

## MEXICO

## Spicing Up Tourism

## A country

famed for its culture, history, food and hospitable people, Mexico boasts one of the world's most important tourism industries. With paradise beaches on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, deserts and rainforests, snow-capped volcanoes, superb cuisine, fascinating history and folklore and archaeological sites, the "New World" country is a vibrant blend of modernity and colonial heritage waiting to be explored.

Mexico's tourism industry is the third most important contributor to the country's economy and is one of the world's largest sectors. In fact, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, in terms of international tourist arrivals, Mexico occupies 10th position worldwide. As the premier destination for international tourists within Latin America, Mexico is widely enjoyed by North American, European, Latin American and a growing number of Asian visitors.

What sets Mexico apart from other countries in the region is the excellent infrastructure and range of high-quality accommodations it possesses. In Mexico, communications and transport have been improved and upgraded, the busiest airports have been remodeled, credits for new hotel and catering service provision infrastructure have been granted, casinos have been opened, health services have been improved and security has been increased in holiday areas.

**"I spent 16 years living in the U.S., most of them working for private companies, so I know what works and what doesn't."** Gloria Guevara Manzo, Minister of Tourism

As Gloria Guevara Manzo, the country's newly appointed Minister of Tourism, says: "We have been rethinking, redefining and reorganizing our economic policies for recovery—after the big losses that took place in 2009 because of the global economic crisis and the H1N1 influenza virus problem—and promoted international campaigns to improve Mexico's image in terms of health and safety.

"We have been trying to show that Mexico's security problems are simply the result of a poor and improper projection, transmission and circulation of the country's image through the local and foreign media, also due to the bad reputation of a few unsafe regions. Among our complaints towards the rest of the world has been the fact that insecurity and violence



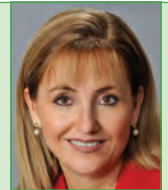
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are not factors typical of Mexico, but rather that they occur simultaneously in other parts of the world, and that the crime rates of some Mexican cities do not reflect the country's general situation. We are therefore trying to restore the international tourists and investors' confidence in our country, cleaning up beaches using international specifications and investing in eco-tourism and indigenous communities for sustainable development."

According to Guevara, Mexico's tourism sector offers the best opportunity to bring the country up to the next level of development by fueling economic growth across the whole economy. As well as its cultural and natural riches, Mexico has a strategic geographic location that allows international visitors to visit its beauty spots easily.

"Given our country's great variety, we are now promoting different products and services to different tourists: from weddings to adventures, to classic relax in our 'sun-&-beach' destinations," Guevara says. "I come from the private sector and I know the tourism industry inside out, so I will be able to understand and translate the needs of visitors into actionable policies that will satisfy their demands and, thus, contribute to the sector's and, in turn, country's economic growth."

Having spent 16 years living in the U.S., most of them working for U.S. companies, Guevara has learned "what works and what does not work" and has built up enviable experience



Gloria Guevara Manzo  
Minister of Tourism

and know-how that will now result in bringing in international tourists, above all from Mexico's main market—the U.S.—and also from Europe, Latin America and Asia.

"My main advantage and contribution will be that of being able to see our tourism sector through the eyes of a foreign tourist, while at the same time having the power to act towards resolving our country's tourism problems and the industry's sustainable development and long-term growth."

### Visitor numbers climbing

With the mass markets covered, the focus is now on higher-end tourists and those who will respect both the environment and cultural traditions.

"We are establishing Tourist Ambassadors all over the world to promote the country," Guevara says, "and since May 2010, most foreigners have not needed a visa to come here. Those that do can get them from travel agencies within 48 hours."

Visitor numbers are, definitely, on the increase, especially those arriving by air. "We had an overall increase of 19.6% in the January-August period of 2010, with respect to 2009, and 6.3% growth if compared to 2008," Minister Guevara says.

"With respect to the same time frame in 2009, I can tell you that all our primary markets have shown increases in terms of tourists arriving by air: the U.S. +16%, Canada +21.2%, the U.K. +15%, Spain +49.4%, Germany +17.7%, Italy +21.5%, Brazil +40%—in this case, with no promotion whatsoever!—and so on. All this comes from the commitment of government, which has made the tourism sector's development and growth a national priority."

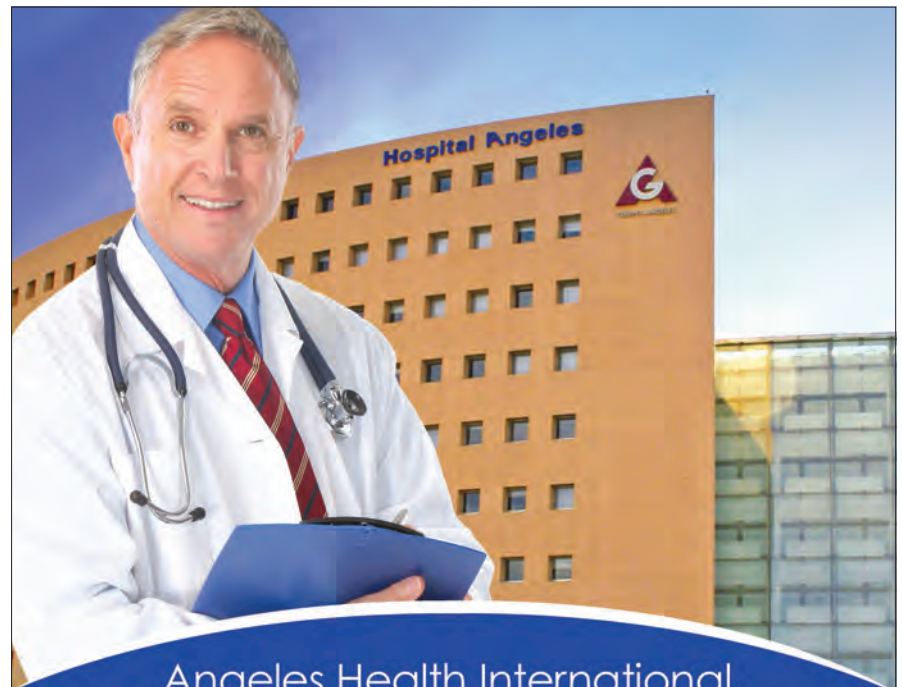
The Minister of Tourism is determined to keep Mexico among the world's top tourist destinations. "Even though we are currently the 10th country in terms of numbers of international visitors, we want to be in the top five over the next eight years," she says. "We will be able to accomplish this challenging goal by working with the private sector and the states and municipal authorities."

Ecotourism is among the potential growth areas currently being pursued by the Mexican government, and Michoacán is one state that is profiting from its unique biodiversity to attract more visitors. With thermal and cold-water spas, lakes, forests, the beautiful Parícutín volcano and the Costa Sierra,

which sees sea turtles arrive every year, the region provides a fascinating draw for any visitor.

### The soul of Mexico

Known as the "Soul of Mexico", Michoacán is home to the celebrated Monarch Butterfly Reserve; a 56,259 hectare



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biosphere where every autumn, millions of butterflies from the U.S. gather in small areas of the forest, coloring its trees orange. The reserve was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 2008.

The state is developing at a rapid pace. As Genovevo Figueroa Zamudio, Michoacán's Secretary of Tourism, says: "We already have very modern transport connections, especially our roads. The government is currently planning a link road to the west coast of Mexico. Also, the National Trust Fund for Tourism Development—FONATUR—has devised a strategic plan for the coast of Michoacán.

"We are already developing 'small stops' where we can give hospitality, food and good service to our visitors. The Port of Lázaro Cárdenas also plays a key role within our infrastructure system, as it is very important for all the executives that visit. In addition, thanks to its great historical university, Michoacán is sending qualified human resources to Lázaro Cárdenas and thus contributing to the latter's overall economic and social development."

### Boutique hotels make the grade

For a world-class hotel experience, the Plaza Suites in Mexico City provides a perfect place from which to explore the buzzing metropolis or the cultural sites that lie within easy reach of the capital. Designed to give its guests all the comfort and amenities the sophisticated traveler expects, Plaza Suites is a boutique hotel that emanates a "home away from home"

atmosphere. As Jaime Levy, director general of Plaza Suites explains: "Mexico's hospitality industry is very dynamic and has been changing over time. We have all the big hotel chains, of course, but since 2000, there has been a huge shift towards boutique hotels, so now the city offers the best of both worlds.

"What sets us apart is that we are based in an award-winning building on the most important avenue in Mexico. We have top security, one of the biggest covered swimming pools in the country, a spa, an amazing gym, an impressive business center, a private movie theater room, two terraces and ample parking. All amenities are included in the suite rate."

### A healthy getaway

Medical tourism is also on the rise, with sophisticated hospitals and clinics offering excellent treatments and the chance to recover in beautiful surroundings. Strong medical infrastructure, state-of-the-art technologies, well-educated doctors, a mature democracy, close proximity to the U.S. and a strong economy all combine to position the country at the top of the Global Medical Tourism Industry.

Grupo Ángeles Servicios de Salud (GASS) is a 100% Mexican health services group that has been supporting private medical care in the country since 1986. The biggest chain of private hospitals in Mexico and Latin America, GASS has more than 2,200 beds, 11,000 registered medical staff, 12,000 employees and 23 hospitals, 11 of them in Mexico City.

As Dr. Roberto Simón Sauma, GASS director general, explains: "Essentially, we are doing one project per year and are also looking into the possibility of expanding internationally, most likely in North and South America."

With the U.S. as a prime market, the Group created a specific unit there three years ago —Ángeles Health International—, which was aimed at attracting patients and taking care of all their health-travel needs.

Acting as an innovative medical-travel division, GASS offers its patients fluent English-speaking concierge services, and handles everything from medical consultations, appointments and record transfers, to travel arrangements for patients and their families in a comprehensive and affordable medical-travel package.

"An unparalleled 6,000 American and Canadian medical travelers have been treated here in the past three years, in the areas of bariatric, orthopedic and spinal surgery, interventional cardiology, cataract surgery, major dental care and kidney transplants," says Dr. Simón Sauma.

"Our geographic location, as a neighbor of the strongest world power, is our greatest advantage. No one can compete with this natural factor." GASS is also a major advocate for general health care improvements in the country, and contributes around 6% of the number of beds registered.

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Genovevo Figueroa Zamudio  
Secretary of Tourism  
Michoacán State

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