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## Tequila, Mezcal, and Pulque – Mexico as a Destination for Spiritourism. A Polish Perspective

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**Abstract:** The study aimed to evaluate the interest in spiritourism in Mexico among Polish tourists and to showcase the country's potential for developing tequila and mezcal-related tourism. To achieve this objective, the authors conducted a survey that obtained 209 responses. The survey was carried out in Polish using the CAPI technique, and the questionnaire was distributed via Facebook travel groups and Instagram, reaching an audience potentially interested in traveling to Mexico. The survey took place from May to October 2024. The article examines the historical background of alcohol in the region, the production processes of various spirits, and Mexico's attractions related to alcoholic beverages to highlight the country's potential for the development of spiritourism. The results indicate that Polish tourists' interest in Mexican cuisine varies, with the highest engagement among those who have visited Mexico. While many recognize popular dishes like tacos and guacamole, travelers to Mexico display deeper knowledge of traditional foods and a stronger interest in tequila and mezcal distilleries.

**Keywords:** cultural tourism, food tourism, heritage, beverage tourism, tequila route, mezcal route, alkotourism, denomination of origin

### 1. Introduction

Alcoholic beverages play an increasingly important role in the development of the modern tourism industry. Travelers are more likely to choose destinations that offer comprehensive experiences combining historical, cultural, and culinary elements (Yeoman, 2018). According to Global Data (2021), culinary tourism was ranked fourth in the list of the most popular types of tourism worldwide. One of the subcategories of culinary tourism is beverage tourism, which can be divided into alcoholic and non-alcoholic experiences. Non-alcoholic beverage tourism includes activities such as coffee tourism (visiting coffee plantations and artisanal cafés), tea tourism (touring tea estates and taking part in tea ceremonies), and cultural drink experiences (e.g. as tasting mate in Argentina). Alcoholic beverages tourism, on the other hand, encompasses wine tourism (visiting vineyards and wineries), beer tourism (exploring breweries and beer festivals),

spiritstourism (touring distilleries and learning about traditional spirit production, such as whiskey in Scotland or tequila in Mexico), as well as cider tourism (visiting orchards and tasting regional ciders, particularly in places like France, Spain, and the UK) and sake tourism (exploring sake breweries in Japan and learning about the brewing process and cultural significance of this traditional rice wine). The definition of spiritourism has not been definitively established. David Bell (2008), presents a definition of alcotourism, saying that it is the general consumption of alcohol during a tourist trip, starting from the casual drinking on vacations to choosing a destination connected to alcohol. In the pursuit of escaping the ordinary and breaking free from routine, alcohol consumption becomes an integral part of the tourist experience being also key factor in socializing. While for some travelers it is merely a complementary aspect of their trip, for others, it can serve as the main

inspiration for their journey (Getz et al., 2014; Robinson and Getz, 2014). However, tourism related to alcohol can have a deeper dimension, arising from the desire to explore a particular region of the world more thoroughly, as it combines culinary, cultural, and historical elements (Torre et al., 2014). In recent years, there has been a notable rise in interest in alcohol tourism, which is increasingly considered a vital component of culinary tourism. Spirits, recognized by UNESCO as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, are deeply woven into traditional lifestyle. Each spirit embodies a unique artisanal craft that reflects regional terroirs and long-established practices. This heritage can be experienced through visits to production sites and museums dedicated to these beverages across various countries. Moreover, the growing craft movement has emerged as a significant driving force behind this trend. The surge of craft

breweries, distilleries, and other small-scale producers highlights a renewed focus on traditional production methods and quality. This movement not only preserves cultural practices but also offers tourists immersive, hands-on experiences that deepen their appreciation of local culinary traditions. Together, these factors have contributed to the sustained growth of alcohol tourism as a dynamic and enriching aspect of global culinary tourism.

The aim of this study is to introduce the reader to an overview of the spirit tourism offer in Mexico and to evaluate the interest of Polish tourists in such tourism in Mexico. To achieve this, the author presents Mexico's emblematic alcoholic beverages. Furthermore, attractions related to alcohol tourism, such as distilleries, themed routes, and museums, are also discussed.

## 2. Methods

This study employed a diagnostic survey method. The research was conducted through an online questionnaire distributed through thematic groups on Facebook as well as posts and stories on Instagram. The use of social media allowed for outreach to a broad audience. The questionnaire was anonymous, and participation was voluntary. A total of 209

respondents took part in the study. The survey was available online from May to October 2024. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions, 4 of which related to demographic data, this section included questions related to gender, age, place of residence, and level of education. The remaining 12 questions were focused on tourism in general.

## 3. Trends of beverage tourism in the world

Much of the research exploring the connection between beverages and tourism focuses on wine tourism. Enotourism studies are numerous, spanning various countries worldwide, and underscore the academic and practical significance of wine as a driver of destination branding, sustainable tourism, and local economic development. (Hall et al., 2000; Bruwer, 2003; Carlsen, 2004; Charzyński et al., 2017; Anđelić et al., 2019) This emphasis is largely due to wine's deep historical roots, religious significance and its global presence, which have long cemented its role as a cultural and economic force. Recently, research on craft beer aspects has been gaining momentum, propelled by the

global craft beer movement that has reinvigorated interest in brewing traditions, authenticity, unique flavor profiles. Despite the significant event potential of craft beer festivals research on craft beer tourism are still scarce but growing in number (Cabras et al., 2020; Williams and Shapiro, 2023; Reid and Nilsson, 2023). Spirits tourism is relatively under-researched (Dsouza et al., 2022) which is surprising considering the significant influx of visitors—numbering in the millions—to distilleries in Scotland, the USA and France each year. Distilleries in Scotland attract over 2 million visitors annually (Scotch Whisky Association, 2023) and 38% of tourists arriving in 2023 from continental Europe and

44% from USA visited whisky distillery (Scotland Visitor Survey, 2024). Bourbon tourism in Kentucky, USA, draws approximately 1.5 million visitors each year (Kentucky Distillers' Association, 2021) and 2.0 million distilleries visits in Texas were recorded (Economic Impacts of Distillery Tourism in Texas, 2019). Kentucky located Buffalo Trace Distillery, the oldest continuously operating in the USA alone hosted 123.000 visitors in 2014 (Schmidt, 2015). Spirits tourism attracts more than 1.6 million visitors in France every year (Guide du Spiritourisme, 2018). Despite these impressive numbers, scholarly attention to spirits tourism remains limited compared to wine tourism. Only a very limited number of studies focus on tourism related to whisky, bourbon, or vodka, leaving a considerable gap in understanding the cultural, economic, and social impacts of this growing phenomenon. That's surprising considering growing interest and significant numbers of distillery visitors. It even looks that such world-renowned spirits like rum and gin have not been thoroughly researched in the context of tourism, despite their cultural significance and global popularity. Rum—deeply tied to the Caribbean's cultural and colonial heritage—and gin, with its resurgence in craft distilleries across Europe and beyond, remain highly underexplored with just 2

French language publications (Michel, 2016; Richter, 2021) and one in Spanish (Rodríguez Vázquez, 2023). This gap is particularly striking given the growing number of rum distilleries offering tours in the Caribbean and other sugar cane growing regions (<https://rumgeography.com/>) or gin-focused tourism experiences in cities like London and Amsterdam (<https://wsta.co.uk/trails/>; <https://wynand-fockink.nl/>), which attract millions of visitors annually. The lack of scholarly focus on these spirits represents a missed opportunity to understand their role in shaping cultural identity, driving local economies, and enhancing tourist experiences.

While a handful of studies, such as spiritourism perspectives in France (Caseau, 2018) whisky tourism in Scotland (Spracklen, 2011; Stoffelen and Vanneste, 2016), bourbon tourism in USA (Brooks and Morrin, 2019; Coomes et al., 2020), vodka tourism in Europe (McKenzie, 2014, 2016; Orłowski and Woźniczko, 2020) and fruit brandy (Harcza, 2017), have begun to explore this field, they remain isolated cases rather than part of a systematic or comprehensive approach to spirits tourism research. They offer initial insights that could serve as a foundation for broader, more integrated research on spirits tourism.

### 3.1 History of Alcoholic Beverages in Mexico

Alcohol has played a significant role in human history for thousands of years. The history of alcohol production between 7000 years BC and the beginning of our era is constantly evolving, shaped by ongoing archaeological discoveries. The earliest evidence of any alcohol production dates back to China. As for wine, the first known production facilities were found in Armenia. Numerous findings suggest that the birthplace of alcoholic beverages—such as wine, beer and distilled spirits—lies in the Middle East. Furthermore, the word "alcohol" which is commonly used today, has its origins in the Arabic language (Philips, 2014). Throughout time, alcohol such as beer often was served as a staple drink, the reason for this was polluted water, that was a problem in past centuries. Moreover, alcohol was often

seen as a medicine, medical properties of alcohol were referenced in ancient Sumerian and Egyptian writings, it was consumed for the treatment of various sicknesses, which further contributed to its popularity in ancient societies (Short History of Alcohol: <https://histmag.org>). Today, alcohol has become an important part of the cultural experience, with more people drinking it occasionally, and exclusively for the experiences of its taste. Tourists are eager to learn the techniques of producing various alcoholic beverages, contributing to the dynamic development of spiritourism. The first place to initiate this form of tourism was the Glenfiddich distillery in 1969, and its opening to visitors became a breakthrough in popularizing the culture of alcohol production

as a tourist attraction in Europe (<https://spirits.eu>).

The exact origins of alcohol production in Mesoamerica are unknown. For centuries, it was believed that the only alcoholic beverage produced in Mexico before the arrival of Spanish colonizers was *pulque* (a drink made from fermented agave (*maguey*) nectar). At first, *pulque* was a beverage reserved for the elite and regarded as sacred. It was consumed only during rituals and ceremonies, including human sacrifices, while its consumption was strictly forbidden to the general population (Desmet and Boons, 2016). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spaniards arrived in the land of Mesoamerica. Some believe that it was the conquistadors who introduced the distillation process on these lands. However, recent research suggests also that distillation was already being used in the region even in pre-Columbian times (Goguitchaichvili et al., 2018). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the first *pulquería* (a venue for selling and consuming pulque) was established, indicating that the drink had become popular

among ordinary people (Álvarez-Ríos et al., 2022). Even though pulque was gaining popularity conquistadors started producing other distilled beverages and that's how tequila was created. Initially tequila was produced in small taverns, that were set up surrounding Santiago River Canyon (Meza et al., 2018). However, this distillate was known mostly locally, and the commercial distribution of tequila was initiated by the Jose Cuervo distillery, which is the oldest distillery still operating in Mexico. Over time, as the alcohol became more widely known, the Mexican government decided to trademark the name "tequila" (Meza et al., 2018). Since 1974, it has been produced only in five states of Mexico, and its production is subject to many restrictions ([www.liquor.com](http://www.liquor.com)). In 2006, the Tequila landscape was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, further promoting tequila on the international stage—so much that July 24 (the date of inscription) was designated as International Tequila Day.

### 3.1.1. Pulque brewing

*Pulque* is a traditional fermented alcoholic beverage made from agave. Pulque is an opaque, milkish beverage with a tangy, buttermilk-like taste and typically contains around 6 percent alcohol. The production process begins with harvesting agave plants that are between 10 and 12(20) years old. The process consists of four stages: castration, extraction of *aguamiel* (the sweet sap of the agave), seed preparation, and fermentation. Castration involves removing the plant's central leaves and floral stalk to create a cavity known as *cajete*. The walls of this cavity are then scraped and covered for 3 months to 1 year. After castration, the plant undergoes a maturation period, allowing it to preserve its carbohydrate reserves. Traditionally, this stage is carried out by a specialist known as *tlachiquero* (Solís et al., 2021). The next step involves scraping the cavity walls to stimulate the sap's flow, allowing *aguamiel* to accumulate in the cavity. It is then extracted twice daily using oral suction with a gourd (*acocote*). After each collection, the walls are scraped again (Escalante et al., 2016). The

collected sap is then transported to the place where fermentation takes place, called *tinacal* (a small room). The process of fermentation begins with the preparation of the starting material (around 10 – 50 liters of fermented agave sap). The containers used for fermentation are called *tinacales*. The entire process usually lasts 36 hours (Erlwein et al., 2013; Escalante et al., 2016; Soliset al. 2021). The prolonged crop cycle, limited demand for pulque, low profitability, and the lack of protective standards have led to a decline in the cultivation area of maguey and the erosion of traditional cultivation and usage knowledge, which, if continued, will inevitably result in the disappearance of *maguey pulquero*. The traditional knowledge of cultivating and utilizing maguey pulquero has deteriorated and become concentrated only among older individuals, as a result of this plant being replaced by those that offer short-term economic benefits (Álvarez-Duarte et al., 2018). Food tourism, then, might offer a chance to halt this trend.

### 3.1.2. Tequila manufacturing

The production of high-quality tequila is a multi-stage, time-consuming process that is essential to obtaining the unique flavor of the drink. The government regulates the tequila production process through Official Quality Norms (called NOM), which sets the standards that distilleries must meet to produce certified spirits (<https://www.mezcalistas.com/nom/>). The first Official Quality Norms were established in 1949, indicating that this alcoholic beverage could be produced from *Agave tequilana*. Since 1964, tequila can only be made from *Agave Tequilana Weber var. Azul* - blue agave (Meza and Avila, 2018). Although tequila is classified in two categories: tequila 100%, which contains sugars just from blue agave and tequila mixto which has at least 51% of sugars from agave. In 2020, the production of agave in Mexico reached almost 2 million tons and the main producer of this plant was the state of Jalisco.

The process of cultivation begins with planting young agave plants, called *hijuelos*. The optimal conditions for agave growth include a dry climate and soil with a high clay content. Agave plants are cultivated for 7 to 12 years. Older plants contain higher amounts of carbohydrates, which are later converted into simple sugars during the production process (Valenzuela-Zapata, 1985). The next step is harvesting the mature agave plants, which is done by *jimadores*, special workers responsible for preparing the agave. They remove the leaves, leaving only the heart of the plant, called the *piña*, and all of this work is done manually (Valenzuela-Zapata, 1985). During the process of cooking the carbohydrates in the agave are converted into simple sugars, this process can last 8 to even 48 hours. Producers can use two methods: traditional in ovens, called *horno* or modern in stainless steel autoclave. Even though traditional methods take more time (36 to 48 hours while autoclaves are reducing this time to 8-12 hours), some distilleries still prefer them, believing they result in sweeter and

better outcomes (Bautista et al., 2001). After cooking, the agave is subjected to a milling process, also known as extraction. The juice from the cooked *piña* is extracted by crushing the pulp and then pressed in roller mills. The resulting liquid is known as *mosto*, after this process it's immediately transferred to fermentation vats. The remaining waste, called *bagazo*, can be used profitably for example in bricks manufacture or as a furniture stuffing (Bautista et al., 2001).

Fermentation can occur in traditional wooden or modern steel tanks, and it lasts between seven to twelve days (<https://www.casamexicotequila.com/how-is-tequila-made-in-7-steps/>). At the end of this stage liquid contains 4-6% of alcohol (Valenzuela-Zapata, 1985).

The distillation process is carried out in copper alembics or steel pot stills and consists of two stages. The first stage is known as preliminary distillation or *destrozamiento*. This process separates fermentation residues from the alcohol, such as dead yeast, non-fermentable sugars, and other minerals. After first distillation the alcohol content is around 20%. The second stage of distillation is rectification, which purifies ethanol by removing other alcohols. The distillation process results in tequila known as "*blanco*" or "silver" with alcohol content around 45-50% (Bautista et al., 2001; Valenzuela-Zapata, 1985).

Next stage in tequila production is aging. The alcohol is placed in oak barrels (apart of *blanco*), where it remains for a specific period, depending on the type of tequila. At the end, the alcohol content is adjusted to approximately 38-40%. However, before the alcohol is poured into bottles, it is filtered to remove any impurities (Valenzuela-Zapata, 1985).

At this stage, it is also important to note the classification of tequila. There are five types of tequila: *Blanco* (also called silver), it remains unchanged in color because it is not

aged in barrels; *Joven* – this tequila undergoes a blending process and is a mixture of different types of tequila. *Reposado* – it is aged for a period ranging from 2 to 11 months. *Añejo* – it is aged for 12 to 35 months. *Extra Añejo* – it is aged in barrels for over 36 months (<https://www.gob.mx/profeco/articulos/tequila-la-bebida-que-conquistolundo?idiom=es>). Tequila production in the period between 1995 and 2023 reached its peak in 2022, with a production value of approximately 650 million liters, of which nearly 419 million liters was exported (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/s-export-amount-of-tequila/>). The main

importers of this beverage are the United States, which receives over 70%, with other main recipients being Japan, Germany, and Spain. Moreover, tequila is also one of the most exported agricultural products from Mexico, ranking 5<sup>th</sup> in the country's export products ([www.gob.mx/profeco/articulos/tequila-la-bebida-que-conquistolundo?idiom=es](https://www.gob.mx/profeco/articulos/tequila-la-bebida-que-conquistolundo?idiom=es)). The world's largest tequila brands by sales value is tequila Patron, followed by Don Julio as second and Jose Cuervo as third (<https://spiritedagave.com/top-10-mostpopular-tequila-brands/#Worlds-Biggest-Brands-of-Tequila-by-Sales-Value>).

### 3.1.3. Mezcal manufacturing

Mezcal can be produced from 30 different species of agave. Even though distilleries use a few types: *tobalá*, *tobaziche*, *tepeztate*, *arroqueño* and *espadín* (<https://mezcalrosaluna.com/article/mezcalregions/>). The production process for mezcal is similar to that of tequila, but it differs in several steps. For example, in the case of cooking, most mezcal distilleries use traditional methods, roasting agave hearts underground. The most common are ovens, lined with volcanic stones and heated with firewood. This is a traditional method used in mezcal distilleries; however, due to the construction of these ovens, it is impossible to collect all sweet juices produced during cooking, leading to approximately 10% loss (Arellano-Plaza et al., 2022). Between 2011 and 2023, mezcal

production reached its highest level in 2022, with a total of 14.17 million liters (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1021215/mezcal-production-mexico/>). In 2023 approximately 8 million liters was exported, which accounts for 54% of the total production (<https://www.mezcalistas.com/diving-into23-mezcal-production-numbers/>). Most of mezcal is imported by USA (71%) and Spain is ranked second (5.8%) (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1021315/mezcal-exports-country-mexico/>). The market leaders in the mezcal industry are: Pernord Ricard, Illegal Mezcal, El Silencio Holdings INC, Rey Campero, Diageo PLC (<https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/mezcal-market>).

### 3.2. Denomination of Origin products in Mexico

The denomination of origin (DO) designation is a type of geographical indication that confirms that a given product is assigned to a specific region within which it can be produced (Salinas-García et al., 2024). In 1974, Mexico introduced the first GI outside of Europe with the *Denominación de Origen Tequila* (DOT). Mexico has in general 17 denominations of origin regulated by the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property. Among these products, there are five alcoholic beverages. The most popular of them are tequila and mezcal,

but DO status got also: *bacanora*, *sotol*, and *raicilla*.

*Bacanora* is a traditional beverage of Mexico that has been produced for approximately 300 years. Its production process is similar to that used for other mezcals. What sets *Bacanora* apart is the specific type of agave required for its production, known as *pacífica* or *yaquiana* (Clark-Mendivil et al., 2021). The drink called *sotol* is an alcoholic beverage made also from agave. It is produced in northern Mexico, and

its denomination of origin includes: Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango (Fig. 1). In the three previously mentioned states, there are 250 distilleries that produce approximately 520,000 liters annually of *sotol* (Madrid-Solórzano et. al., 2021). *Raicilla* is a niche product of Mexico, probably the least popular agave-based spirit. It has low production volumes and is not widely commercialized. *Raicilla* received its Denomination of Origin in 2019, covering the states of Nayarit and Jalisco – Fig. 1 (Nava-Cárdenas et. al., 2024).

Tequila's denomination of origin includes states: Jalisco, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, Nayarit, and Guanajuato (Fig. 1). The total area covered by this status is 11 million hectares (<https://geo-mexico.com/?p=6953>). Jalisco is recognized as the birthplace of tequila, offers the best conditions for growing blue agave. In this state harvested is circa 75% of agave (<https://www.gob.mx/siap/articulos/el-tequila-ha-generado-una-industria-economicamente-muy-activa?idiom=es>). The next largest agave harvesting states are Guanajuato, Nayarit,

Michoacán and Sinaloa. In Michoacán only 30 municipalities in the entire region have the right to produce tequila (<https://diydistilling.com/can-tequila-bemade-outside-of-mexico/>). In Tamaulipas just 11 municipalities in this region have DO for tequila. Nayarit is mainly a producer of agave. Guanajuato state is situated in central Mexico and includes 7 municipalities that can produce tequila (<https://geo-mexico.com/?p=6953>).

Mezcal received its Designation of Origin in 1994, initially covering the states of Oaxaca, Durango, Guerrero, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí. The designation was later expanded to include the states of Tamaulipas (11 municipalities), Michoacán, Guanajuato and Puebla (Tejo-Pech et al., 2010; Salinas-García et. al., 2023) and finally (2021), Sinaloa (Fig. 1). The largest producer of mezcal is the state of Oaxaca, accounting for 90.5% of the spirit's production, in second place is the state Puebla, producing nearly 5% of mezcal (<https://www.mezcalistas.com/diving-into-2023-mezcal-production-numbers/>).



**Figure 1.** Map of Denomination of Origin for alcoholic beverages in Mexico, where: 1. Sonora, 2. Chihuahua, 3. Coahuila, 4. Durango, 5. Sinaloa, 6. Zacatecas, 7. Tamaulipas, 8. San Luis Potosi, 9. Nayarit, 10. Jalisco, 11. Guanajuato, 12. Michoacan, 13. Guerrero, 14. Puebla, 15. Oaxaca [own elaboration on the base of blank map from d-maps.com]

### 3.3. The Offer of Spiritourism in Mexico

Mexico is one of the most popular countries among tourists from different parts of the world. According to data from [worlddata.info](http://worlddata.info), in 2021, the country ranked second among the most visited nations by international tourists, right behind France. According to UNWTO, nearly 42 million international tourists visited Mexico in 2023 (<https://embamex.sre.gob.mx>). The most frequent visitors are citizens from the United States (nearly 25 million of tourists) followed by Canada (5.4 million of tourists) and Colombia (1.3 million of tourists). Among European countries, Mexico is most commonly visited by British tourists (1.3 million) (<https://gowithguide.com/blog/tourism-mexico-statistics-2023-all-you-need-to-know-5248>).

Spiritourism in Mexico began to develop in a more structured and organized manner in

1997 with the launch of the "Tequila Express" project, a train running from Guadalajara to the town of Tequila (Torre and Ocerin, 2013). The train still operates every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The ticket price varies depending on the selected travel class and ranges from 1.150 MXN\$ to 2.200 MXN\$<sup>1</sup> (<https://www.tequilaexpress.mx/>). The Tequila Express offers onboard tequila tastings and live mariachi music while traveling through Jalisco's picturesque blue agave fields. This project was part of a broader initiative called "*Mundo Cuervo*," a concept created to promote the town of Tequila as a tourist destination. This initiative combines the activities of Casa Cuervo and the Beckmann Foundation's efforts to achieve a shared vision for the development of the tequila region. (Toldos and Wood, 2022).

#### 3.3.1. Tequila route

Another key attraction in the region is the Tequila Route (*Ruta del Tequila*). According to the official website of the route, it is a civic association bringing together a network of tourism service providers distinguished by the TT (*Tequila Turistico*) certification (Fig. 2). The TT badge is granted by the Tequila Regulatory Council (CRT) to service providers and artisans who offer products that meet the quality standards outlined in the "Guide to Good Practices". By 2015, it had been awarded to 187 entrepreneurs and artisans ([www.cartademexico.com](http://www.cartademexico.com), 2015). The route was established in 2006 after the "Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila" was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site (<https://www.rutadeltequila.mx>).

The route consists of eight municipalities surrounding the Tequila Volcano, including El Arenal, Amatitán, Tequila, Magdalena, San Juanito de Escobedo, Ahualulco de Mercado, Etzatlán, and Teuchitlán (Vázquez de la Torre



**Figure 2.** Tequila Tourism Distinction. (Source: <https://www.rutadeltequila.mx/quienessomos>)

et al., 2014). The first four on the list are part of the UNESCO-listed area. (<https://mexicanroutes.com/tequila-route/>). Currently, there are 146 distilleries located on

<sup>1</sup> approx. 219 – 418 PLN as of 08.03.2025



the trail, capable of producing more than 50 million liters of tequila annually (<https://www.national-geographic.pl/traveler/artykul/meksykszlakie-m-tequili>). According to the Mexican Chamber of the Tequila Industry (CNIT), approximately about 900.000 tourists traversed the *Ruta del Tequila* in 2019 (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joemicallef/20>

20/01/30/mexican-road-trip-how-tourism-is-transforming-the-tequila-industry/). The route includes distilleries such as: Casa Marengo, Don Elias (Fig. 3. A, B), Tres Mujeres, la Rojeña (Fig. 3. C, D), la Cofradia, Hacienda Casa Gonzalez (Fig. 3. E, F), la Fortaleza, Casa Sauza, el Tequileño, la Rienda, el Castillo de Tequila.



**Figure 3.** Don Elias distillery: A, B; Jose Cuervo distillery: C, D; Hacienda Casa Gonzalez: E, F (Photos by: Z. Rola)

### 3.3.2. Mezcal routes

The Mezcal Route on the Potosí Highlands begins in the municipalities of Ahualulco and Pinos (Zacatecas state) and ends in Salinas (San Luis Potosí state). The route offers tourists the opportunity to visit distilleries, where they can learn about the mezcal production process, as well as explore handicraft shops and local restaurants. The

main stops along the route include Santa Teresa, Ipiña, Saldaña, La Pendencia, and the Salinas Cultural Center (Gonzalez et al., 2018).

There is also a network of ten tourist routes in the state of Oaxaca. These were established as part of a strategy to increase the region's popularity as a travel destination.

Thanks to its rich cultural and natural heritage, Oaxaca has become an attractive tourist destination, and these routes have contributed to the decentralization of tourist traffic and increased income for local communities. The first tourist route, *Caminos del Mezcal*, was dedicated to mezcal and was launched in 2015, and includes six municipalities: Santa María del Tule, San Jerónimo Tlacoahuaya, Teotitlán del Valle, Tlacolula de Matamoros,

San Pablo Villa de Mitla, and Santiago Matatlán. (Garcia Contreras et al., 2020). The development of such routes has been further reinforced by the broader restructuring of the mezcal industry, which—following the appellation of origin recognition—has aimed not only at protecting product identity but also at enhancing its appeal to both domestic and international tourists (Trejo-Pech et al., 2010).

### 3.3.3. Spirits Museums

Another type of attractions related to spiritourism includes museums dedicated to the history of tequila and mezcal, showcasing both their production processes and traditional consumption methods. One such museum is located in the town of Tequila (Fig. 4). The museum is relatively small, and a visit typically takes around 30 to 40 minutes. The exhibition covers the history of the region and its local spirits, the stages of tequila production, and traditional machines used in its manufacture. A collection of tequila and mezcal bottles is also on display. The museum has a cozy atmosphere but does not attract large crowds, likely due to the fact that most

informational boards are available only in Spanish.

Another site is the Tequila and Mezcal Museum in Mexico City. Its exhibits focus on the tequila production process, its history, and the culture associated with *mariachi* music. Visitors can also learn about different tequila and mezcal brands. The entrance ticket includes both access to the museum's exhibitions and a tasting of tequila and mezcal, making it a key location for alcohol tourism in Mexico. An advantage is that informational boards are available both in Spanish and English.



Figure 4. Tequila museum in Tequila (Photos by: Z. Rola)

Mexico can also offer various ways of celebrating those beverages. *Feria del Tequila* is a festival dedicated to this spirit. It takes place in November in the city of Tequila. The event attracts crowds of tourists, offering

parades, concerts, tastings, and workshops on tequila production. Attractions include mariachi performances, craft fairs, and tastings of local cuisine (<https://tequila-mexico.com.mx/>).

#### 4. Results of survey

The majority of survey respondents were women (83%). The largest group was individuals aged 26 - 35 (38%), followed by those aged 18 – 25 (37%). The survey

participants were mainly individuals with university-level education (71,8%) followed by ones with secondary education level (Tab. 1).

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (n=209)

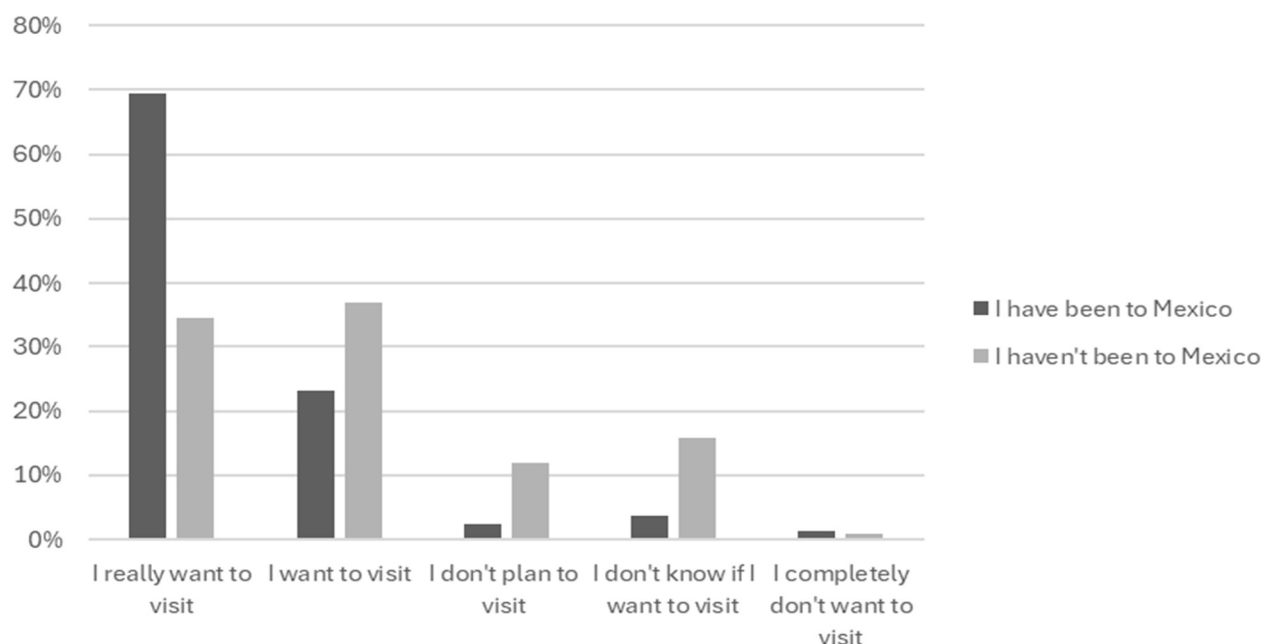
		Value	%
<b>Sex</b>	Woman	174	83.25
	Man	34	16.27
	Non-binary	1	0.48
<b>Age</b>	18-25	78	37
	26-35	80	38
	36-45	32	15
	46-55	14	7
	56-65	5	2
	Over 65	0	0
<b>Education</b>	Elementary	1	0.5
	Secondary	58	27.8
	University-level	150	71.8

The largest group of respondents who had been to Mexico stated that they "really want to visit" the country again (70%). Among those who had never been to Mexico, the desire to visit was prevalent, with approximately 37% selecting the option "I want to visit" and around 35% choosing "I really want to visit." Significantly fewer respondents showed no interest in Mexico, as the options "I do not plan to visit" and "I absolutely do not want to visit" were chosen only occasionally by both groups. (fig. 5).

The survey also included a question about associations with Mexico. The responses indicate that the perception of the country is multidimensional and based on diverse associations. Mexico is most commonly linked to its rich cuisine, with answers such as tacos, tequila, guacamole, and nachos appearing frequently, highlighting the global influence of

Mexican food. Three quarters (74%) of all respondents indicated associations related to cuisine. Among those who had previously been to Mexico, this percentage was 82%, while among those who had never visited Mexico, it was 67%. This shows that even individuals who have never visited Mexico are familiar with its cuisine. These respondents most frequently identified tacos, guacamole, and tequila as representative elements. Mexican cuisine is among the most popular in the world — according to the Taste Atlas ranking, is ranked third among the best cuisines globally (<https://www.tasteatlas.com/best/cuisines>). Its growing popularity has led to an increasing number of Mexican restaurants opening in Poland. As a result, even people who have never visited the country have the opportunity to experience the flavors of Mexico and



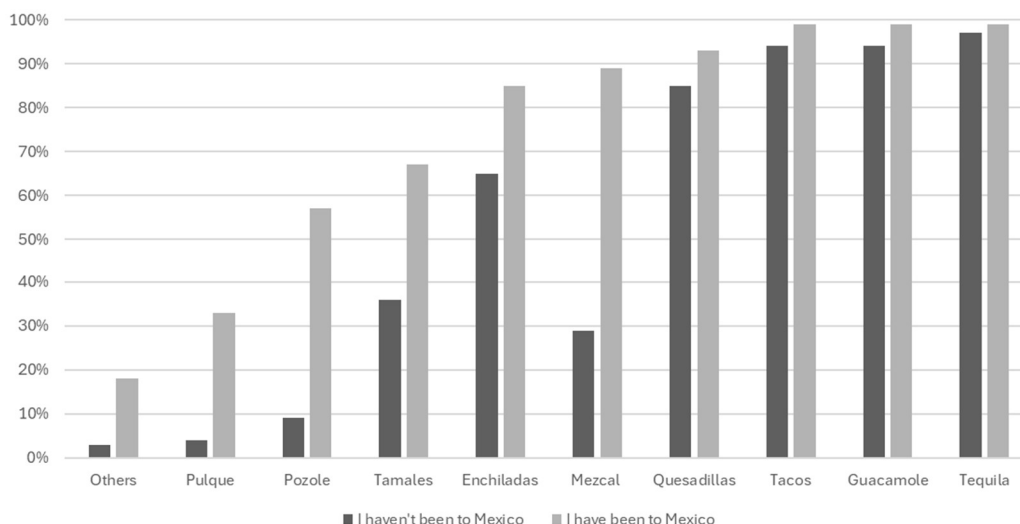


**Figure 5.** Percentage of People Planning to Visit Mexico in the Future (left – people who have been to Mexico before n=82, right people who haven't been to Mexico n= 127) (based on Author's own study)

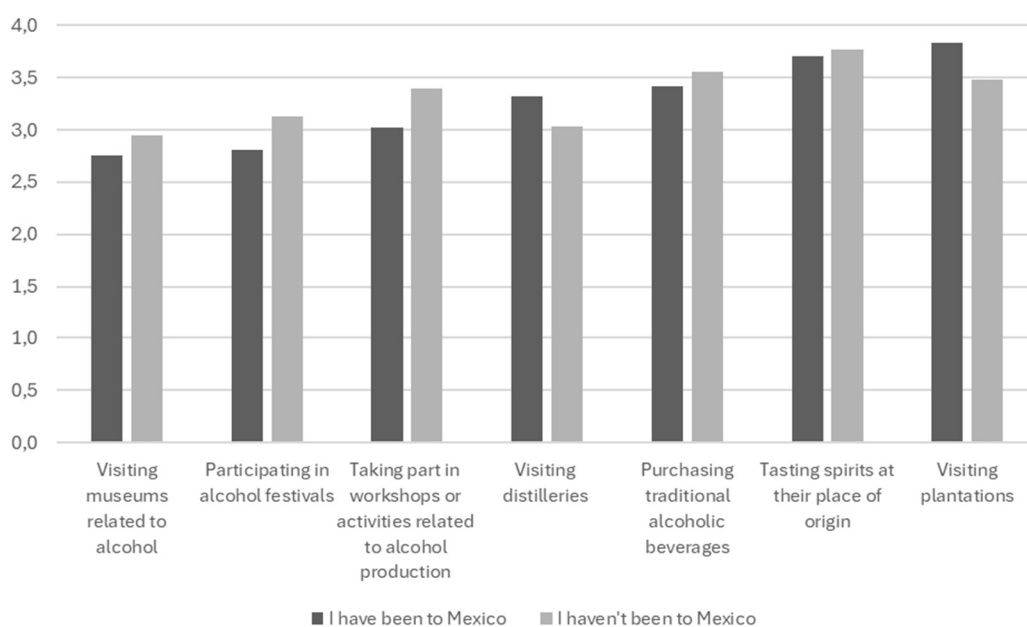
The survey conducted by website Expedia.mx among 1,000 travelers about their reasons for visiting Mexico, revealed that 84% of respondents considered its cuisine an important factor when planning a trip (<https://www.expedia.mx/>). The second prominent category of associations was culture and national symbols. Many respondents mentioned sombreros, mariachi and *Día de los Muertos*, which have become international icons of Mexico. Occasionally, responses related to crime and drug cartels appeared. While asked about their knowledge of Mexican cuisine dishes (Fig. 6) respondents recognized mostly tacos, tequila and guacamole with nearly 100% of recognition in both groups. Least known among both groups was *pulque*, however substantially more people who have been to Mexico indicated that they are familiar with this drink. A small percentage of respondents indicated knowledge of other Mexican dishes or drinks, mostly people who have been to Mexico could indicate additional dishes. Familiarity with Mexican cuisine and beverages increases after visiting Mexico, particularly for less-known traditional foods like *tamales*, *pozole*, and

mezcal. However, globally popular items like tacos, guacamole, and tequila are widely recognized regardless of travel experience.

Among alcohol related attractions (Fig. 7), the greatest interest among those who have visited Mexico is in tasting spirits at their place of production, as well as visiting plantations. The least attractive among those people is participating in alcohol festivals and visiting museums related to alcohol. Travelers without prior experience in Mexico indicate that the most attractive among them is tasting spirits at their place of origin and purchasing traditional alcoholic beverages. This group of people show less interest in visiting distilleries and visiting museums related to spirits. Tourists who are visiting agave landscape and tequila distilleries could be divided in two groups: those who are involved in tequila topic and those who are not. Individuals highly engaged in tequila develop a stronger connection with the beverage and place great importance on the tasting experience. In contrast, those with lower engagement tend to focus more on the external aspects of the agave and tequila landscape (Coelho and Castillo Girón, 2023).



**Figure 6.** Familiarity with traditional dishes and alcohol beverages of Mexico (left – people who haven't been to Mexico n=127, right - people who have been to Mexico n=82, respondents were able to choose more than just one answer) (based on Author's own study)

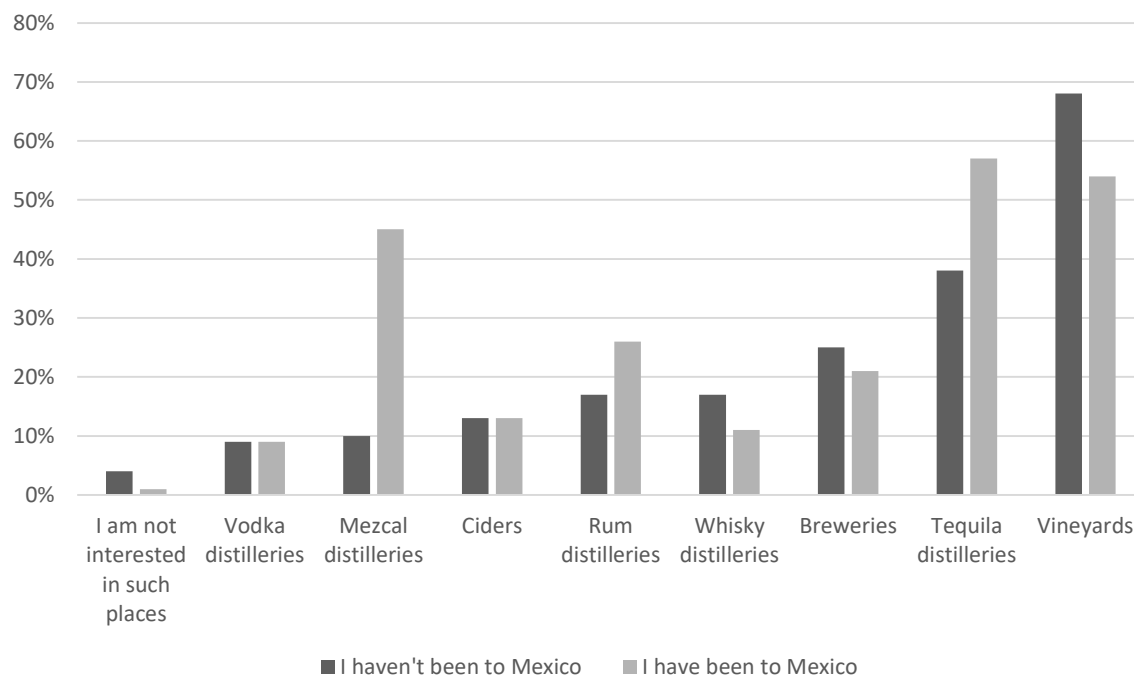


**Figure 7.** The average popularity of specific alcohol-related tourist attractions among respondents (left – people who have been to Mexico n=82, right – people who haven't been to Mexico n=127) (based on Author's own study)

The most popular alcohol-producing locations among tourists are vineyards, which attract over 60% of respondents. This indicates that wine production is perceived as exceptionally appealing and is also one of the most accessible, given that wine is produced in many countries around the world. Tequila distilleries rank second, with approximately 50% interest (Fig. 8). This result highlights the global fascination with tequila, particularly in the context of its origins in Mexico. Nowadays even Poland is becoming increasingly interested in agave-based beverages. Evidence of this was the Tequila and Mezcal Festival

held in Gdańsk, with its first edition taking place in May 2025. The event combines education on the production process of these spirits with the opportunity to taste them (<https://tequilamezcalfestival.pl>).

Notably, only a small fraction of respondents declared no interest in such attractions, emphasizing that alcohol tourism has a broad potential audience. The results highlight the particular popularity of venues offering a connection to tradition and unique character, such as vineyards and tequila distilleries.



**Figure 8.** Preferred Destinations for Alcohol-Related Tourism (left – people who haven't been to Mexico n=127, right – people who have been to Mexico n=82) (based on Author's own study)

The survey also included a question regarding the regions famous for mezcal and tequila production. These were open-ended questions, and respondents were not required to answer them. For the question about the region known for mezcal production, 33 respondents provided correct answers, accounting for 16% of all participants. The majority of correct responses came from individuals who had visited Mexico. The state of Oaxaca was most frequently mentioned, though regions such as Durango and Guerrero

were also acceptable answers. Regarding the question about the most famous tequila-producing region, 36 respondents provided correct answers, representing 17% of all participants. The correct response was Jalisco, but the city of Tequila and other regions with a designation of origin for tequila were also accepted. These results indicate that knowledge about the production regions of these spirits is more prevalent among those who have had direct exposure to Mexican culture.

## 5. Conclusions

Mexico's rich cultural heritage, combined with its unique tequila and mezcal traditions, makes spiritourism a powerful magnet for broader cultural tourism. By attracting visitors through agave-based experiences, Mexico can boost overall tourism revenue while encouraging exploration of its history, cuisine, and local traditions.

Analysis of the survey results indicates that Polish tourists show varying levels of interest in Mexican cuisine:

- the greatest interest in Mexico is shown by individuals who have already visited the country before;

- Mexican cuisine is well known even among people who have never visited the country (2/3 of respondents indicates some associations with Mexican cuisine);
- the most well-known elements of Mexican cuisine are tacos, guacamole, and tequila;
- Visiting plantations and tasting spirits at their place of origin generate the greatest interest;
- Vineyards are the most frequently chosen destinations for beverage-related

tourism (60% of respondents), followed by tequila distilleries (45% of respondents);

- Only a small percentage of respondents declared that they are not interested in visiting spirits-related sites (3%);
- The regions producing tequila and mezcal are relatively little known, with only about 16% of respondents identifying them correctly.

A trip to Mexico has a direct impact on the knowledge of Mexican cuisine. While many dishes are recognized worldwide due to globalization, those who have visited Mexico are also able to name less known dishes and traditional beverages such as *pulque*. Additionally, tourists who have been to Mexico show a greater interest in tequila and mezcal distilleries.

A study conducted among Polish respondents indicates a high level of interest in visiting alcohol-related attractions, such as tours of agave plantations, visits to tequila and mezcal distilleries, and on-site tastings. Unfortunately, not all distilleries are open to visitors, and only some offer guided tours. Nevertheless, Mexico recognizes the needs of tourists and strives to engage them by creating

tequila and mezcal routes, which allow visitors to plan their trips across the country according to their interests. However, a major issue in the country is the lack of promotion of these routes, resulting in many visitors to Mexico being unaware of their existence. This could be the reason for the low percentage of tourists visiting the tequila trail in Mexico.

Another challenge for the development of alcohol tourism in the Jalisco region is the insufficient availability of information in foreign languages. Many attractions and offers are primarily targeted at Spanish-speaking visitors, which may pose a barrier for international tourists. Better adaptation of the offer to international guests could contribute to greater interest in spiritourism in this region. It also limits the potential of Mexico's rich cultural tourism - where tequila and mezcal traditions serve as living expressions of Mexican identity and heritage. Given that spiritourism is inherently linked to cultural experiences, from agave fields to historic haciendas, improving multilingual access could unlock the full socioeconomic potential of these authentic cultural attractions.

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