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alert:

Travel Still Safe to Major Tourist Hubs in Mexico

On February 20, 2009, the U.S. Department of State issued a travel alert to those visiting Mexico, warning of violence and drug-related conflicts in several areas. The alert states, in part, "While millions of U.S. citizens visit Mexico each year (including thousands who cross the land border every day for study, tourism or business), the number of incidents in the country has increased recently."

Travel agents should be aware that the most noteworthy crimes are taking place in border towns including Ciudad Juarez and the city of Chihuahua. The most popular tourist destinations, including Cancun, the Riviera Maya, and Puerto Vallarta, remain safe for visitors.

The following is an abbreviated response from the **Mexico Tourism Board**:

Mexico remains a safe tourist destination and this is reflected in the 22.6 million international visitors that visited Mexico in 2008, of which 18 million were Americans. This number represents a 5.9 percent increase from the previous year. Although some areas suffered any incidents were minimal.

The violence associated with drug trafficking is isolated in cities that are far away from tourism destinations. Visitors should use common precautions as when traveling to any foreign country.

Q: Is Mexico an unsafe place to travel?

Mexico ranks tenth as an international travel destination in the world and is the number one international destination for North Americans traveling abroad. Many tourists to the country are repeat visitors, which shows that the vast majority of tourists are satisfied and leave with overwhelmingly positive impressions.

Q: The travel alert issued by the U.S. State Department warns that even travel within the country border is dangerous. Should I just avoid traveling to Mexico completely?

No. Common sense and proper precautions must be taken when traveling anywhere, and Mexico is no exception. When traveling on the border or if you find yourself in another area of the country, stick to legitimate business areas. Be aware of your surroundings and your stay should be a memorable and safe experience.

Mexico's frontier, like many other frontiers in other countries, at times experiences certain conflicts and border states should do so while taking the proper precautions.

Q: Then what do you make of the U.S. State Department warning against travel to the border among drug cartels?

In Mexico, the possession and consumption of drugs and narcotics are illegal. The laws governing these are stricter and the resulting fines and prison sentences are often harsher than those provided for in U.S. law.

The recent incidents involving drug traffickers have prompted U.S. and Canadian authorities to suggest taking extra caution when visiting certain border towns.

It is important to note, however, that this temporary announcement does not advise travelers against visiting safe tourist destinations. In fact, Leslie Bassett, Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, stated the intention of the alert is to inform of the violent acts that are taking place in specific states of Mexico. She clarified that in no way does this alert seek to negatively portray the tourist destinations.

Q: Shouldn't everyone just avoid going to Mexico, with everything that is going on with the drug dealers?

It's important to note that hotel occupancy in the popular destinations for tourists within Mexico remains high. The Secretary of Tourism elaborated this month (February 2009) shows the following: Cancun's hotels at 73%, Riviera Maya at 85%, Los Cabos at 69% and Puerto Vallarta at 78%.

As the country's promotion agency, the Mexico Tourism Board recommends visitors to contact our website for more information on the destination they are planning to visit.

Drug dealing and possession are a social problem that every nation faces, and Mexico is no exception. We are confident that local authorities are working hard to apprehend all those who violate the law to bring them to justice.

Q: What if something does happen? Will emergency services be able to help?

Federal and local governments are constantly working on improving emergency services, not only for tourists but also for local residents. Visitors should take precautions if they have any pre-existing medical needs and speak to their doctor before travel abroad. We are also working on raising the bar in our standards to that our guests are kept safe, such as legalizing open bars in areas known as Spring Break destinations.

Hundreds of thousands of American students travel to resort areas throughout Mexico over Spring Break. The best way to enjoy their vacation without incident is to use some common sense to avoid dangerous situations. We encourage students to drink responsibly and be aware of the laws and regulations.

As stated in the U.S. State Dept. website:

"Excessive alcohol consumption and unruly behavior can lead to serious problems with Mexican authorities involved in the vast majority of arrests, accidents, violent crimes, rapes, and deaths suffered by Americans over Spring Break. Disturbing the peace, lewd or indecent behavior, littering, driving under the influence, drinking or on public transportation, using public transportation without payment, or making obscene or insulting remarks are considered criminal activities by Mexican authorities.

For any emergencies involving U.S. citizens in Mexico, please contact the closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. The U.S. Embassy is located in Mexico City at Paseo de la Reforma 305, Colonia Cuauhtemoc, telephone from the United States 011-52-55-5080-2000; telephone within Mexico City: 5080-2000; telephone long distance within Mexico: 011-52-55-5080-2000. You may also contact the Embassy by e-mail at: [http://ccs@usembassy.net.mx](mailto:ccs@usembassy.net.mx). The Embassy's website is at <http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/>.

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