Floor; Women’s Denim & Sport, Fourth Floor; Hair and Beauty Salon, Fifth Floor; and harrods.com



Above and top right: Mobile food stalls dot the streets of the Mexican capital, where brightly coloured buildings also feature prominently; Luna Rooftop bar offers spectacular views of San Miguel de Allende, including the dramatic pink towers of the neo-Gothic Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel church

AS A BEAUTY EDITOR, I’m always looking for the next big thing in wellness; recently, it seems as though a new TikTok-fuelled trend focusing on some aspect of the subject pops up every day. But what if instead of futuristic concepts and high-tech treatments, we stripped everything right back to basics? You guessed it: there’s a trend for that, too.

Enter the five senses technique, which is at the core of Gretchen Rubin’s 2023 *New York Times* bestseller *Life in Five Senses: How Exploring the Senses Got Me Out of My Head and Into the World*. And Rubin’s perspective is straightforward: she simply lists five things we can see, four things we can touch, three things we can smell and so on. As she says: “The five senses turn out to be this kind of all-purpose tool. It’s very easy to get stuck in our heads so we don’t notice the beauty that’s around us. Tuning in to our five senses makes us feel that connection.” Her hack is simple: “You just need to pay attention more.” And where better to test this theory and ignite the senses than in diverse and culturally rich Mexico?

One doesn’t have to look too far to find sights to captivate the eyes. On my first afternoon in Mexico City, I visit the streets of Coyoacán, which feel alive with a village-like charm. Here,

of just how special the local cuisine could be came in the shape of the duck empanadas smothered in mole sauce at Los Danzantes – I’ve dreamed of them ever since. That said, the gastronomic offering in San Miguel de Allende is no less mouthwatering – and, for me, this peaked with Rosewood’s bountiful brunch. Stalls line the courtyards of the hacienda, offering some of Mexico’s best dishes: spiced cochinita pibil, pineapple- and pork-laden tacos al pastor, softly steamed tamales, fresh ceviche and clote – cups of sweetcorn mixed with cheese, chilli and a squeeze of lime. And then there were the chilaquiles – tortillas with chicken, avocado, feta and onion covered in a green or red tomato salsa (or both – ‘divorciados’-style, the choice of the locals) – which I looked forward to every morning.

With my sight and taste sated, I am craving relaxation. My next stop is the Chablé Yucatán boutique hotel, nestled in the heart of the Yucatán jungle and built around an old hacienda. I value peace and tranquillity when I go abroad, and there’s definitely not much by way of company here, bar some sun-basking iguanas. When, however, I try to FaceTime a friend from my sunlounger, she says, “I can’t hear you... what’s that noise?” A choir of native chachalacas are having a whale of a time in a nearby palm tree, but I hadn’t actually noticed. In fact, when I tune in, there’s something meditative about the sound, and I realise it’s because I feel so present and in the moment. This state of mind stays with me as I cycle around the vast grounds, have a dip in the private pool at my own *casita* and read at the spa – which is built around a cenote, or natural sinkhole. Privacy is key to this place’s magical, calm nature – aligned with the wellness vibe I am more used to (though the 3,750-strong tequila collection – one of the largest in the world – at Ixi’im Restaurant is a nice touch, too).

Of course, I couldn’t go to Mexico and not hit the beach. A five-hour drive east takes me to Yucatán’s sister property – Chablé Maroma. It’s clear that the Chablé resorts take wellness and spirituality seriously (barefoot luxury is at its finest here). But perhaps my most eagerly anticipated appointment of the trip is a visit to Bu’ul restaurant to experience the tasting menu designed by chef Jorge Vallejo from the Mexico City-based eaterie Quintonil – and it does not disappoint. Risotto with blue shrimp from the Campeche region, lobster nestled on a puffed tortilla, longaniza cured meat from Valladolid,



and – best of all – Tikin Xic-style fish wrapped in corn leaves, alongside a particularly moreish burnt-pineapple Margarita.

As for the spiritual element, no activity has ever fine-tuned my senses quite like the temazcal ceremony – a tradition that dates back to pre-Columbian times – at Maroma. Inside an igloo-like structure made to represent Mother Earth’s pregnant belly, my shaman welcomes hot stones representing my ancestors. Picture yourself inside a smoky sauna, but it’s pitch black, and all you can hear are Mexican chants to the beat of a drum and the occasional crack of stones as they fizz with heat; there’s a reason it’s called the ‘rebirth ceremony’. It’s so hot I can’t breathe through my mouth, but I can feel the heat funnelling in and out through my nose. The smoky herby smells from the eucalyptus and rosemary transport me to an almost hypnotic state. With each ‘stage’ representing the four elements (earth, water, air and fire), more stones come in. It gets hotter and the chanting gets louder – until the crescendo of the ceremony: in child’s pose, shouting into the darkness. Emerging (doused with freezing water to bring me ‘back to life’), I’ve never felt more alive.

On the plane home, I’m in reflective mood. We spend our lives looking for the new; the next innovation that will bring us to the state of euphoria that we all crave. After one of the most memorable trips I’ve ever taken, I feel that travelling with the five-senses technique in mind is definitely the way to go. As for Mexico? With the intensity of its sights, sounds and tastes, it’s absolutely the place to do it. □



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“EMERGING (DOUSED WITH FREEZING WATER TO BRING ME ‘BACK TO LIFE’), I’VE NEVER FELT MORE ALIVE”



Chablé Hotels: Chablé Yucatán: Don Riddle Images; Adrian Gau; Getty Images; Amanda Marsalis/Think Archive; Rosewood San Miguel de Allende

WHERE TO STAY

Mi casa es su casa... being welcomed with open arms is at the core of Mexican hospitality. Consider these three hotels a comforting home-from-home



Rosewood San Miguel de Allende

A city hotel evocative of hacienda living, the Rosewood is so peaceful you could well imagine yourself to be in the middle of the countryside – expect unparalleled service, reviving massages and spectacular views.



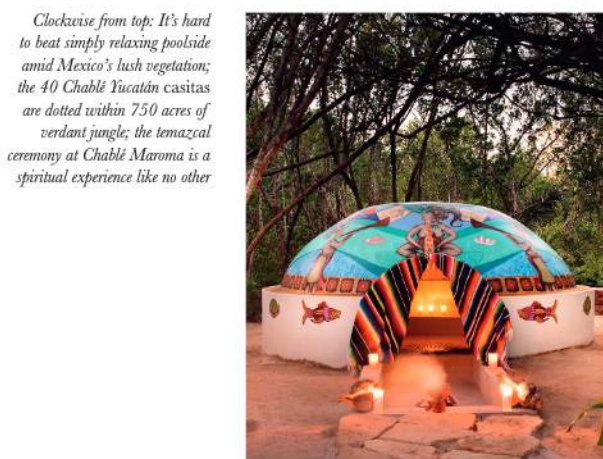
Chablé Yucatán

This multi-award-winning restored 19th-century estate amid the Yucatán jungle is a hub of wellness-inspired luxury, offering 40 stand-alone *casitas*, activities ranging from biking to Pilates, plus a world-class spa.



Chablé Maroma

Nestled between the vibrant east-coast destinations of Cancun and Playa del Carmen, this 70-luxury-villa resort in the Punta Maroma Reserve, with 650ft of private beach and lush tropical surroundings, is a tranquil haven.



Clockwise from top: It’s hard to beat simply relaxing poolside amid Mexico’s lush vegetation; the 40 Chablé Yucatán *casitas* are dotted within 750 acres of verdant jungle; the temazcal ceremony at Chablé Maroma is a spiritual experience like no other