

Palena in Chile: A Piece of Paradise

Located in Chile in the southeastern corner of South America's Lake Region, Palena has almost 6,000 square miles of rivers, lakes, mountains, fjords, glaciers, hot springs, and virgin forests—a land of enormous wealth in natural resources, but fewer than twenty thousand inhabitants.

This territory of impressive natural beauty is divided into five townships. Its capital, Chaitén, was devastated by a volcanic eruption in May of 2008. Chaitén, Cochamó and Hualaihué are the largest townships, with extensive coastlines on the inland sea to their west, and Futaleufú and Alto Palena are at high elevations in the mountainous interior.

With these geographical characteristics, Palena's scenery and fauna provide an interesting backdrop for activities such as hiking, horseback riding, kayaking, rafting, canyoning and fly-fishing in its generous, fast-flowing rivers. And thanks to its proximity to the Puerto Montt and its El Tepual International Airport, good connectivity is available by land and sea, with multiple air taxi services.

Chaitén: Pristine nature

Chaitén is the connection by sea to Palena and the rest of Chile's far south. Surrounded by numerous natural attractions, it was made just a gateway by the volcano, but its beautiful scenery, with its valleys, fjords, volcanoes, lakes, rivers, redwood forests, lagoons, the sea and islands, remains intact. Activities vary from soaking in hot springs, to canyoning, climbing and fly-fishing in beautiful rivers like the Yelcho.

Futaleufú: A landscape painted by God

Considered Palena's capital of tourism, this township is world-famous for the river of the same name, one of the finest for world-class competitive kayaking and rafting. Its assorted rivers, lakes, mountains, forests and valleys are the ideal setting for getting back to nature at its purest.

In Espolón, el Azul, las Escalas and Río Chico several Chilean and international operators, and increasingly local businessmen, offer kayaking and rafting trips down the Futaleufú River, trekking, horseback riding and fly-fishing.

A territory of abundant natural riches, Futaleufú still possesses undeveloped potential for eco-tourism in unexplored valleys and canyons. The Espolón valley leads to the Blanco Volcano, which beckons climbers and trekkers.

Alto Palena: Paradise at the world's end

Small fertile evergreen valleys, such as El Azul and California, surround Alto Palena and emerge as a real Eden hidden between the frost of the mountains and the dry pampas. Forests of Southern Beech, uncountable lagoons in the sectors El Diablo y Puerto Ramírez and peaks over 6,000 feet,



Kayaking in Palena.

are just a few of the surprises offered by this region of fewer than three inhabitants per square mile.

In Lake Palena National Reserve, a binational watershed, lies the source of the Palena River navigable by kayak throughout its entire course to the sea. Where the Futaleufú River empties into Lake Yelcho, also located within the Reserve, is a fly-fisherman's paradise, just as Moro Peak, a 6,581-foot rocky massif, is a climber's delight.

Hualaihué: Hot springs and nature

Located only two hours by land from the city of Puerto Montt, including a half-hour ferry ride, Hualaihué possesses landscapes of astounding beauty, and its capital, Hornopirén, has the necessary services to make it a good base from which to organize excursions.

Hualaihué's hot springs with their rustic installations lure and fascinate visitors. Pumalín Park, a private nature reserve within the township, has excellent installations for receiving those who come to enjoy its interesting trails and special flora and fauna.

Cochamó: Adventure in Patagonia

Cochamó is only 1.5 hours by land from the city of Puerto Montt and offers many adventure tourism activities. Known as "Patagonia's secret," Cochamó is characterized by its outstanding landscape; great numbers choose it as "the place" to practice extreme sports such as rock climbing.

Cochamó has good support services that provide a range of possibilities to travelers. Trekking, sport fishing, horseback riding, kayaking and observing the natural habitat are only a few possibilities for visitors to this challenging spot.

Its proximity to important cities with their services makes Cochamó an ideal destination for those who can spend only a few days in the region.

www.patagoniaverde.com

HOTEL LIBERTADOR PALACIO DEL INKA CUSCO AMONG BEST HOTELS IN SOUTH AMERICA



The renowned American travel magazine *Condé Nast Traveler*, through a recent survey of 32,000 readers, has reported that Peru boasts three of the best fifteen hotels in South America, and Hotel Libertador Palacio del Inka Cusco is one of them. The well-respected magazine has been publishing for twenty years and this year it was named as one of the ten most important magazines in the United States by *Adweek* and *Advertising Age*.

Located at number twelve in *Traveler's* list, the five-star Hotel Libertador Palacio del Inka Cusco offers its guests an unparalleled location in the historic center of the imperial city of Cusco facing the Inca Koricancha, or Temple of the Sun—just ten minutes from

Cusco's international airport.

El Hotel Libertador Palacio del Inka Cusco has 254 rooms ranging from standard accommodation to superior rooms and suites. This hotel is renowned for its innovative gastronomy, with chefs who combine the best of international cuisine with ingredients unique to the Cusco region.

Libertador Hotels, Resorts & Spas owns exclusive properties in Arequipa, Cusco, Puno, Lima and Trujillo—all highly desirable travel locations in Peru.

In addition, the company is currently building the new Hotel Libertador Paracas, which is expected to be the supreme resort and spa on the Peruvian coast.

Together with the American hotel chain Starwood, Libertador Hotels, Resorts & Spas is building Westin Lima (the first in South America) and the Hotel Tambo del Inka Luxury Collection (in the Sacred Valley of the Incas—Urubamba). The Hotel Libertador Palacio del Inka Cusco will also form part of the new Luxury Collection.

Libertador Hotels, Resorts & Spas, etrigoso@libertador.com.pe, www.libertador.com.pe

LOCAL TOURS IN QUITO FROM LARC

The Latin America Reservation Center (LARC) is providing tours on a shared basis for agents, giving them an opportunity to offer money-saving choices to travelers already in Quito.

LARC suggests agents keep a printout of this special offer handy at their desks, to remind them they can offer it to their passengers and save them precious travel dollars. The valuable add-on should produce win-win bookings.

The minimum number of people required to operate the tours is two. Excursions take place Friday, Saturday and Sunday only. LARC will pick up at any Quito hotel.

Tours are offered with or without lunch. Prices and details for those including lunch are as follows: Fridays: city tour of Quito plus trip to the Equator with lunch in Cochabamba, \$55 per person, with minimum two persons booking; Saturdays: full-day trip to Otavalo with lunch at La Mirage, \$89 per person, minimum two persons booking; and Sundays: full-day trip to Cotopaxi with lunch at Tambopaxi, \$72 per person, with the two-person minimum.

Without lunch, tours are Fridays: city plus Equator, \$29 per person with minimum two persons booking; Saturdays: full-day excursions to Otavalo, \$49 per person with minimum two booking; and Sundays: full-day excursions to Cotopaxi, \$59 per person, minimum two booking.

The commission for agents is 10 percent. Rates do not include entrance fees, tips, drinks, and personal expenses. For tours that do not include lunch, persons will be taken to the restaurants listed where they pay directly for their meals.

Latin America Reservation Center (LARC), 800-327-3573, travel@LARC1.com, latinamerica@verizon.net; www.LARC1.com

AUSTIN-LEHMAN ADVENTURES HAS EXPANSIVE PERU ITINERARY FOR TIME-CHALLENGED TRAVELERS



Austin-Lehman Adventures (ALA) has expanded their South American trip portfolio to include an adventurous journey along the Cusco to Puno corridor through Peru's Sacred Valley to Machu Picchu and then on to the waters of Lake Titicaca.

"Our trip represents one of the most comprehensive overviews of Peru and its indigenous cultures available to today's time-challenged traveler," says Dan Austin, ALA co-founder and director.

"We accomplish this journey in a nine-day/eight-night package from start to finish," he says, noting that it took three years to carefully research and plan what he calls a "perfectly paced" program that includes Machu Picchu, the pre-Incan ruins at Pucara and a number of unheralded sites such as a kayak excursion on Lake Titicaca to Isla Taquile where residents in native costume thrive without electricity. One highlight of the adventure is biking the breathtaking Tinajani canyon alongside towering rock formations. Nights are spent in exemplary lodgings or luxury campsites.

There are four scheduled 2009 departures: March 25–April 3, June 6–14, August 1–9, and October 17–25. The nearly all-inclusive ppdo rate is \$3,998 (\$880 single supplement)—exclusive of internal air which is \$360. Included are first-class accommodations, most meals and beverages, expert guides, park entry fees, multisport activities such as hiking, biking, kayaking and more, ground transportation and luggage service. Not included is round trip travel to the host city.

Austin-Lehman Adventures manages all arrangements for its selected destinations that include iconic regions of North, Central and South America as well as southern Africa and Europe. Small groups are limited to 12 guests (18 on family departures).

Austin-Lehman Adventures, 800-575-1540,
www.austinlehman.com

ADVENTURE TOURISM WITH CRILLON TOURS

Three exciting adventure programs have been organized by La Paz's Crillon Tours for Bolivia. A four-day/three-night Madidi National Park rafting and expedition program allows visitors to experience fun rafting on the Tuichi River. The expedition is supported by professional guides, first-aid experts, full equipment, a specialized cook and a motorboat. Nights are spent in comfortable tents at the river shores. The Amazon exploration alternative exposes the luxurious flora and spectacular fauna of the region. One may also choose tailor-made expedition programs for special interests: Adventure and Nature, Photo Tour and Bird Watching.

Trekking in the Top of the World and Titicaca Islands runs two days/one night. Crillon Tours Adventures launched a new trekking flier covering Royal Range and subtropical Valley trekking programs and this TRK-151 soft adventure option has been well received by clients for its coverage of outstanding Andes highlights.

Pampalarama, an Indigenous Community Project is a full-day option. Crillon Tours is supporting emerging indigenous community projects and Pampalarama is an Aymara settlement dating back to 1871 that maintains the essential traditions and features of the Aymara culture. Located at the foothill of the Chacaltaya Mountain at the Royal Cordillera and one hour from La Paz, Pampalarama is open to tourism so visitors can enjoy this community dedicated to agriculture, the growing of llamas and alpacas and the production of "charke," dried llama meat. The project emphasizes the preservation of nature within a sustainable development.

Crillon Tours, titicaca@entelnet.bo, ngutierr@titicaca.com,
www.titicaca.com

SAMARI RESORT & SPA IN ECUADOR HAS LAND AND TRADITION THAT INSPIRES

Dr. Jose Gallegos Mora, General Manager of Samari Resort & Spa in Banos, Ecuador, has appointed LARC (Latin America Reservation Center, Inc.) as Samari's North America sales and reservations office. Dr. Gallegos Mora, inspired by its mystic energy, purchased the property and transformed that which was a Jesuit monastery with beautiful countryside to produce what the Samari Resort is today. A stone house was converted into a gourmet restaurant; its hollow walls were discovered by builders to be a long-forgotten wine cellar. Artists, craftsmen and other masters from all over Ecuador have put together the structures of wood and stone, gold and silver work, metal crafts, paintings and handicrafts.

3D/2n packages are available and include the round-trip private car and driver Quito to Banos with stops enroute, accommodations, map and 22-percent Ecuadorian taxes. Rates range from \$510 to \$560 ppdo, depending on the desired room type, with additional nights available.

Latin America Reservation Center (LARC), 800-327-3573,
travel@larc1.com, latinamerica@verizon.net, www.larc1.com

SMALL-SHIP COMPANY ECOVENTURA SINGLED OUT TO RECEIVE AWARD FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM



The small-ship, visionary travel company, Ecoventura, got a pat on the back at World Travel Market in London earlier this month.

Ecoventura received the "Best in Marine Environment" accolade, among 13 overall award categories on responsible tourism presented by Virgin Holidays. Judges noted that Ecoventura contributes scholarships for education and helps local women develop micro-businesses. It recently converted a fishing boat into a restaurant and boutique providing alternative livelihoods for the wives of fishermen. Ecoventura was also recognized to be among the first cruise operators to be independently environmentally audited.

"We, as a company, are both humbled and energized by this prestigious award," said Ecoventura president Santiago Dunn who was present to receive the award. "It's wonderful to be recognized for our past efforts but our groundbreaking work on setting the bar for responsible tourism in the Galapagos has just begun."

The distinguished panel of judges included Professor Harold Goodwin, co-director of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism at Leeds Metropolitan University; Justin Francis, managing director of responsibletourism.com; and Graham Boynton, group travel editor of Telegraph Media Group.

"In this, the fifth year of the Awards, the bar has been raised for responsible tourism yet again," said Justin Francis. "What inspires me are the efforts that businesses and destinations are making to ensure that responsible tourism lies at the heart of their strategies and plans. Without a doubt, this is the only way to plan for the future—responsible travel is not a passing fad or a niche travel trend for marketing purposes. It is an entire, holistic approach to tourism operations."

Ecoventura, 800-644-7972, www.ecoventura.com

BOUNDLESS JOURNEYS ANNOUNCES PERU: SACRED VALLEY & MACHU PICCHU TRIP AS CHARITY EVENT FOR 2009



Boundless Journeys is offering its August 2–9, 2009 Peru: The Sacred Valley & Machu Picchu trip as a special charity event to benefit the Instituto Machu Picchu and a community school in the village of Huanca. This follows the company's successful 2008 event, a Tanzanian safari benefiting the Foundation for African Medicine and Education, which resulted in a donation of \$6,000 to FAME and the participation of 10 Boundless Journeys clients in a well-child check at a Karatu, Tanzania orphanage.

Founded in 1999 by Alfredo Ferreyros, IMAPI is a natural extension of the philosophies and practices that made him a 2007 winner of the Adventure Travel Trade Association's Lifetime Achievement Award. A Peruvian nonprofit association dedicated to the conservation of natural and cultural resources in the Machu Picchu Sanctuary and Cusco region, IMAPI's primary goal is to promote and execute projects related to the sustainable development of tourism, agriculture, cottage industries, education, and scientific research.

As Karen Cleary, Peru Trip Manager for Boundless Journeys notes "It is part of Boundless Journeys' mission to plan an annual charity event trip as one aspect of our commitment to sustainable tourism. The Huanca community school is in need of renovation and restoration. Our donation to the project of approximately \$4,900, plus the time our guests will spend working, will allow the community to accomplish this important goal."

Along with the popular walking and hiking tour including important sites in the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu, Boundless Journeys guests participating in the August 2–9 charity event will have the opportunity to spend a day working with Huanca villagers, assisting electricians, carpenters, painters, and masons to complete the community school renovation project; and spend the night camping in the community, giving participants time to get to know the villagers better, and enjoying a traditional party to celebrate the completion of the project.

Group size is limited to 16 for Boundless Journeys' charity event Peru: The Sacred Valley & Machu Picchu. Cost is \$4,295 per person (not including international airfare).

Boundless Journeys, 800-941-8010,

karen@boundlessjourneys.com, www.boundlessjourneys.com

NEW BELIZEAN RESORT TRANQUILITY LODGE IS 'WILD BY NATURE, TRANQUIL BY DESIGN'

Sheila and Rusty Nale have announced their purchase of Tranquility Lodge in the Toledo District of Southern Belize. After 12 years in hotel management in Belize, it was a natural progression to become owners of a lodge.

Tranquility Lodge is already a prime spot for birders and adventure seekers alike. With the November 2009 addition of a jungle spa, it will become a prime choice for travellers to Toledo District looking for affordable luxury.

Catherine Paz, manager of Tropic Air, says, "Toledo District is being discovered for its tropical lushness, exhilarating adventure, and vibrant Mayan culture. Tranquility Lodge is the place to embrace it all in affordable luxury accommodations."

Situated 8 miles from Punta Gorda Town off the Southern Highway in a peaceful, secluded setting on 20 acres of lush tropical gardens and jungle, Tranquility Lodge is an ideal base for exploring the cultural and eco-adventure activities of southern Belize. Afterwards, guests will enjoy tranquil spa services, superb dining, and casually elegant accommodations.

Tranquility Lodge, 800-819-9088,
info@tranquility-lodge.com,
www.tranquility-lodge.com

CHAN CHICH LODGE PROVIDES IDEAL BASE TO EXPLORE BELIZEAN NATURAL WONDERS

With an unparalleled abundance of wildlife (and the best chance to see the elusive jaguar in its natural habitat), Chan Chich is an extraordinary destination for those seeking an authentic retreat to the jungle. The attractive Lodge is on a 130,000-acre private nature reserve in northwestern Belize at the heart of "La Selva Maya," a launching spot for day trips to historical sites and jungle walks through the extensive Mayan trail system.

Gallon Jug also has guided horseriding

along trails and remote Mayan sites such as Punta de Cacao, deep within the jungle. Laguna Verde, a small natural spring-fed lake about four miles north of the Farm, provides fun canoe rides.

A small group of friends or family can now enjoy all these ecological treats with a stay in Chan Chich Lodge's new Villa, situated at the southeast corner of the plaza bordering the jungle. Comprising two bedrooms with king beds, the lovely structure with its generous deck looking out into Belizean flora, has also the following amenities: A/C; two outdoor living areas, one screened with a private Jacuzzi and

outdoor shower; and a large but intimate living room complete with its own bar. The accommodation also comes with a golf cart for its guests' personal use.

Rates for the Villa, which accommodates two to five persons are, for High Season through April 30, \$895; and \$795 for Low Season, May 1 through October 31, 2009.

The cost of the meal package is: adults, \$70 plus 10-percent GST; and for children under 12, \$30 plus 10-percent GST. Rates are effective until October 31, 2009, and do not include the nine-percent hotel tax.

Chan Chich Lodge, 800-343-8009,
info@chanchich.com, www.chanchich.com



CHAA CREEK GIVES THANKS

During this holiday season, the management of Chaa Creek would like to take a moment to express our feelings of sincere gratitude. To the country of Belize, thank you for offering an extraordinary landscape in which to grow and excel. To our staff, thank you for breathing life into the environment and forming the heart of a truly magical Belizean experience. To our colleagues and guests, thank you for guiding our hand, sustaining our work, and for becoming an integral part of our special little world. And to the god of all things and creator of nature's bountiful riches, our gratitude is as it should be, beyond measure.

November, 2008 World Recognition

National Geographic Adventure Magazine, Worlds Top 50 Eco Lodges: Chaa Creek, Belize

"The Most Earth-Friendly Retreats In The World's Most Spectacular Wilds"

Travel & Leisure Magazine, Worlds Best Hotels in Mexico, Central and South America: Chaa Creek, Belize

"The Very Best Hotels In The World"

Conde Nast Magazine, Worlds Best Places to Stay in Central and South America: Chaa Creek, Belize

"Exotic Hideaways Where Creatures Meet Creature Comforts"

The Lodge at Chaa Creek employs over 120 Belizeans and extends job training opportunities to many students. Hundred of school children receive hands on knowledge at the Natural History Centre, Butterfly Farm, and Maya Medicinal Trail, set within Chaa Creek's 365 acre reserve. A respect for the environment and the people who toil to sustain it's full potential combine to secure a future filled with promise. A future that Chaa Creek is very proud to be part of.

*"And in the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter, and sharing of pleasures.
For in the dew of little things the heart finds its morning and is refreshed."*

Khalil Gibran

For more information about

The Lodge at Chaa Creek

contact the property toll free 877-709-8708, Belize (501) 824-2037

email: reservations@chaacreek.com or visit our website: www.chaacreek.com



PALMETTO BAY OFFERS OPPORTUNITY TO ENJOY ROATAN BEACHES, WATER SPORTS

At Palmetto Bay Plantation, an eco-friendly resort on the north shore of Roatan, Honduras. The resort's amenities include a beachfront restaurant and bar with live music on weekend nights, and a pool and hot tub looking onto the beach. Private Balinese-style villas equipped with modern appliances have wide sundecks surrounded by tropical gardens and oceanfront views.

Special 2009 eight-day/seven-night packages, featuring an all-inclusive meal plan plus specific activities for each, are listed with prices exclusive of lodging. Lodging prices vary and are per house, not per guest, ranging from weekly rates of \$1,000–\$1,800 (daily \$150–\$270). The meal plan provides breakfast, lunch and dinner in Palmetto's beachfront restaurant. A fee of \$55 per adult and \$35 per child 12 or under is added to the daily rate. All items on the menu and nightly specials are included, except drinks from the bar and gratuities.

There's an Ecoadventure package for \$630 ppdo, a Relaxation package at \$677.50, a Diving package for \$680 plus \$35 diving taxes, a Spanish Course package at \$730, and a Heavenly Honeymoon or Romantic Getaway priced at \$707.50. Discount prices may be available for larger groups.

The rates listed for 2009 are rack rates commissionable at 20 percent. As an incentive to travel specialists Palmetto Bay offers a 10-percent commission on any activity and packages booked by

travel agents. Rates provided through Palmetto's website and brochure are valid through December 31, 2009 (taxes and gratuities not included). Tour operators should calculate taxes by adding 16 percent over lodging prices.

Palmetto Bay Plantation, rentalinfo@palmettobayplantation.com, www.palmettobayplantation.com

DIVE, FISH, RELAX: DRAMATIC RATE REDUCTIONS FOR BELIZE'S TURNEFFE

Turneffe Island Lodge in Belize has reduced rates up to 60 percent for 2009. For January 3 through May 31, package rates for four nights range from \$1,800 to \$2,400 ppdo; seven-night packages are priced from \$2,300 to \$3,120 ppdo. From June 1 through December 25, rates range from \$1,600 to \$2,220 ppdo for four-night packages to seven-night packages priced at \$2,100 to \$2,720 ppdo. Specific packages are designed for beachcombers (minimum) to those that encompass diving, fishing, and dive/fish combinations. Prices include deluxe lodge accommodations, all airport and boat transfers, all meals, daily morning coffee or tea delivered to the room, evening appetizers; iced tea, water, coffee and lemonade drinks. Gratuities and 10-percent tax are extra.

Rates are subject to change without notice and are not valid on previously-booked reservations. Detailed information is available on the Turneffe website.

Turneffe Island Lodge, 800-874-0118, info@turneffelodge.com, www.turneffelodge.com

CHAA CREEK PRESENTS A UNIQUE MAYA WEDDING IN THE RAINFOREST

Couples seeking a magical setting for their wedding will find the perfect backdrop at The Lodge at Chaa Creek, an award-winning eco-lodge in the enchanting tropical rainforests of Belize, with three distinct wedding packages offered. It is a 365-acre nature reserve along the verdant banks of the Macal River in the foothills of the ancient Maya Mountains in the Cayo District of Belize.

Maya Weddings are officiated at the nearby Maya temple ceremonial sites of Xunantunich and Cahal Pech, providing picture-perfect opportunities. They can also be performed in the privacy of Chaa Creek's own unexcavated Maya Temple site, Tunchilen, with its lush foliage backdrop.

Rainforest Weddings can be held at Chaa Creek's spa gardens on Butterfly Hill overlooking the Macal River Valley or other intriguing gardens around the property.

Butterfly Weddings can take place in the orchard overlooking the Macal River, on Butterfly Hill, or several garden spots of choosing.

Five-day all-inclusive wedding packages include airport transfers and allow time for the couple to enjoy spa pampering or other stress-relieving activities, with an experienced wedding coordinator ensuring hassle-free preparations for their special day.

Details on the wedding packages are outlined on the website. The Lodge at Chaa Creek, 877-709-8708, reservations@chaacreek.com, www.chaacreek.com/wedding/

SUNBREEZE HOTEL & SUNBREEZE SUITES

AMBERGRIS CAYE, BELIZE



*The SunBreeze Hotel features 43 rooms offering the facilities and services of a resort while the SunBreeze Suites has 20 oceanfront fully equipped suites. *Dive packages from US\$1,232 ppdbl for 7 nights deluxe room accommodations, room taxes, 4 days local 2 tank boat dives, 1 tank night dive and round trip air transfers.*

**Packages valid through April 20, 2009*

SUNBREEZE HOTEL

email:
sunbreeze@btl.net

website: www.sunbreezehotel.com
toll free: 1-800-688-0191

SUNBREEZE SUITES

email:
sunbreesesuites@sunbreesesuites.com

website: www.sunbreesesuites.com
toll free: 1-800-826-1631

LONELY PLANET NAMES MEXICO CITY ONE OF TOP 10 CITIES FOR 2009



Mexico City is a Lonely Planet Best in Travel 2009 pick for the Top 10 Cities in the world. The information website for travelers contains over 20,000 pages of detailed information, and is reviewed by an ongoing army of dedicated authors on the road. Formerly titled *Bluelist*, Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2009 captures the hottest trends and experiences for the year ahead and lists the best places to go and things to do all around the world.

"We are extremely excited to know that Lonely Planet has named Mexico City one of the Top 10 Cities in the world. Mexico City is immersed in culture, history and entertainment. There is something to be found in the city for everyone and we are proud that visitors around the world feel the same," said Oscar Fitch, CEO of the Mexico Tourism Board.

Mexico City is singled out for its architecture, rich culture, trendy bars, live-music venues, museums and fine restaurants. The World Baseball Classic and Festival de México en el Centro Histórico in March are highlights. Visiting the ruins at the Templo Mayor and taking a gondola ride through the canals of Xochimilco are also recommended as some top things to do. "The Most Unusual Place to Visit" is El Chopo, an alternative flea market held each Saturday that brings together locals with a variety of interests including metal heads and counterculturals seeking rare CDs and live music.

Lonely Planet just released a new guidebook to the city—its first since 2000. The two authors, one a long-time Mexico City resident and the other a Mexican aficionado, really capture the city's glory. With its insider's perspective, this guide makes the exciting city accessible to the traveler through in-the-know neighborhood reviews and detailed maps, walking tours, top gallery showings, extensive dining coverage from street eats to Mexican haute cuisine, and the best nightlife for all tastes.

Lonely Planet, www.lonelyplanet.com; Mexico Tourism Board, 800-929-4555, www.visitmexico.com, www.visitmexico.com

CAPELLA CELEBRATES IXTAPA AS FIRST IN SERIES OF FOUR MEXICAN PROPERTIES



In December, Capella Ixtapa marked the North American debut of the growing Capella Hotels and Resorts brand. The 59-room hotel, tucked into Mexico's lush Sierra Madre mountainside that overlooks the Pacific Ocean, is the first of four Capella Hotels and Resorts planned for Mexico. Joining Capella Ixtapa will be Capella Pedregal, to open in Cabo San Lucas spring 2009; Capella Bahia Maroma in Riviera Maya, also scheduled for this spring; and Capella Nahui, opening in Riviera Nayarit in winter 2010.

"We couldn't be more excited to unveil Capella Ixtapa," comments Romana Heeg, General Manager, Capella Ixtapa. "We're proud to be the first to introduce the Capella experience to Mexico and travelers from all over the world."

At Capella Ixtapa, guestrooms and suites cascade down the cliff toward the Pacific and range in size from 550 to 1,150 square feet, with airy outdoor terraces fronting the ocean and individual plunge pools thoughtfully positioned out of sight from other suites. Each room has a central computer system with controls for all of the room's functions (lights, curtains, etc.) at bedside.

Culinary options are A Mares, open for dinner and presenting the best local Mexican cuisine; Las Rocas, a rustic seafood restaurant featuring cliffside alfresco dining over the shoreline; and the Terrace Bar serving lunch and dinner, tiered in three levels to showcase the ocean views. Guests may also dine in the privacy of their guestroom or terrace through the resort's 24-hour room service, or arrange for a romantic dinner experience at a unique location on the grounds.

The 6,000-square-foot Spa at Capella Ixtapa has six individual treatment rooms and an additional couples treatment room with a rain shower and Jacuzzi. Spa guests are greeted with a foot cleanse and massage before being escorted to treatment rooms. Plunge pools highlight all 59 guestrooms, the resort beach is a welcome respite, and a nearby beach provides snorkeling, scuba diving, surfing and kayaking. Additionally, Capella Ixtapa enjoys proximity to two 18-hole championship golf courses. All activities, as well as dining reservations and off-site experiences, can be arranged by Capella's signature personal assistants.

Introductory rates start at \$350 ppd through December 2009. Capella Ixtapa, 877-247-6688, www.capellaixtapa.com