

MEXICO

MEETING & INCENTIVE PLANNER | 2020



Meet in Mexico

An array of "only in Mexico" experiences, combined with state-of-the-art convention centers, hotels and resorts, make Mexico a top choice for meetings and incentives.



Mexico Ramps up for the 2020s



Puerto Morelos, Quintana Roo

The country offers an extraordinary infrastructure for meetings & incentives

As we enter the new decade, the MICE infrastructure in Mexico is firmly in place. Convenient airlift, beautiful beaches and mountains, rich colonial and Mayan history, tropical weather, fabulous food, a high level of English-speaking service, abundant conference facilities—and, most impressive of all, an extraordinary inventory of luxury and business hotels purpose-built for meetings and incentives are all part of the picture.

We recently spoke with CVB executives from a variety of Mexico's robust and up-and-coming MICE destinations to get the skinny on what makes their regions tick for meetings and incentive programs, and what planners can expect in 2020.

State Of Quintana Roo

Located on the Yucatan Peninsula and encompassing (but not limited to) the hugely popular Caribbean beachfront destinations of Cancun and Riviera Maya, the state of **Quintana Roo** continues to expand with top-tier properties and attractions. “The meetings & incentives segment plays a key role in our overall tourism picture,” says Dario Flota Ocampo, director of the **Quintana Roo Tourism Board**. He cites excellent airlift, with direct flights from many locations in the US and Canada; a wide diversity of hotels; attractions that go beyond sun and fun; and the tax-free VAT incentive that gives planners great value for products and services. “Globally, Cancun, Riviera Maya, and Cozumel have one of the best infrastructures for meetings and events,” says Ocampo, noting that the region is home to not only a huge and expanding number of hotels, but also to “some of the best and most professional DMC organizations.” For large events, there’s a convention center in Cancun’s Hotel Zone, plus hotels that offer more than 3,000 guest rooms and world-class meeting space for up to 8,000 attendees. “Due to strong efforts positioning Cancun and Riviera Maya as leaders in the meetings & events markets, and tremendous growth in hotels and attractions, we certainly expect the market to continue growing not only by segmentation but also geographically,” notes Ocampo. “We have seen an increase in the U.S. and Canadian markets. This is a result of event organizers constantly looking for new destinations and venues. They look for venues that operate the way they operate back home, and this puts Cancun and Riviera Maya in a good position.”



Merida's historic buildings set the scene for a unique MICE event

State Of Yucatan

Situated on the Gulf of Mexico next to Quintana Roo, the state of **Yucatan** is an up and coming destination for meetings and incentive programs. It's capital, Merida, was named the best small city in the world in 2019 (Conde Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards). "Merida is a modern city with a cultural and architectural legacy visible on every street," says Federico Treviño, MICE director at the **State of Yucatan Ministry of Tourism**, adding that Merida is also known worldwide for its unique gastronomy. The MICE infrastructure here is growing exponentially, with 2,100 guest rooms in the convention district in such hotels as the **InterContinental Presidente** and **Hyatt Regency**, and more inventory coming soon, including an **Aqua** hotel.

"Merida has convention centers within walking distance of MICE hotels, as well as other amazing places to host your events such as boutique hotels and mansions," says Treviño.

Fancy bringing your group to a convention center with a cenote in its interior? The only one in the world, the LEED Platinum-certified **Centro Internacional de Congresos de Yucatan**, (Yucatan International Congress Center) is in Mérida. Another convention center, the **Centro de Convenciones Yucatan Siglo XXI** located about 20 minutes north of the city, will complete remodeling in 2020. “Yucatan is a very good proposal for your meetings due to all our cultural and natural attractions,” says Treviño. “The fact that we now have the infrastructure to host increasingly important events, like the recent World Summit of Nobel Peace Prizes that was promoted in more than 120 countries and held in the Centro Internacional de Congresos de Yucatan, has put us on the map.”



Aldama Street, San Miguel de Allende

San Miguel De Allende

Moving inland up the arm of Mexico to the central highlands, another cultural icon coming onto the 2020 MICE radar is the colonial city of **San Miguel de Allende**. Known for its cobblestoned streets, baroque Spanish architecture, and historic town center anchored with the dramatic pink towers of a neo-Gothic church, San Miguel de Allende has been called the most beautiful city in Mexico. “It is small, walkable city, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and

has all the MICE facilities,” says Edgar Israel Zamudio Aguando, general director, **San Miguel de Allende Tourism Board**. “The local tourism board has a special department to help the meeting planner with one-stop shopping,” he adds, “and is reaching out to promote the destination for meetings and incentives.” City hotels can comfortably host groups of up to 500 people. The luxurious, 153-room **Live Aqua Urban Resort San Miguel de Allende** opened in 2018 with the city’s largest ballroom that can accommodate up to 1,000 people for events, and caters to incentive groups with five-star service and posh contemporary flair. A new **Hilton** hotel is currently under construction near the city’s **La Casona** convention center. But a growing MICE infrastructure does not mean San Miguel de Allende will lose its charm, notes Aguando. “Last year a tourism capacity study was done and an urban development plan is almost completed. The city is not planning a big growth in the numbers of travelers. The idea is to keep the destination small and on weekdays, have the city full with meetings and business travelers.”



Charrería, Jalisco

State Of Jalisco/Guadalajara

A trending MICE destination in Mexico's west-central state of **Jalisco, Guadalajara** is a business hub, home to more than 600 high-tech companies. There are roughly 4,500 hotel rooms within walking distance of **Expo Guadalajara**—one of Mexico's largest convention centers that is about to embark on a major expansion. "The amount of developments in infrastructure, flights, hotel investment, and tourism offerings are increasing exponentially," says Rocio Lancaster, tourism undersecretary for the State of Jalisco. The region's appeal is also due to its storied history. "Jalisco is a state that offers the best of modernity mixed with the essence of Mexico," says Lancaster. "We are the birthplace of three iconic pillars of the country: mariachi, *charrería* [or charro, Mexican rodeo], and tequila. Day trips to Jalisco's magical towns include Tequila, Tlaquepaque, Ajijic, Tapalpa, San Sebastian del Oeste, and more. And within Guadalajara, there are more than 15 historical and cultural venues for social events." Recent hotel development includes the 350-room **Hard Rock Hotel** that opened in 2018 with the city's largest hotel conference space accommodating up to 2,000; and the **Hilton Midtown** that opened in 2019 with meeting space for 670. More than 2,500 additional hotel rooms are expected to open in the next two years. There have also been huge investments in accessibility: more than \$700 million for modernization and expansion of the state's two international airports, in Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta; and \$320 million for a new highway between Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta expected to open this year that passes by the quaint town of Tequila during the 3-hour ride. "We see the future of North American-based meetings and incentives in Jalisco only increasing in the new decade," predicts Lancaster.



Culture and tradition in Puerto Vallarta

Puerto Vallarta

Puerto Vallarta, on Jalisco's coastline fronting the Pacific Ocean, has long been known for beautiful beaches, the verdant rolling hills of the Sierra Madre, and a historic town center with the cafe-lined Malecon boardwalk and many art galleries. It also boasts a large inventory of luxury resorts and copious conference space. "Puerto Vallarta is the cultural heart of Mexico's Pacific Coast, offering MICE planners more variety than anywhere else in the country," says Javier Aranda, general director of the **Puerto Vallarta Tourism Board**. He cites an "unbeatable MICE infrastructure," anchored by the modern **Puerto Vallarta International Convention Center** with 100,000 sf of flexible indoor function space and 400,000 sf of outdoor event space. About 10 minutes away are many upscale beachfront hotels, including internationally recognized brands. "Altogether, there are over 12,000 hotel rooms," notes Aranda. "Puerto Vallarta has always been popular for incentive groups, especially during the high season months of January to May," he says. Now, the destination is also attracting citywide conventions in the value season of May to November. "What is exciting about planning a meeting in Puerto Vallarta is that the weather allows the use of

alternative outdoor spaces like the iconic **Malecon**, and we also have large venues such as beach clubs, theaters, and nightclubs that can be converted to group event space,” says Aranda. The modernized international airport, located within the city, continues to add direct airlift from the U.S. and Canada, including new flights from the Midwest. Hotel news includes a new **Fiesta Americana** tower. “It is important to note that Puerto Vallarta’s tourism infrastructure is continually being renovated,” emphasizes Aranda. “This year millions of dollars have been spent to renovate meeting spaces as well as leisure spaces.”



Sayulita, Riviera Nayarit

State Of Riviera Nayarit

Riviera Nayarit, a 200-mile stretch of Pacific coastline just north of Puerto Vallarta, is fast becoming a hot MICE destination, due in part to an expanding inventory of world-class hotel brands. “Our unique hotel infrastructure caters to groups of all sizes, interests, and budgets,” says Marc Murphy, managing director, **Riviera Nayarit CVB**. “In recent years we’ve seen a steady growth in meetings market tourism, in particular during low season in May, June, and October when hotels have more availability to accommodate larger groups and are able to offer more attractive rates.” Murphy points out that Riviera Nayarit’s hotel capacity continues to expand. Twenty-nineteen saw the opening of **Marival Armony Luxury Resort & Suites**, a 268-room beachfront property with a state-of-the-art convention center accommodating groups of up to 5,000. Luxury hotels in the early 2020 pipeline include **Conrad Playa Mita**, **Rosewood Mandarin**, **Only&Only Mandarin**, **Auberge Resorts Collection’s Susurros del Corazon**, **Autograph Collection**, and **The Ritz-Carlton Reserve** and **The Ritz-Carlton Resort**. For large groups, the next few years will see openings of upscale all-inclusives like **AMResort’s Dreams Punta de Mita Resort & Spa**, and new **Westin** and **Marriott** properties. Murphy also notes that in 2023, the first **Fairmont** property in the region will open in **Costa Canuva CIP**, a nearly \$2 billion luxury development that will be home to five new resorts and a championship golf course. Beyond the infrastructure, “our eclectic charm and versatile offering is our main differentiator, as we’re able to offer meeting planners singular experiences that align with their interests while personifying the spirit of Mexico,” he says. “We expect to see continued growth in meeting planners choosing our destination, particularly for Millennials seeking local experiences and for repeat groups.”



Groups can opt for sunset cruises along Los Cabos' stunning scenery.

Los Cabos

Los Cabos, too, has many selling points for meetings and incentives groups, including the diversity of the landscape, says Rodrigo Esponda, managing director for **Los Cabos Tourism Board**.

There are many of opportunities for groups to enjoy Los Cabos' farm-to-table food culture and participate in bringing their meal to fruition via cooking classes that incorporate picking herbs from a garden, preparing the food and then, of course, enjoying it afterwards.

Another selling point is that there are less than 10 rainy days a year, so it's easy for groups to feel confident when they are planning outdoor events.

The destination also offers quite a bit of infrastructure—from the newly opened **Hard Rock Hotel Los Cabos**, home to the area's largest ballrooms (see the Jan/Feb issue of **Prevue**, page 85) to a myriad of luxury hotels such as **Las Ventanas al Paraíso**, **A Rosewood Resort**; **One&Only Palmilla**; and **Zadun, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve**.

Depending on which type of experience your group wants, various areas give way to different opportunities. For instance, in San Jose del Cabo, where the fully renovated **Viceroy Los**

opportunities. For instance, in San Jose del Cabo, where the fully renovated **Viceroy Los Cabos** is located, groups can experience more of the local vibe, or, for a more secluded experience, **Nobu Los Cabos** might be the preferred option.

Esponda notes that there is great value to Los Cabos. which adheres to high standards. So, "for a good price," he says, "you can have amazing Mexican hospitality, service, safety, and authentic experiences."