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Q&A; With the Secretary of Tourism of the State of Sinaloa

written by [Lorri Robbins](#) | Posted on March 14th, 2012



During Cruise Shipping Miami, taking place at the Miami Beach Convention Center March 12-15, Lorri Robbins, publisher for Recommend magazine, sat down with Lic. Oralia Rice Rodriguez, Secretary of Tourism of the State of Sinaloa, to talk about the state of tourism in [Mexico](#) and specifically in the state of Sinaloa and [Mazatlan](#).

Lorri Robbins: In your opinion do you think the tourism board has been proactive about addressing the safety concerns in [Mexico](#) right now?

Lic. Oralia Rice Rodriguez, Secretary of Tourism of the State of Sinaloa: Very much so. Gloria Guevara, Mexico's Secretary of Tourism, has done a lot of road shows in the U.S and Canada. We have joined her. The governor of Sinaloa, Mario Lopez Valdez, and myself, have been part of this effort because we believe we need to give a different perspective on what has been going on in Mexico. So even though we have invested, for example, in a three or four million dollar campaign in the U.S. and Canada in which we present this new face of [Mazatlan](#), I think we have also invested time in doing interviews and these kinds of things. Ogilvy Public Relations [the Mexican State of Sinaloa's global media relations, public affairs and stakeholder communications agency of record, as well as the global public relations agency of record for the Mexico Tourism Board] has done a great job. That's why we hired them as well, to help us reposition Sinaloa and Mazatlan, because 8,000 ex-pats living in Mazatlan cannot be wrong or 32.4 million international tourists in Mexico cannot be wrong.

LR: To that point, if you go online and look up Mazatlan, for example, you get information from those ex-pats that says it's safe, there haven't been incidents. You get information from tourists, whether they're American or otherwise, that say it's safe, but there doesn't seem to be a clear message from the government itself.

ORR: Exactly, that's why we are here. That's what we're trying to do. We didn't have Ogilvy last year; we have them now. That's the reason we hired them, because we want to change that perception.

LR: What additional security precautions, if any, were put in place after the incident in [Puerto Vallarta](#) last month?

ORR: Well, I can't talk about [Puerto Vallarta](#), but I can talk about Mazatlan. Last year, we promised we were going to do something very special and that was implementing a security plan for tourists. Let me explain that a bit. During high season, whether it's a cruise line docking, or Holy Week, Christmas, New Year's Eve, or Carnival. Incidentally, Mardi Gras in Mazatlan is the third most important Carnival in the world, after Rio and New Orleans, Forbes said that, not us. And we had 250,000 visitors during Carnival and everybody was happy and nothing happened because we are securing the tourist areas. But that's not just

more police, there are cameras, a lot of things we didn't have before. In crisis, you see opportunity.

LR: You mentioned you attended the State of the Industry. Are you working with actual cruise lines in developing security programs and are they messaging to their passengers that it's safe to get off the ships?

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ORR: We've developed a security plan with the cruise industry. The Secretary of Security of the State of Sinaloa met with the security personnel from the cruise lines, who asked him about these kinds of protocols. Fortunately, we have not had any incidents this year. Nothing has happened to a passenger, to a tourist—they're not targeted.

LR: In your view, how should travel agents deal with their clients in terms of allaying their security fears—in two parts, one via a cruise port and one via a land-based destination? What should travel agents tell them? You've got this force of people that is the distribution network that could essentially make the difference between clients going to [Mazatlan](#) or clients going to the Caribbean or any place with a beach and a colonial city, or anywhere that requires a passport.

ORR: What I would say to the travel agent is to just ask your clients about their experiences in our destination.

LR: What if they haven't been there yet?

ORR: Come, we invite you. We have the Sea of Cortez, it's a beauty and so wonderful. We have the experience of taking the train to Copper Canyon. It's a wonderful experience. We have the ancient world, the modern world, the colonial part. We have wonderful, wonderful places, the *Magic Towns*. We have this new convention center—very big, very nice. We have archaeology—this is very important, Las Labradas Petroglyphs, to be named by UNESCO as a Historical Archaeological Heritage, because there are more than 300 petroglyphs drawn in ancient times.

LR: And you can see all of this?

ORR: Yes. This is a 20-minute drive from [Mazatlan](#). And there's the Copper Canyon experience, about a 4-hour drive time from Mazatlan and you see the Indians. We have the

gastronomy. And there's the "new Cancun" in the southern tip of the state that FONATUR is building, about an hour-and-a-half drive from Mazatlan. It's going to be 44,000 rooms— Cancun was initially planned to have 22,000 rooms, now with the Riviera Maya, they have a total of 64,000 rooms. We are going to open a new road from Durango to Mazatlan. Right now it's a 5-hour drive from Mazatlan to Durango, and with the new road it's going to be 2.5 hours. It's going to be a road that goes across the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico, a 12-hour drive.

LR: So going back to this "new Cancun," the plan is ambitious?

ORR: Twice the size of the initial plan for Cancun. The difference is that in this case you can arrive by land also, not only by air. These experiences talk about how rich this area is. They know us as a beach destination only, but we have gastronomy, and we can show that side of the equation.

LR: I have one last question that's going to put you on the spot. For travel agents to tell their clients, if a client was in Mazatlan for only one day, but had the ability to get wherever they needed to get to, what is the one thing they should not miss?

ORR: Las Labradas Petroglyphs. Or, if they want to stay in town, go to downtown and stroll the seawalk, or *malecon*; it's 7.5 kilometers (about four miles) with no buildings, so you see the ocean.

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