

THE VANCOUVER SUN

Look Beyond the Beach to Find the Real México

Written By Carlos Berdegue



I have watched for some time now, as commentators in the Canadian media have lectured travelers, cautioning them about "dangers in Mexico," fundamentally failing to consider the vastness of our country and the nuance of the region. It seems all too often the true nature of Mexico is misconstrued and misunderstood all to the detriment of travelers the world over.

It is no secret Mexico has faced its fair share of challenges. But no country should be painted with a broad, uniform brush. Mexico is a geographically large country, close to the size of western Europe, so saying "Mexico" is dangerous because of violence in Ciudad Juárez is like saying "Vancouver" is dangerous because of violence in Downtown Eastside.

But let me tell you specifically about my home. I was born and raised in Mazatlan, a fishing town turned tourist destination on the Pacific coast of Mexico, north of Puerto Vallarta. As a young man, my father Julio Berdegue came to Mazatlan with a vision. He not only built Mexico's largest commercial shrimp fleet; he created the first master-planned resort community during the early 1970s in Mexico, known as the El Cid Resorts.

Mazatlan is much more than simply a sun and beach destination; it is a diverse city of 450,000 people, home to a dynamic year-long cultural program, deep history, dazzling art and world-class gastronomy, myriad adventure and sporting activities, not to mention a glorious beach. Founded in 1531, Mazatlan boasts a rich cultural heritage; Mazatlan was not created for tourists, and its authenticity is palpable.

Mazatlan is a distinctly Mexican city, but has long been shaped by international influences. From its founding, the city was shaped by the arrival of Spanish and German immigrants, who helped transform Mazatlan into a busy seaport while also leaving their mark on our culture, from music to gastronomy.

We, as Mazatlecos, task ourselves with sharing Mazatlan's story, its history and culture with others, whether with Mexican-born visitors, Canadian tourists of which there were 60,000 in 2011, or one of the 9,000 Americans and Canadians who have decided to call Mazatlan their home.

I promise you will enjoy Old Mazatlan and our historic district, home to the world-recognized Angela Peralta Theatre, stunning sandy beaches along the Malecon and the lighthouse, El Faro, the second highest in the world, which stands tall over the city. You will enjoy the thrill of watching Mazatlan's famous cliff divers, zip lining over agave fields and catching some waves.

But most of all, you will enjoy the people, the real Mazatlecos, a group of natives so proud of their history and culture they will want to share it with you. A group of people so hospitable you will feel right at home.

Carlos Berdegue is the president and CEO of El Cid Resorts, a Mexican hotel chain with properties in Mazatlan, Cozumel and Cancún. He is vice-president of the Mazatlan Hotel Association.

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