

Mexico

Mazatlan on the Move

By Mark Rogers

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In recent years, Mazatlan has been overshadowed by other Mexico resort destinations such as Los Cabos, the Riviera Maya and even Riviera Nayarit. But Mazatlan has a reputation for being more than just a resort destination — it's also a hard-working city and the center of the country's shrimp industry. So instead of taking a back seat, Mazatlan has shouldered forward to fire up its tourism engine with a full slate of new developments.

"In the last five years, Mazatlan has reinvented itself as a very attractive destination," said Raul Llera Martinez, the state of Sinaloa's secretary of tourism. "We've added 2,000 hotel rooms and, when you figure in condos and villas, it's three times that."

A major factor in Mazatlan's burgeoning room count is last May's opening of the 716-room Hotel Riu Emerald Bay. The seaside, all-inclusive resort has four restaurants, five bars and several meeting rooms that can host up to 120 guests. Rooms range from Double Standard Rooms with a balcony or terrace (ocean views can be reserved) to the high-end Jacuzzi Suites, with guaranteed ocean views and balconies.



The Mazatlan International Center is part of the massive Marina Mazatlan project. // (C) 2010

Mazatlán Hotel Association

Presently, Mazatlan has more than 90 hotel and condominium properties, including nearly 50 four- and five-star resorts. Much of the new condo and villa builds are being snapped up by U.S. and Canadian retirees relocating to Mexico. Martinez noted that these retirement communities are growing at the rate of 20 percent a year in Mazatlan.

A good example of this niche growth is Diamond Beach, a 1,200-acre, master-planned community located just northwest of Mazatlan in the coastal region of Nuevo Mazatlan. Hard dates for an opening have not been announced but, when complete, the development will have luxury and boutique hotels, a signature golf course, condominiums and an Olympic-size saltwater pool.

"It's considered a safe destination — that's why the retirement communities are growing so rapidly," he said. "Part of this growth can also be attributed to the excellent medical services in

the region.”

Martinez is also proud of Mazatlan’s careful renovation of the historic quarter.

“Old Mazatlan has seen extensive renovation to its historic buildings and the addition of new lighting and landscaping,” he said. “It’s a great location to enjoy Mexican music and culture.”

A sign that Mazatlan has been making the right moves is the rise in visitation numbers. In 2009, the destination marked its seventh consecutive year of growth, welcoming approximately 1,937,067 visitors; an uptick of about 3.7 percent from the previous year, according to the Mazatlan Hotel Association.

“We’ve seen tremendous improvements to our infrastructure, especially with the ongoing construction of the new highway linking Mazatlan with Durango,” he said. “The two-lane highway will have the two biggest bridges and the two longest tunnels in Latin America.”

The project, which is slated to be completed in 2012, is a challenging one since it has to cross Mexico’s western mountain range, the Sierra Madre Occidental. Martinez noted that the highway will have 56 tunnels and 62 bridges, including the 3,675-foot-long, 1,640-foot-high El Baluarte Bridge, making it the longest and highest bridge in Latin America. The 145-mile highway will be both a tourism and commerce corridor in addition to providing the shortest route between Durango and Mazatlan, clocking in at a 1½-hour drive.

Ground has broken on the Marina Mazatlan project to develop 1,450 acres of land surrounding the marina. The huge project includes the construction of a new 18-hole golf course designed by David N. Fleming, designer of El Tamarindo Golf Resort. Plans also include new high-rise luxury hotels, residences, shopping, restaurants and recreational areas. An important element of the project, the Mazatlan International Center, is already open for business. The three-level convention center has 17 exhibition halls and meeting rooms and a capacity for 4,500 convention attendees. It also has a business center, dining lounge, retail and commercial areas and full-service catering.

The El Cid Marina Beach Hotel & Yacht Club is another part of the Marina Mazatlan project. The Mediterranean-style waterfront resort opened earlier this year and has already snagged a AAA Three-Diamond ranking. The resort has 204 suites overlooking the marina and Deer Island, 10,000 square feet of event space, upscale oceanfront dining, swimming pools, a business center and a kids’ club. With a nod to Palm Beach, the resort sports an adults-only beachfront Mediterranean day lounge with massage tents, a sundeck and an oversize Jacuzzi.