



My VACAYA in Mexico

DIVA publisher **LINDA RILEY** discovers the delights of Puerto Vallarta and LGBTQIA travel

Established in 2018, VACAYA is relatively new in the LGBTQIA travel market, but it's already outstandingly popular. The first large-scale, adults-only holiday company created to represent the LGBTQIA community and their ally friends, it offers customised itineraries, personalised services, entertainment, parties and an endless number of activities designed to make everyone feel welcome.

Recently, I was lucky enough to join them on a trip to the city of Puerto Vallarta in Mexico. For this particular experience, VACAYA hired out the whole of the Hilton Vallarta Riviera complex one. Initially, I expected to be joined by predominantly cis gay men and I was worried about how we'd all fit together, but, amazingly, these expectations were shattered. The company was so welcoming, providing a relaxing environment for guests with a chill-out lounge that certainly didn't go amiss.

I was accompanied by my friend Jude Guaitamacchi who, as a TEDx speaker, model and campaigner, was the first-ever non-binary face of Harrods Beauty. Jude came into the experience and, like me, was a little apprehensive about sharing a space with what they anticipated would be mostly cis gay men. But, as VACAYA's Johanna Pscodna, Guest & Production Specialist explained to us, "We wanted to create a 'utopia-like' environment where everyone gets

the chance to be seen." And that's a sentiment both Jude and I left the week radiating.

The experience was partly coordinated by the outstanding Alysse

"The reigning themes of the holiday were inclusivity and fun"

Dalessandro, who as the Diversity and Inclusion specialist, excelled in finding local tours run for and by LGBTQIA people. A personal highlight for me, one local lesbian-owned business (Vallarta LOCAL) ran a so-called "Taco Tour". There was something extraordinarily empowering about exploring the city of Puerto Vallarta alongside fellow LGBTQIA women

and non-binary siblings, many of whom I bonded with.

We kicked off the Taco Tour with churros rather than tacos, which were absolutely delicious – no questions asked! Then, we walked over to our first taco joint, a delightful little place called Marissimo Seafood which specialised in – you guessed it – fish tacos. It's safe to say that we started with a bang here, because this was the best taco I'd ever eaten. Next, we went on to try dishes from Memo's Grill (also delicious!), hopping over to a few extra taco joints before finishing the evening at a lesbian-owned cocktail bar for a few tipples.

Elsewhere, the Hawaiian evening complete with a BBQ and fireworks was the most surreal, idyllic experience. It truly summed up the reigning themes of the holiday – inclusivity and fun.

You might think that, as a lesbian sharing the experience with so many cis gay men it could have potentially been an isolating time, but I was so pleasantly surprised by the openness of the community. Everyone I met was so friendly and, to be honest, I have never experienced such en masse like-mindedness and acceptance between gay men and lesbians. All in all, it was a heart-warming glimpse into what no doubt represents a brighter future for the LGBTQIA community. **D**

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Photos Gabriel Goldberg @hollywoodtravellers



LIFESTYLE

