

History and Development of Tourism in Mexico

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In the past decade and one half more and more tourists are taking advantage of an economical and enjoyable vacation in Mexico. As a result tourism has become the principal industry of the country. Mexico is second only to Canada as an objective for the traveler from the United States.¹ Realizing the growing importance of tourism the Mexican government and people have become increasingly accommodating to the tourists. The importance of tourism is obvious in the rising economy of Mexico today. Many small industries were established on the basis of catering to the tourist. Guide and tour services, recreational facilities for fishing and hunting, and services for the hotels are examples of these enlarging industries. Not to be ignored is the continued importance to the tourist of the handcraft and souvenir industries, which are booming.

The number of tourists coming to Mexico increased almost three times from 1939 to 1950 and gross receipts increased more than five times. Since 1946 the tourist receipts have been rising at an annual average rate of almost 22% compared with the annual average rate of increase of only 12% from 1939-1945. The net earnings from tourists reduced the cumulative trade deficit from \$904 million to only \$114 million from 1939 to 1950. The amount of money each tourist spends during his stay in Mexico also has been rising over the years. In 1930 per capita expenditures by tourists amounted to \$221.00; by 1949 they increased to \$439.00; and then declined to \$416.00 in 1950, as a result of the depreciation of the peso.²

Simplicity of entering and the nearness to Mexico make it convenient for the United States tourist to enjoy the Old World atmosphere and customs of another country at reasonable expense. Formalities for entering into and departing from Mexico are simple. No passport is required of United States citizens who may readily obtain a tourist card valid for six months. Before reentering the United States after prolonged sojourn one must present evidence of having had a recent smallpox vaccination.³ The present rate of money exchange is twelve and one half pesos to one American dollar.

The "bargain rates" are not, however, the only explanation for the top place held by tourism. There is an abundance of beautiful and spectacular natural scenery. The former civilizations of the country have left remnants of their varied cultures. There are palaces, cathedrals, pyramids, ancient aqueducts, and shrines of the Spanish, Aztec, and Toltec empires. Other attractions are native products (silver, pottery, etc.), bullfights, and an active sports program. These along with the modern business buildings, apartments, hotels, universities, and private residences of Mexico City and the other large cities give the tourist a wide variety and ceaseless supply of interesting sights to see and places to visit.

Mexico's year round climate is an asset to its tourist industry. There are no seasons in which one cannot enjoy the weather. The climate in Mexico is determined vertically rather than horizontally, and the combination of altitude and tropical location make it possible to guide the individual to a temperature level suiting his tastes. Throughout the greater part of the country the rainy season occurs between the months of May and October. The country has a recorded total hours of sunshine per year equalled by few other nations of the world.

The government has recognized the importance of the tourist industry to Mexico, and through the Federal Tourist Bureau (*Direccion General de Turismo*) in the Ministry of Interior, began advertising the attractions of Mexico in the United States and abroad. A vigorous campaign to encourage visitors was started during the administration of President Avila Com-

acho (1940 to 1946). The minister of the Interior, Miguel Aleman, appointed Alejandro Buelna to reorganize the tourist department. The press, radio chains, and movie industry of the United States were invited to send managers, publishers, and directors as guests of the Mexican government. Advertising in the United States consisted of special exhibits, the showing of 16 mm colored travelogues narrated in English, careful advertising, and wide distribution of descriptive folders. This campaign in addition to other promotional efforts resulted in a most favorable reaction in the United States.⁴ Since 1948 about 95% of the tourists entering Mexico were residents of the United States.

In 1939 the number of tourists visiting Mexico was around 139,000 (excluding border visitors). From 1940 on, except for the war period, it gradually built up to about 390,000 in 1951, and has risen to around the half million mark since.

During the war year, 1944, when 128,000 tourists came to Mexico only 30% traveled by automobile with gas rationing on, and 19% by airlines; in 1950 the number of tourists increased to 390,000 and 59% came by automobile on the new and improved highways, and 23% by airlines. In 1955 the total number of American tourists alone was 550,000. Automobile travel brought 27% into Mexico, and 73% traveled by air and other means of transportation.

Air travel is fast becoming an important factor in the tourist industry of Mexico. The construction of airports was originally begun by private airlines. However, in order to insure more balanced development of air traffic throughout the country and to strengthen the financial position of domestic airlines the government began a program of airport construction and improvement in 1947. Several new airports have been built in recent years, and the airport in Mexico City has been improved. In 1951 there was a total of 15 airports with adequate installations in addition to 365 registered landing fields in the country.²

Mexico's proximity to the United States, its everwidening network of good roads and improved accommodations, its many natural and cultural attractions, and other favorable advantages should draw an increasing number of visitors each year. The Government Tourist Bureau is encouraging increased construction of hotels and motor courts, restaurants, and other tourist facilities; some with the aid of government loans. The most important single factor limiting further expansion of the tourist trade is the lack of facilities to accommodate a substantial increase in the number of tourists.

LITERATURE CITED

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