



FASTFACTS

- **CLIMATE:** Rainy season is May to mid-October. The dry season runs from mid-October to April. June to October along the southern Pacific coast is when hurricanes are most likely.
- **CURRENCY:** Mexican Peso (MXN).
\$1 = 12.96MXN.
- **TIME:** Most of Mexico uses Central Standard Time; much of western Mexico, Mountain Time; and Baja California, Pacific Time.
- **DIAL CODE:** + 52.
- **GETTING THERE:** Major US hubs such as Atlanta, Chicago, Charlotte, Dallas/Fort Worth, Los Angeles, Miami, New York JFK, Philadelphia and Washington DC generally offer non-stop service to Cancun, Puerto Vallarta, Los Cabos and other popular destinations.
- **GETTING AROUND:** Buses are frequent and cheap. Taxis are readily available in tourist areas as well as *colectivos*, minibuses that run along set routes and charge a bit more than buses.
- **RED TAPE:** A passport is required by all US citizens flying in and out of Mexico. Cruise lines also recommend carrying a passport, even if starting and ending in the same US port.
- **GEOGRAPHY:** Mexico consists of 31 states plus the federal district and capital, Mexico City. The terrain ranges from coastal lowlands along the Caribbean and northern Pacific coasts to central high plateaus and mountains that peak at 18,000ft. The southern Pacific coast is backed by a mountainous interior.
- **VISITOR NUMBERS:** Around 17 million US travelers visited in 2011 (one in three Americans who traveled outside of the US).
- **CONTACT:** Mexico Tourism.
T: 800-44-Mexico. www.visitmexico.com

HOTELS & RESORTS

According to tourism officials, an estimated \$1.5bn will be spent on new hotel developments in Mexico over the next five years. This includes around \$500m by InterContinental Hotels Group to create 47 new properties. Starwood Hotels & Resorts will be adding three Mexican properties to its existing 23, while Marriott International and Hilton Worldwide each have several new hotels in the pipeline.

Major new all-inclusives include Secrets Huatulco, Sunscape Dorado Pacifico Ixtapa, Secrets Vallarta Bay and Ambar Puerto Vallarta, the first new-build in downtown Puerto Vallarta in several years. In addition, Cancun Palace, Vallarta Palace and Aventura Spa Palace will be re-flagged as Hard Rock Hotels, featuring music memorabilia-decorated suites.

With UNESCO adding Mexico's cuisine to its Intangible Cultural Heritage list, food and cultural travel has exploded, says Sylvie Laitre, director of Mexico Boutique Hotels. "Many of our hotels are promoting local cuisine and art, and several offer opportunities to connect with locals by volunteering in community programs."

Luxury trends, such as swim-out suites, beach butlers, beach beds, swim-up bars and 24-hour room service, as well as tech amenities like wi-fi and iPod docking stations, have also made their way into many Mexican resorts.

AIR LINKS

With an increasing number of flights to Mexico from the US, accessibility is one of the country's most appealing aspects, ensuring its top attractions are little more than a few hours away.

Among the most popular routes, Aeromexico connects 16 US cities with Mexico. New routes include daily services from Washington DC and Atlanta to Mexico City, and New York/JFK to Cancun. American serves 16 cities through its hubs in Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, LA, Miami and New York. US Airways, meanwhile, provides 28 daily flights to 10 cities from its hubs in Phoenix, Charlotte, Philadelphia and Boston.

Delta, offering services between 17 US cities and 11 Mexican cities, is celebrating 25 years of service to Mexico this year with expanded peak frequency between Atlanta and JFK to Mexico City, and between Atlanta and LA to Guadalajara.

Southwest Airlines subsidiary AirTran Airways added several new routes in spring, including non-stops from Denver, San Antonio, Austin and Chicago to Cancun, as well as flights from San Antonio and Orange County to Mexico City, and daily non-stops between Los Cabos and Orange County.

Virgin expanded its routes in December, and now flies to Puerto Vallarta from San Fran, New York and Seattle, and to Los Cabos. VivaAerobus also bolstered connections, adding flights between San Antonio and Monterrey in November. ■



MAP: JOHN PLUMER. IMAGE: KARISMA RESORTS