

# A NEW FACE For Mexico

The U.S. director of the Mexico Tourism Board discusses agents' role in repositioning the country as a cultural destination

BY JERRY SOVERINSKY

**EDUARDO CHAILLO**, director of the Mexico Tourism Board for the U.S. and Canada, spoke with **Travel Agent** at the Motivation Show, the sales and marketing trade show held this fall in Chicago.

## Mexico has started remarketing itself as a destination for culture and history. How has this changed the visitor demographic?

This year, we've received an increase of 8.3 percent in U.S. tourist revenue, so the strategy has been very successful. We're able to bring a traveler who spends more time in Mexico and who spends more [money], not the traveler who is looking for [something] cheap. When they are able to spend time at beach resorts combined with culture, nature, adventure and maybe meetings, it opens a big new market for us. This cross-market strategy is producing great results with a mix of new travelers and first-time visitors to our country.

## Cancun has evolved into an up-and-coming spot for luxury. What impact has this had on business?

It is a good decision the Cancun people made after Hurricane Wilma [which hit in 2005]—they didn't lower rates, they took the opportunity to refurbish and remodel the properties and to offer new possibilities to luxury travelers. Now, there's a massive tourism sector choosing Cancun not because it's cheap but because there are more possibilities and value for the money...there are cultural combinations. For instance, Cancun is promoting itself as part of the Mayan world...this is a great strategy. They're now bringing a better product.

## Is the rebranding of Cancun, and Mexico in general, something that has been profitable for agents?

We want to help the industry—agents—to



Eduardo Chaillo of the Mexico Tourism Board

have people convinced that they want to go to Mexico. We do that with our advertising and promotions, which are far-reaching. We are reaching out to the cultural segment in the U.S., and we're making new partnerships—the Smithsonian, for instance. This creates awareness and drives new travelers to our country, which will bring more profits for agents.

## What is Mexico's strategy in working with agents?

We're trying to push with the travel agent community our World Heritage sites. That is good to know, it is a new discovery for many agents and it is presented in our *Magic of Mexico* ([www.magicofmexico.com](http://www.magicofmexico.com)) online seminar. We're pushing the cultural product in all of our communications. The training program has been very successful—more than 5,000 agents

have gone through the program, and we're working to increase that. We want to partner all the time with cultural and heritage Mexico specialists. It is a big growth area for us.

## Do you think clients feel safer traveling to Mexico because of what the country learned after Hurricane Wilma?

It's very impressive how the Cancun people are prepared for these threats. Hurricane Dean [which struck this August] damaged barely anything—of course, this is entirely different from Wilma... [In regards to communications for Dean], we were very prepared with PR, sending messages to tour operators...we had planes bringing people out so that when the hurricane hit Cancun, it was empty of tourists. Everything resumed the day after—planes were back with people, it was great. The private sector, municipalities, states, PR agency, tour operators...we had great communications and the results were great.

## How is Mexico preparing for the "soft" season?

The way to diminish the effects of a low season is to cross-segment. In the meeting segment, there is no low season. They can celebrate meetings any time of the year. That is one of the reasons we are here: We want business in September and October. We're also doing a great PR campaign. In regards to the weather, we're communicating the storm information and bringing the word that we're prepared. But no lowering rates, that's not our strategy. Never. ■

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