

AARÓN DÍAZ

TAKES US THROUGH THE STREETS OF SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, THE MAGICAL MEXICAN VILLAGE WHERE THE ACTOR GREW UP AND WHERE, EVEN TODAY, HE FEELS AT HOME

For Aarón Díaz, the talented Mexican actor who plays the photojournalist León Vélez in the second season of the series *Quántico* (ABC), San Miguel de Allende is synonymous with family, friends, good food and hospitality. Although he was born in Puerto Vallarta, from his first year of life until adolescence, he lived in this magical town that has received numerous awards for its colonial architecture, religious sanctuaries, cultural and dynamic energy, and has welcomed foreigners, which now make up 8% of the population. "I go whenever I have a chance. Growing up in and being part of the town has been amazing. I always feel at home in San Miguel," he told us. "In places like San Miguel you meet people from all over the world. I'm an actor by coincidence and destiny."

It was in San Miguel where 34 years ago his parents, Beto Díaz and Robin Spencer opened a restaurant, **El Pegaso**, that today is an institution. And that was where Aarón had his first job. "It's one of the oldest restaurants if not the oldest. I know a lot of people who have been going there for breakfast, lunch and dinner for years. The people and the energy of the place are one-of-a-kind." His parent' hospitality is contagious and Aarón remembers his early years working for the familiar business with fondness. "They taught me to work at a young age. At El

Pegaso I learned to deal with every type of person and that is really important for a young person's development. I've met some of the most interesting people through my parents because they're customers." The opportunity to meet new people keeps him involved in the restaurant business. His new project in San Miguel is a **Cevichería, La muy, muy**, where he also serves Raicilla, a liquor from the agave plant that comes directly from the Jalisco highlands. Aarón's childhood memories are full of the smell of freshly baked bread and vanilla and chocolate pastries from **La Colmena** and other bakeries in the center of town. The aromas from his mother's cooking, who is



American, but "cooks better than many Mexicans" and dishes like Chiles en Nogada, are among his favorites.

The beauty of this Mexican town

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can be easily appreciated by taking a stroll through its streets. "The center of San Miguel is a place where you can meet people from all over the world because they're doing the same thing." When he visits the town with his wife, Lola Ponce, who is also an actor, along with their two daughters, he loves wandering its cobblestone streets getting lost, and taking them to the plaza. "My daughters love it. Part of the magic of San Miguel is walking through its streets. The whole center of town is really nice, the souvenir shops, the restaurants. **Parque Juárez** is lovely and full of birds. We feel very safe," he adds. Other places he recommends visiting are the **The Toy Museum**, a good place to buy handmade toys and learn about the history and craftwork market, "where tourists can find a lot of the typical handicrafts from this city." San Miguel de Allende, located in Guanajuato state, was included in Condé Nast Traveler magazine's 2013 list of the 25 best cities in the world for its culture, architectural beauty and attractions.

If you're looking for a romantic evening, Aarón recommends one of the many terraces in the center where you can appreciate the contrast between the architecture and the city lights.

"Growing up in a place full of painters, sculptors, writers and jewelry makers was really great. Being surrounded by artists taught me a lot. My grandmother, my mom's mother, was an actress. I always knew I was very artistic, but I never thought 'I want to be an actor.' It's not the same growing up on the border as it is to grow up in a magical town like San Miguel, where you absorb everything," he says. When he was a 'chavito', he took classes at the **Centro Cultural Ignacio Ramírez 'El Nigromante'**, better known as Bellas Artes, a school that teaches arts and crafts in a beautiful old convent where you can find murals by Siqueiros, Eleanor Cohen and Pedro Martínez.

San Miguel offers a rich cultural agenda as well as the opportunity to enjoy various ecological activities in the city's outskirts. **The Jardín Botánico**, in the **Charco del Ingenio**, is a fascinating place. It has the largest collection of succulents in the country, around 750 species. The garden is 15 minutes by car or 45 minutes by foot from the center of the city. "San Miguel has all the different climates. The best time to visit depends on what you like best. I like fall best. It's not too hot or too cold. I also like the **Festival de Jazz** and the **Día de los Muertos**," he adds. **Guanajuato's Film Festival** is another opportunity to get to know the state better. Guanajuato is a mining city where cars travel through inter-connecting tunnels, the city center's streets are pedestrian and its architecture is eclectic and unique.

The singer and actor acknowledges that he isn't an expert on San Miguel because it is a place that is constantly changing, and part of its charm is it that has a variety of businesses and visitors. "I went to elementary and middle school at José Vasconcelos, right next to La Aurora. It used to be a textile factory, and now

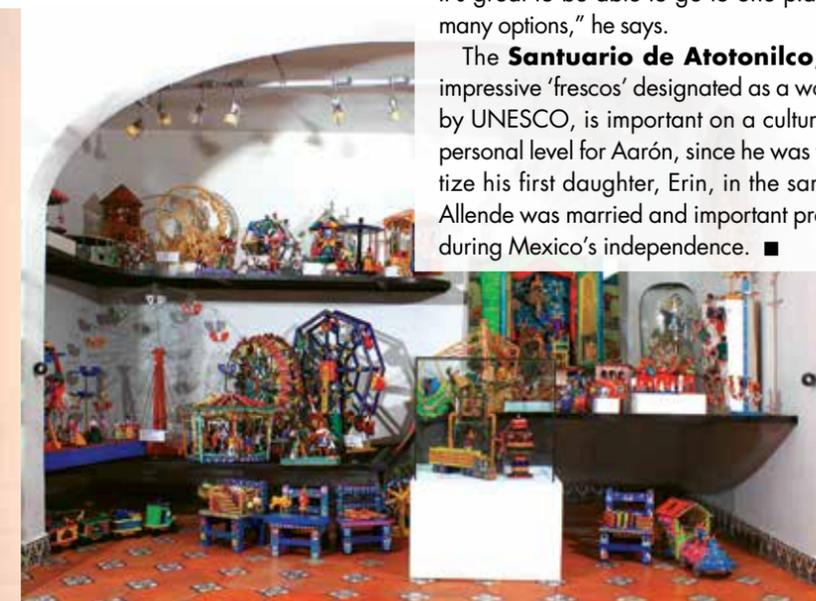
Aarón Diaz's new project in San Miguel is Cevichería La muy, muy, where he also serves Raicilla, a liquor from the agave plant that comes directly from the Jalisco highlands.



If a night of romance is what you want, Aaron recommends one of the many terraces in the center where you can see the contrast between architecture and lighting.

it's an amazing place, full of art and galleries. Once a month they host events and introduce new artists. They turned it into a really interesting and cool place," he says. Another example of this transformation is the **Hotel Matilda**, "a really pretty place. It's a boutique hotel close to Parque Juárez", that has preserved the colonial facade on the outside and has a minimalist, ultra contemporary look on the inside, where you'll find **Moxi**, the restaurant of the famous chef Enrique Olvera. Also of interest is **Plaza 12-18**, a concept by **L'hotel group**, that remodeled an old hardware store known as Casa Cohen to create a space that brings together under one roof art, cuisine, design and hospitality with an emphasis on high-quality Mexican products, a **Casa Dragones** tequila tasting room and **Jacinto 1930**, a restaurant that serves traditional Mexican food by the Italo-Mexican chef Matteo Salas. "I went to 12-18 and I loved it. It's very beautiful, full of high-end luxury stores. It's great to be able to go to one place and have so many options," he says.

The **Santuario de Atotonilco**, a church with impressive 'frescos' designated as a world heritage site by UNESCO, is important on a cultural but also on a personal level for Aarón, since he was fortunate to baptize his first daughter, Erin, in the same place where Allende was married and important protests took place during Mexico's independence. ■ —ANGELA LANG



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San Miguel de Allende was where Aarón's parents opened a restaurant, El Pegaso, 34 years ago. Today it is an institution. El Pegaso was also where Aaron had his first job.



ISTOCK. PHOTOS. EL PEGASO, MUSEO DEL JUGUETE Y LA CEVICHERIA BY COURTESY.