

Increase in Texas Clients Could Help Mazatlan Break Close to Even

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Travel Agent chatted Monday with Carlos Berdegue, vice president of the Mazatlan Hotel Association, and learned that a new highway that will connect the destination to **Texas** is roughly 70 percent finished and could be fully complete by either October or November.

“That’s really big news for the destination because we will be getting traffic from Texas that we weren’t getting in any other year and that’s why we think it will help us somewhat break even for the year,” Berdegue, told us.

Well, Mazatlan won’t exactly break even, but it will be close. Currently, the destination is projecting a six-percent drop from this time last year, which is still the effect of some negative publicity that prompted several major cruise lines to pull out of the destination last year. Once the road, which is called the **Mazatlan-Durango Highway**, is complete and the destination welcomes and influx of clients from Texas – as well as a continued rise in both the Mexican and Canadian markets – Mazatlán could be facing only a three-percent drop by year’s end.



The highway will also shave an estimated six hours off the journey time between the state capitals of Mazatlan and Durango, from eight hours to two. It will pass **Sierra Madre Occidental** through 63 new tunnels and 11 new bridges, including what will be **Latin America’s** tallest cable-based bridge. Eight of the 11 bridges will be more than about 1,000 feet high. About 11 miles – one-fourth of the route – will be underground.

The new highway will also feature **North America’s** tallest bridge **Baluarte Bridge** in the state of **Sinaloa**, towering over the height of the **Eiffel Tower** at 1,321 feet. It is the second highest bridge in the world – after **China’s Si Du River Bridge** – and the world’s highest cable-stayed bridge. There is roughly \$1.2 billion invested in the 45-mile stretch of Mazatlán-Durango Highway, which will connect **Mexican Federal Highway 40**, also known as the **Carretera Interoceánica (Interoceanic Highway)**, a four-lane divided highway that links Durango with Reynosa, a major Mexican border city.

It will also replace the notoriously dangerous winding road known as the "devil's backbone" that crosses the jagged peaks of the Sierra Madre Occidental.

“The cruise stuff really hurt us for a bit, but we are seeing all of those visitors beginning to come back now,” says Berdegue, who noted that the average monthly hotel occupancy is currently at about 72 percent, which is roughly six percent higher than this time last year.

And the rebound of Mazatlan’s cruise business is also helping the destination get back what it lost last year. In fact, local businesses and tour operators in Mazatlán recently welcomed more than 600 passengers aboard **Oceania Cruises** flagship, “**Regatta**” in late May. The travelers, primarily American, Canadian, **Thai** and **Dutch**, spent 12 hours in the city, exploring the historical center, sampling the local cuisine and touring the nearby rural communities.

Despite the departure of cruise lines such as **Holland America** in 2011, cruise activity is gradually picking up in the port of Mazatlán, beginning with Oceania Cruises. Tourism officials held meetings with a number of cruise lines at **Cruise Shipping Miami** this past March, many of which intend on returning to Mazatlán soon.

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