



MEET ME IN MAZATLAN

[ON LOCATION] LYDIA GREGORY

Although Mazatlan has always enjoyed a reputation as a premier sportfishing destination with good accommodations, it lacked the infrastructure to handle big events booked at Mexico's other beach powerhouses. That all changed with last year's opening of the \$61 million, 25-acre **Mazatlan International Center** facility, a brilliant addition to the upscale Marina Mazatlan area.

"We had over 30 years' experience working with small groups and we did it well," says General Director Einar Broden. "Now we're rolling out the red carpet for conventions with 1,000-plus attendees." In fact, with almost 154,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting space, the complex can welcome up to 5,000 participants for special events using the whole facility.

The architectural style of the sleek white concrete and glass building is a study in contemporary interpretations of the maritime theme. The stunning Sea of Cortes mural is a massive 17,000-sf handcrafted outdoor mural composed of a half-million little ceramic squares, which sets the tone for the one-of-a-kind art pieces sprinkled throughout the interior.

Architects and designers took great care to incorporate earth-friendly features too: The double-glazed glass façade, for example, was created with special thermal properties that dramatically reduce power consumption.

Indoors, the facility includes an exhibition hall and 17 separate meeting rooms, all fully outfitted with state-of-the-art technology. There's also a dining lounge, retail and commercial space and full-service catering onsite.

"We're now bidding on large groups on an international level because we have the first-class facilities they require," states Broden, "and we're working closely with the airlines to continue to increase airlift. With our very competitive rates for both accommodations and convention services, plus the charm of our seaside city, we're simply a great alternative for planners."

EL CENTRO

These days there's a lot more brewing in the port city of Mazatlan than their famous cerveza *Pacífico*. For the past decade, the entire city has been feverishly working to prepare Mazatlan to step into the big-time tourism arena—and they say it's ready to give other Pacific destinations a run for their money.

"This colonial city by the sea has a wider appeal than just a simple beach destination," says Carlos Berdegué, VP of the **Mazatlan Hotel Association & Tourism Board**. "Believe me, there's always something going on in Mazatlan, day or night, and our city has a very rich culture dating back centuries, which makes it a very unique for groups."

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Opposite: Mazatlan International Center

Below: Nuevo Mazatlan

Mazatlan's history was once home to a formidable Spanish garrison who built many of the colonial homes, but its main influences were the Germans, who exported all the gold and silver, and the French, who commandeered it and left their indelible architectural stamp on the Historical Center.

Old Mazatlan is the city's pride and joy, and the results of the ongoing restoration of 180 blocks encompassing some 480 buildings are beautifully in evidence. The city has invested millions of dollars in the last decade to return it to postcard beauty of old.

A morning spent walking along the narrow streets will uncover little galleries like Casa Etnika and Nidart, selling quality handicrafts from rooms that open up to inner courtyards. There's also plenty of sidewalk cafes surrounding leafy plazas where you can enjoy an *Ojo Rojo*: ice, beer, clamato and lime with salt on the rim of the mug.

Mazatlanecos love to see and be seen, and at night the sidewalks around the main Plaza Machado turn into outdoor restaurants. At **Pedro + Lola**, you can sit under the stars and choose from the ever-changing menu prepared by their French chef, who chooses his specialty according to what the fishermen catch. A combination of highbrow and low, you'll find beef tongue medallions alongside shredded shrimp *machaca*, accompanied by a magnificent wine list. As you dine, the sounds of a live jazz trio weave their way through conversations in several different languages, adding to the ambience. The restaurant also sits next to the Angela Peralta Theater, where groups can watch live opera.

"One of the top things to do in Mazatlan is definitely a drive down by our 8-mile boardwalk," says Gloria Tirado, owner of **Viajes El Sábalo**, one of Mazatlan's leading DMCs. "If you can, take the ride aboard a local *pulmonía* (4-person open taxi); for bigger groups, we have trolleys."

ISLAND HOPPING

There are several islands just offshore for snorkeling, bird watching and sea lion sightings. Stone Island is one of the most popular for groups who arrive aboard the *Catamaran Sábalo* on an Adventure Island Tour. The 90-minute ride passes the sportfishing fleets, ferry to Baja, lighthouse and bird sanctuary, ending with a 3-hour stay on a quiet beach with no vendors.

"This is one of the best beaches for swimming, and the seafood is the freshest around," says Tirado. You can also tour the island on horseback.

After the day trip, the catamarans conveniently dock right in front of **La Puntilla Restaurant**. A simple, open-air eatery with a view of the ferry and incoming shrimp boats, it's one of the best places to indulge in Mazatlan's famous seafood dishes. We highly recommend the *aguachile*, a mouth-watering ceviche preparation of raw shrimp on a bed of cucumbers with salt, lime,

chile and red onions, followed by *tostadas de marlin ranchero*—smoked marlin prepared with tomatoes, chile and onions.

MAKE MINE OCEANVIEW

Right in the heart of the popular Golden Zone, the venerable 408-room **Hotel Playa Mazatlán** has welcomed guests since 1955. This low-rise colonial landmark was favored by movie stars and producers like John Huston and John Wayne. Today it's the epitome of Mazatlan's lively atmosphere, combining excellent service, luxurious rooms and 23,000 sf of function space.

Heading north to Nuevo Mazatlan—just minutes from the International Center—the 716-room **Hotel RIU Emerald Bay** is the newest arrival on Playa Brujas. The only all-inclusive hotel in Mazatlan, the RIU boasts an enormous, lavish lobby, three a la carte restaurants, five bars and 5,200 sf of meeting space.

Also in Nuevo Mazatlan, the 288-room **Pueblo Bonito Emerald Bay Resort & Spa** features a unique neoclassical-meets-tropical style with all marble floors, Roman statues in the vaulted lobby and lush gardens outside populated by flamingos, swans and peacocks. Its main attraction is the 16,500-sf spa with fountains, waterfalls and a bubbling stream to reach the front desk. Meeting space tops 7,000 sf.

Mazatlan Hotel Association: gomazatlan.com

Mazatlan Int'l Center: mazatlaninternationalcenter.com

Viajes El Sábalo DMC: viajeselsabalo.com

Hotel Playa Mazatlan: hotelpalayamazatlan.com

Hotel RIU Emerald Bay: riu.com

Pueblo Bonito Emerald Bay: pueblobonitoemeraldbay.com

