

# TRAVEL WEEKLY

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DESTINATIONS

'Today's trend is the mix of culture and history.' — Javier Paez, Mazatlan Hotel Association

## Mazatlan shifts its focus from climate to culture

By Mark Chesnut

**W**ith new hotels developing at a faster clip, an increase in visitors and plans to increase airlift, tourism officials in Mazatlan are predicting even more growth for the Pacific coast resort city.

Visits have risen steadily in recent years, reaching more than 1.7 million in 2007, compared with around 1.2 million in 2004, according to government statistics. Average hotel occupancy during the same period rose to 67%, up from 41%.

To keep up with the increased number of visitors, some 600 hotel rooms are being added to the city's inventory this year, bringing the total room count to more than 10,000.

Among the newest properties is the 89-room D'Gala Mazatlan Hotel, which opened in March in the Zona Dorada. This fall, Villas at Estrella del Mar Golf and Beach Resort will open 56 new guestrooms.

In the coming months, even larger ho-

tel properties are to debut. First up is the 240-room Crowne Plaza Marina Mazatlan, to open in December, south of Playa Cerritos in Nuevo Mazatlan.

tel properties, which describes its decor as "hip and minimalist," offers access to an 18-hole golf course, a 1,000-slip marina, multiple restaurants and a spa.

Slated to open in May is the all-inclusive, 750-room Riu Emerald Bay, also in

the Nuevo Mazatlan section. In addition, a large development called Diamond Beach began construction last fall.

"The total investment is \$1.2 billion, along two miles of beach north of the city," said Javier Paez, marketing and public relations manager for the Mazatlan Hotel Association.

Paez said the project consists of two phases, the first of which includes a five-star hotel (the brand has not been announced) plus 900 condos, 800 homes, two additional luxury hotels, a commercial center, a 27-hole golf course, two polo fields, a fitness center, a turtle sanctuary and an equestrian area.

"There will also be a resort clinic, to be

staffed by doctors from the U.S. who specialize in cosmetic replacement and reconstructive surgery," he said.

Still in the planning stage is a boutique hotel project by Mexico-based luxury hotelier Quinta Real.

The company plans to restore a historical building in the city center, but the exact location and opening date have not been announced.



Mazatlan, pictured, will add some 600 hotel rooms this year, bringing its total room count to more than 10,000.

### Historical roots

What's causing this sudden growth spurt, both in hotels and foreign arrivals?

"Mazatlan seems to have found its true identity," said Paez. "From being promoted as a sun and beach destination, its publicity and public relations efforts have changed to history and culture plus a growing variety of new products that form a richer tourism offering. The destination offers a unique experience unlike other beach destinations."

The key element in marketing Mazatlan as a historical and cultural destination, Paez said, is the city center, where an increasing number of restored colonial and post-colonial buildings are now home to restaurants, museums, stores and small hotels.

In addition to the planned Quinta Real property, the Centro Historico has already witnessed the opening of several small hotels, most recently Casa Lucila, a boutique-style property that opened with eight rooms last year.

The greater focus on Mazatlan's cultural and historical offerings is a good complement to the destination's sun and sand, according to Paez. "Today's American traveler

seeks the whole experience," he said. "The sun, good weather and beach are things that do not attract people if that's the only attraction being offered. Today's traveler is more informed about what to find in a destination, thanks to the new research tools such as the Internet. I think today's trend is the mix of culture and history, with [continued demand for] the modern infrastructure of hotels."

As with any destination, one of the challenges in growing arrivals is the availability of airlift. From 2006 to 2007, the number of weekly air seats available into Mazatlan grew by nearly 2,000. However, Paez noted, "for the beginning of this year, the air seat capacity dropped to 18,783. But we expect to recover, and surpass, the seat availability by [adding] for this fall over 4,000 more weekly seats. We are already on the right track, as we have already secured close to 2,500 weekly air seats. The areas of growth will be from the midwestern and eastern Canadian markets, midwest U.S. and north and central Mexico."

For more information about Mazatlan, visit [www.gomazatlan.com](http://www.gomazatlan.com).

## MEXICO UPDATE

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