

TRAVEL + LEISURE + FOOD

**THE
WORLD'S
BEST
RESTAURANTS**

*And the Future of
Global Dining*

TRAVEL + LEISURE

Experiences

TRAVELERS' TALES, FROM NEAR AND FAR

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▲ Charred onions, corn husks, and more ingredients for a farmstead dinner with Oaxacan chef Rodolfo Castellanos.



Castellanos shows his former boss, chef Traci Des Jardins, around the greenhouse at Rancho 314, on the outskirts of Oaxaca city.

The pool at the 300-year-old Ex Hacienda San Antonio retreat, in the foothills southeast of the city.

Group Trips, Reinvented

Modern Adventure (modernadventure.com; four nights from \$2,850) is one of several new travel operators shaking up the group-tour model by adding a compelling host. The **Luminary Experiences** (theluminaryexperiences.com; five nights from \$7,000) takes travelers to Paris with historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, or to Iceland with Reykjavik-based actor Hafþór Björnsson, best known for his role as the Mountain on *Game of Thrones*. Membership-based operator the **Palatum** (thepalatum.com; four nights from \$5,200) is set to launch in 2021 with culinary tours led by notable American chefs. And **Uncovr** (uncovrtravel.com; six nights from \$4,680) flips the script, tapping local creatives to cohost. —L.H.B.

clay for his work: bowls overflowing with shards of Mixtec pottery; ancient metates, or slabs for grinding corn; and piles of manos, the stones used to work the grain, polished smooth from long-ago use. Traci—who is half-Mexican and obsessive about the country’s culinary traditions—ran her hands over the stones reverently. When Manuel offered to sell her a pre-Hispanic metate for a song, she was dumbstruck. The hills are full of such treasures, he explained. You only have to look.

Manuel and his wife, Marisela, invited us to wander their house to see more of his work. In their daughter’s room, a sculptural mirror hung above a dresser strewn with the stuff of teenage girlhood; one door over, a mixed-media grid was juxtaposed with piles of their young son’s toy cars. We sat down for Marisela’s *chiles de agua rellenos*, a labor-intensive dish of fried peppers stuffed with a garlicky mix of chicken, apples, plantains, and raisins. It was sweet-hot and richly flavored, with cinnamon lending a bass note of warmth to the brightness of the chiles. I’d had Oaxacan food before, but few restaurants served meals like this—“celebration food,” Florencio called it, worth the effort only for births and weddings. And, apparently, for us. We fell quiet as we ate, too delighted to speak.

Our whole trip wasn’t about food, but it made all our other experiences come alive. At the home of the Ruiz family, Zapotec rug

makers in Teotitlán del Valle, we learned how they make dyes from regional materials, then Señora Ruiz showed us how to press masa and cook the tortillas on a comal. In San Martin Tilcajete, we circled around *alebrije* figurine makers Zeny and Reyna Fuentes, peering at Reyna’s agave-spine brush as she dabbed an intricate sun and moon on the outstretched wings of a hand-carved copal-wood owl. Afterward, Zeny summoned us into the backyard, where we sipped hot mezcal and sucked on salted orange slices as he peeled back a sheet of metal covering a pit. There, beneath layers



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