

# MEEETINGS IN MEXICO

Famously warm hospitality, fabulous beaches, easy access, and new world-class facilities make meetings in Cancún, Puerto Vallarta, and Los Cabos more appealing than ever.

By Annette Burden

**W**HY MEET IN MEXICO RIGHT now? The tremendous value, for starters, followed by easy access and new information networks that actually enhance the nation's hallmark of hospitality with a personal touch.

Much of the value side of Mexico's attraction comes from its zero-percent VAT policy—which can save up to \$60,000 for a program of 1,000 delegates. Mexico not only waives all sales tax on meetings held by foreign companies, it also waives the 16 percent tax on lodging, airport, transfers, and everything from set-up and equipment rental to food and beverage.

As for the easy access, few countries can beat Mexico's resort areas with their frequent direct flights from U.S. gateways. At the same time, hundreds of daily flights connect U.S. passengers nonstop to Mexico City, where connecting flights usually take about an hour.



When it comes to the personal touch, the Mexico Tourism Board bends over backward for meeting professionals. For many planners, connection begins at one of the board's nine U.S. and Canadian satellite offices, which provide promotional

materials, specialized information on hotels and venues, and assistance in coordinating site inspections. The satellites work closely with headquarters to link planners directly to the right people at convention and visitors bureaus, DMCs, specialized suppliers, and venues of all kinds.

While Mexico's eagerness to do business makes it a bargain, and its proximity makes it convenient, it's the diversity that makes it irresistible. Mexico holds something for everyone: fabulous beaches and sun-kissed weather; exotic flora and fauna above and below the waterline; cultural assets from ancient to colonial to modern times; and up-to-the-minute hotels and meeting facilities second to none on the world stage.

# CANCÚN



**CANCÚN**, Mexico's number one tourist destination for nearly 40 years, attracts a steady stream of meetings to its Caribbean shores, including such high-profile events as the 2010 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Conference to the Parties of the Kyoto Protocol.

With more than 35,000 hotel rooms to suit any need—plus well over 33,525 more on the neighboring Riviera Maya—Cancún welcomes groups of every size and purpose, even the largest of groups with ease.

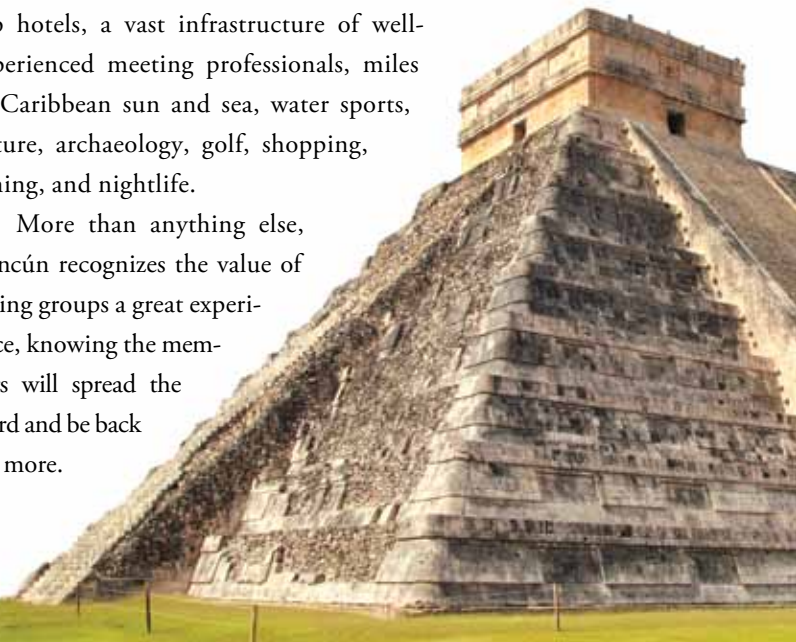
For planners, Cancun's newfound wealth of all-inclusive hotels adds another layer of ease. All-inclusives now make up 70 percent of the properties, in part due to the recent conversion of the Hilton Cancún into an Iberostar, Le Méridien Cancún into a Sandos, and the Cancún Palace into a Hard Rock.

Back in September of 2010, the new CancúnMesse Exhibition Center debuted a whopping 272,000 square feet for expos

near the airport. In 2012 it broke ground on another 200,000 square feet for meetings. In the Hotel Zone, Cancún Center—the region's premier convention facility—offers 154,074 square feet of famously eco-friendly facilities.

Cancún has it all: abundant meeting space, top hotels, a vast infrastructure of well-experienced meeting professionals, miles of Caribbean sun and sea, water sports, nature, archaeology, golf, shopping, dining, and nightlife.

More than anything else, Cancún recognizes the value of giving groups a great experience, knowing the members will spread the word and be back for more.







**Cancún's** myriad attractions begin with a picturesque location (opposite) and continue (clockwise from top left) with the enchanting wildlife of Xcaret, golf on a choice of championship-caliber courses, high-speed thrills with Exotic Rides, and high-end pampering from a host of area spas.



## CROWD PLEASERS

### MAYAN MYSTERIES

Cancún's new \$15-million Maya Museum brought hundreds of archaeological artifacts to the heart of the Hotel Zone, including recent discoveries and never-before-seen relics collected over 30 years by the National Institute of Anthropology and History. Next door, the island's own archaeological site, San Miguelito, recently reopened to the public as well, after restoration of its 14 structures.

### PEDALS TO THE METAL

What better way to supercharge incentive programs than with racing lessons from a professional NASCAR driver and practice behind the wheel of a Lamborghini, Ferrari, Lotus, or other top-performing car—either on a private speedway or a four-hour road trip through the Riviera Maya? After Exotic Rides debuted the

experience in December 2011, it shot straight to the top of TripAdvisor's reader recommendations.

### BEST SHOT

Delegates short of time in the Hotel Zone can walk to at least one of the 13 golf courses (and counting) in the region. Iberostar Cancún Hotel, which bought the Hilton Cancún in 2011, purchased the neighboring 18 holes in 2012 and now welcomes everyone, whether guests of the hotel or not. Highlights include new carts, Calloway club rental, wildlife sightings, and views of the mainland over Nichupté Lagoon.

### SPA DAZE

Competition between Cancun's dazzling array of spas keeps them all on their toes. All need to satisfy been-there, done-that

travelers with originality, innovation, and the latest exotic treatments. The sumptuous new Gem Spa at the Fiesta Americana Grand Coral Beach Cancún Resort & Spa illustrates the point with its jewel-inspired treatments in 26 therapy rooms—plus a complimentary ten-step hydrotherapy-ritual circuit.

### CREATURE FEATURES

Howler monkeys, pink flamingoes, dolphins, white-tailed deer, tropical rain forest trails, and one of the largest butterfly pavilions in the world fill Xcaret, a giant eco-theme park on the Riviera Maya. Jaguars, pumas, horses, a huge aquarium, underground river, and more contribute to the experience. Groups of 60 to 1,800 can end the day with dinner and a show in the park's amphitheater and replicated Mayan ball court.

# PUERTO VALLARTA



## UERTO VALLARTA,

Mexico's second most visited tourist destination, nestles in a narrow corridor between the emerald peaks of the Sierra Madre and the Pacific waters of Banderas Bay. In addition to state-of-the-art conference facilities, the city offers a host of meetings experts, DMCs, highly trained and motivated support staff, 20,000 hotel rooms, and matchless settings for outdoor events, team building, adventures, and relaxation. Often called Mexico's most Mexican resort, Puerto Vallarta also rates as the world's friendliest city, according to the readers of *Condé Nast Traveler*.

In March of 2009, the State of Jalisco opened a US\$43 million convention center in Puerto Vallarta. Just five minutes from the airport and most of the major hotels, the all-green, state-of-the-art, 58,664-square-foot facility aimed to boost the region's economy by attracting more and larger groups—while improving the environment.

The center reinvests 100 percent of its profits in Estero del Salado, the surrounding 169-acre nature preserve. Contributors to this enlightened cause, whether they knew it or not, included the 900 delegates at the World Economic Forum in April 2012.

Building on a reputation as one of the world's top incentive destinations, Puerto Vallarta came of age with the advent of the new convention center. Still growing, in 2012 it gained three new conference-ready hotels—including the stunning Now Amber Puerto Vallarta—with more to follow in the coming years.







**Puerto Vallarta's** iconic Los Arcos Amphitheater (opposite) provides a scenic frame for the area's natural beauty. Other attractions (from above left) range from shopping to culinary feasts to historic landmarks, like the magnificent Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

## CROWD PLEASERS

### CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

Puerto Vallarta offers one of richest arts scenes in Mexico. All roads start at the Malecón, where the city's newly revitalized boardwalk presents an impressive lineup of sculptures by internationally renowned artists—all viewed against a backdrop of infinite sky and sea. More than 50 galleries showcase everything from art by indigenous peoples to works by superstars of the contemporary art world.

### CULINARY WONDERS

Fresh ingredients from the fields, farms, and bay meet influences from around the globe in the kitchens of Puerto Vallarta. Dine-arounds can hop from Italian restaurants to French, Japanese, Austrian, Thai, Argentine, and Brazilian, to name just a few. Equally alluring home-style Mexican fare and gourmet versions thrill the most

educated palates. Tequila connoisseurs can visit nearby haciendas to see how *raicilla*, a local specialty, makes its way from agave to distillery to tasting glass.

### PAR EXCELLENCE

Most golfers can only dream about Puerto Vallarta's nine golf courses: jungle-green landscapes with views of the mighty Sierra Madre on one side and the serenity of Banderas Bay on the other. Vista Vallarta, home to several PGA tournaments, serves as the brass ring for golfers with its 36 holes by Jack Nicklaus and Tom Weiskopf. Both the slope-side Vista and its seaside sibling, Marina Vallarta, welcome corporate events with open arms.

### STARRY, STARRY NIGHT

The tour company Vallarta Adventures promises an unforgettable evening for

groups under the stars. It begins with a sunset cruise across the bay to Las Caletas, former retreat of Hollywood director John Huston (who filmed *Night of the Iguana* nearby). After a torch-lit dinner by the sea, guests adjourn to a jungle amphitheater to witness *Rhythms of the Night*, a musical extravaganza inspired by Cirque du Soleil.

### URBAN WILDLIFE

Estero del Salado, the wildlife sanctuary funded by Puerto Vallarta's new convention center, opened its gates to escorted tours last year. Groups can visit the mangrove habitats and tropical forest via footpath and *panga*, watching for the 100 species of birds, 30 species of amphibians, and 10 species of mammals that make their home in the city's newly reclaimed and protected estuary.

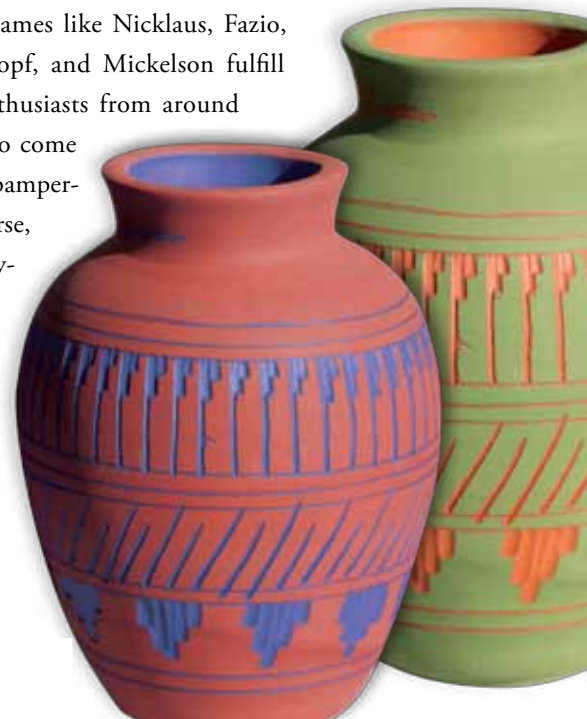
# LOS CABOS



**LOS CABOS**, Mexico's latest up-and-coming meetings destination, lies at the tip of the thousand-mile-long Baja peninsula, where the Pacific Ocean meets the Sea of Cortez. Groups select from 13,000 hotel rooms based in three distinct areas: lively Cabo San Lucas at the southwestern tip, sleepy San José del Cabo to the northeast, and the 20-mile stretch of resort-studded coast that lies between.

A recent surge in renovations, expansions, and developments has raised the region's meetings profile substantially. Along with the growing choice for resort-centered conferences and incentives came Los Cabos International Convention Center, built by the federal government at a cost of US\$100 million and fueled by more than 1,000 solar panels. The 2012 G-20 Summit put Los Cabos firmly on the world's meetings map when its 7,000 attendees convened at the center last June.

Still a mecca for big-game sport fishing, as it was in the days of Ernest Hemingway and John Wayne, Los Cabos also features golf as a headline attraction. Eleven courses designed by names like Nicklaus, Fazio, Norman, Dye, Weiskopf, and Mickelson fulfill the bucket lists of enthusiasts from around the world. Visitors also come for out-of-this-world pampering at the spas, of course, not to mention everything from hiking, zip-lining, and ATV adventures on land to snorkeling, diving, surfing, and kayaking in the legendary waters.







**Los Cabos's** many faces include natural landmarks, such as El Arco de Cabo San Lucas (opposite), and go on to include (clockwise, from above left) colonial beauty at Mission of San José del Cabo Anuití, whale watching, culinary sensations, and plenty of nighttime fun.

## CROWD PLEASERS

### ART OF THE ANCIENTS

Only a Green Globe-certified outfitter like Ecoturismo Kuyimá can take groups to see some of the planet's largest and best-protected cave paintings in the mountains of Baja. Little publicized (for their own protection), the prehistoric murals are so magnificent and abundant that UNESCO declared the whole mountain range a world heritage site. Options for groups include everything from eight-hour day trips to ten-day expeditions.

### TALES OF THE SEA

The tour operator Cabo Adventures offers to organize just about any kind of corporate event aboard its fleet of luxury yachts, from board meetings to sunset cocktails to team-building programs. Groups enlisting the company for custom day sails often see whales from

December to April and dolphins year-round while exploring the coast's hidden coves and beaches.

### PARTY TOWN

Cabo San Lucas means just one thing for some 20-somethings—and those eager to prove there's life after 30: party! The rock clubs Cabo Wabo, Squid Roe, and Giggling Marlin ruled the after hours in the '80s and still do—now joined by the Hard Rock Café, Body Shot Night Club, Mambo Café, Nikki Beach, Zoo Bar & Dance, and many more. A local VIP concierge service, Los Cabos in Style, will supply a van, designated driver, and friendly guide to show the way.

### COLONIAL CONNECTIONS

Groups in search of Old Mexico find just what they're after in San José del Cabo,

which basks in more than 300 years of history at the northeast corner of Los Cabos. The city's main square, Plaza Mijares, dates from the days of the Spanish padres. Shaded by ancient trees, it offers the perfect place for groups to meet between visits to the Mission of San José del Cabo Anuití, City Hall, Casa de la Cultura, Maritime Museum, shops, and restaurants that line its borders.

### GIVING BACK

The Groups & Incentives division of Terramar, a leading destination management company in Los Cabos, helps groups connect to a wide variety of local projects in need of volunteers. Examples include pitching in on school and orphanage rejuvenation and support for a local book-mobile and reading centers in low-income neighborhoods.