

TRAVEL WEEKLY

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INSIGHT

What image problem? Visits up 13% in early '09

By: Jorge Sidron
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Nearly 4 million tourists visited Mexico during the first two months of this year, up almost 13% compared with the same period in 2008, according to Sectur, Mexico's ministry of tourism.

The jump in visitors came despite worries about the surge in drug-related violence in certain border towns and despite the global economic downturn.



In a statement announcing the latest visitor figures, the tourism ministry did not allude to the drug violence that prompted travel alerts by both the U.S. and Canadian governments.

The global recession however, was blamed for a drop in tourism revenue, which totaled \$2.38 billion for the first two months of the year, down 7.5% vs. the same period in 2008.

The tourism ministry said recession-weary visitors are taking shorter trips to Mexico and are spending less while on vacation.

Part of the decline in revenue was also blamed on the Mexican peso's steep losses in recent months, which has lowered prices on local tourism products and services.

Despite the global economic slump, Mexico could come out ahead of many of its chief competitors due to its proximity to the U.S., the country's main source of visitors, the ministry said.

By comparison, the tourism ministry cited Spain, which recorded a 13% drop in international visitors during the first two months of this year compared with 2008.

Last year, Mexico welcomed a total of 22.6 million tourists.

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