

Mazatlán Focuses Efforts on Neighbors to the North

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Mazatlán shifted into high promotional gear at Tianguis Turístico, launching an \$11 million marketing campaign targeting visitors from the U.S. and Canada.

In addition to a colorful booth inside the convention center, complete with posters, brochures and costumed dancers, tourism officials brought two of the destination's new Fun Buses to the conference.

The double-decker, open-top vehicles that seat from 52 to 78 passengers each transported the Mazatlan delegation and some delegates, complete with bands and music, to and from the convention center. During the day, the buses parked at the conference site to allow curiosity-seekers to take a peek inside.

The brightly painted tour buses debuted in December in Mazatlan's hotel zone, picking up individual riders on morning and afternoon runs through the historical center and shopping areas. The buses, which also can be chartered by convention and meetings groups, are an alternative to Mazatlan's distinctive, open-sided taxis known as pulmonías.

The marketing campaign for the destination, whose descriptive taglines include "A Colonial City on a Beach" and "Pearl of the Pacific," will continue its series of guest testimonials, begun last year, in which tourists and residents tout Mazatlan in TV ads and online promotions.

Carlos Berdegué, vice president of the Mazatlan Hotel Association, said that the 9,000-plus Americans and Canadians who make Mazatlan their permanent home or their vacation getaway each year "are our best spokesmen for the destination."



Dialogue continues with Holland America Line and Princess Cruises, which pulled out of Mazatlan more than a year ago, citing security concerns.

The February 2012 travel warning from the U.S. State Department cautioned Mazatlan visitors to stay within the Zona Dorada (tourist zone) and the historical town center.

"Our officials met with cruise line representatives recently in Florida, and we continue to incorporate new measures for port security, including the addition of tourist police at the pier and in the port and tourist areas to advise visitors and answer questions," Berdegué said.

Guestroom nights increased 7% over the last five years, and visitor numbers are forecasted to increase 8% in 2012, according to Berdegué. Mazatlan welcomed more than 1.5 million visitors in 2011, with Canadian visitors taking the lead, although the U.S. leisure market increased slightly over 2010.

"Length of visitor stay grew 4% last year, group and incentive business grew 25% in 2011 over 2010 and investment commitments include new projects planned for Playa Espiritu, the planned development south of Mazatlan," said Berdegué.

In fact, investment in tourist-related infrastructure projects this year totals \$23 million, up from \$4 million in 2011

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