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LATIN AMERICA TRAVELMART *Score\$ In Colombia*



LATIN AMERICA

TRAVEL WORLD NEWS - SECTION THREE - NOVEMBER 2007

Latin America TravelMart Score\$ In Colombia

Cartagena Event Ranks As Most Succes\$\$ful Since 9-11.

MICHAEL IACHETTA

Perception is the reality, so the saying goes, and whatever the perception, the reality is that South America's Colombia recently staged the most successful Latin America TravelMart since 9-11 in history-drenched Cartagena, the first such conclave held in Colombia in nearly a quarter-of-a-century.

Indeed, image-plagued Colombia has come a long-way touristically since that last TravelMart, image-wise and otherwise –and the figures bear that out.

In fact, more than 265 suppliers, 300 buyers, 230 companies and 560 international tourism employees (30% from the U.S.) turned out for the recent 31st Latin America TravelMart in the Cartegna de Indias Convention Centre Sept.12-14 –a dramatic increase from the numbers recorded at Colombia's first TravelMart held in Bogotoa in 1981.

That increase is mirrored in the increase in tourism in Colombia, 1.3 million tourists to date, spending an average of \$800 to \$1200, up from 900,000 visitors the year before, an increase of around 15%, with those numbers expected to improve by year's end after the TravelMart exposure.

And those optimistic numbers reflect the positive international marketing influence of a relatively new Colombia tourism promotional arm, the government-funded and Miami-based ProExport Colombia, which has come up with slogans such as *Colombia Is Passion*, *Colombia Is The World's Best Kept Tourism Secret*, and *Colombia, The Only Risk Is Wanting to Stay*.

Those slogan's were bannered in red against the outside entrance walls of the Convention Centre as well as inside on the red carpets and walls surrounding the Colombia tourism booths leading to and from marketing informational/sales centers representing countries ranging from Ecuador, which will host next year's TravelMart in Quito, to Chile, host country a year later in Patagonia, with that country's tourism representatives attending their first TravelMart.

Each country in Central and South America put its best



Colombia Pavilion at TravelMart Latin America.

tourism foot forward, and that included Central America's Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama and South America's Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

But few, if any, had to do as much image-spinning as Colombia, with stepped up travel agent fam trips, increased advertising and far flung public relations campaigns akin to polishing a gem stone whose true layers of beauty had been obscured for far too long by an undercoating of negative publicity.

Indeed, the aforementioned "Risk" slogan confronts Colombia's image problem head on, and is indicative of how far ProExport Colombia has come in turning that negative image around with positive promotional efforts that came about as a result of the following dialogue, more or less:

"What can we do to create a positive image?" Colombia's dynamic President Alvaro Uribe supposedly asked government officials in words to that effect a few years back during a Bogota brainstorming session..

"We need lots of pro-Colombia publicity, but we don't have the money for that kind of campaign," he was allegedly told.

"I'll get you the money," he reportedly said.

And he has with the creation of ProExport a factor in engineering the tourism turnaround.

But first some background:

Colombia gained a degree of modern Hollywood notoriety around a decade ago when Kathleen Turner and Michael

Douglas starred in an action-packed kidnapping movie called *Romancing the Stone* ostensibly filmed in Cartagena, a UNESCO world heritage site rich in history, architecture, emeralds and more, but actually shot in technicolor, as it turned out, in Mexico for safety reasons.

That kind of image, and worse, has resulted in a dramatic Colombia turn for the better, touristically speaking, because it contributed to a government-sponsored image-enhancing campaign, part of what is called "The Uribe Phenomenon," as in the direct intervention of President Alvaro Uribe. That intervention has resulted in ProExport's showcasing the country at its best abroad while the Uribe team focused on making Colombia better in every way.

That ProExport tourism showcase focuses on the positives of Colombia as the only South American country that fringes on both the Atlantic and Pacific, and portrays it as a proud, passionate, lush country rich in emeralds, coffee, oil, beaches, mountains, historic cities, tropical fauna and wildlife.

In fact, Colombia has, perhaps surprisingly, more species of birds than anywhere else in the world with everything a tourist could want located about an hour away as Avianca flies, from beaches to cobblestoned streets, snow-covered peaks rising from a steamy coastal plain as well as cosmopolitan cities such as Bogota, Colombia's sprawling capital standing at the end of a vast plateau in the eastern Andes.

And then, of course, there is Cartagena, perhaps the most striking colonial city in South America, on the Caribbean coast of a country that straddles the equator.

Against that backdrop, there is also the downside of Colombia's perceived negative image: drug trafficking, left-wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary groups, terrorism, car bombings, more, all tackled head on by the Uribe government with a get-real-get-tough enforcement policy that has made readily discernible headway.

That headway includes plans that in-

clude yet go beyond spin control while expanding tourism, from jobs to infrastructure, while cracking down on the bad guys.

But slogans are just empty words unless you go beyond words and walk the walk as well as talk the talk, and ProExport made sure TravelMart walked that walk while talking that talk.

In fact, ProExport showcased Cartagena at its best to TravelMart participants, including several international journalists, this *Travel World News* contributing editor among them.

So we could write you a hymn of praise to the glories of Cartagena, from the well-preserved remnants of the Spanish Main's days of piracy, slavery and allegory to the 16th century fortifications that stretch seven miles long, stand 60 feet high and are generally regarded as the best example of Spanish conquest architecture in the Americas.

And we could wax eloquent about Ciudad Amurallada (the walled old city) and places like the 16th century Cathedral on Plaza de Bolivar, the Cerro de la Popa, a hilltop 17th century monastery that once was a fortress that now houses a museum, a chapel and is regarded as a kind of local miracle-working version of Fatima and Lourdes with incredible panoramic views, the Palacio de la Inquisicion with its implements of torture, the Plaza Santo Domingo, with the church built in 1539 the oldest in the city, that area coming alive with restaurants and bars at night.

There's even a novel in the church named for San Pedro Claver who ministered to slaves and whose body rests in a glass coffin beneath the altar of an adjoining church, or in the San Felipe fortress, perhaps the grandest of all Spanish fortresses in Americas, where the one-eyed, one-armed, one-legged hero of Cartagena, Blas de Lezo, emerged victorious after a 56-day siege of the city by the vastly superior British forces of Sir Edward Vernon with 27,000 men and 3,000 pieces of artillery in 1741, with Vernon allegedly so confident of victory the Brits were already

minting coins celebrating the win that never was.

And on and on, from the likes of Sir Francis Drake and the Frenchmen Baron de Pointis and Ducasse among those who challenged Cartagena's daunting outer forts and encircling walls to the five-star Charleston Cartagena-Claustro de Santa Teresa Hotel, a restored 17th century convent that once also served as a jail and police station before the upscale Charleston chain poured \$25 million into restoring it in the heart of the old town, to boutique hotels such as the Casa Quero, La Passion Hotel Boutique, Casa Pestagua, Casa del Marquez de Valehoyos and more, all travel agent commissionable at 10%.

But we'll leave the travel guide stuff to, well, the travel guides.

And we'll tell you instead about the stuff you can't read in travel guides. Like this writer breaking away from the group for late night walks around town, deliberately doing the Ugly American

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www.ghlhoteles.com

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thing by leaving my wallet deliberately exposed as it juttled out from my back pocket, and never being jostled, hassled or hustled.

There was, undeniably, a stepped up police presence everywhere, from the Centro Historico and the Corralito de Pietro with its four sectors (San Diego, La Matuna, Getsemani and Santo Domingo, each with their own stories to tell) to Boca Grande (Big Mouth), the most modern area of the city with its many hotels and restaurants. And from El Laguito (The Little Lake) to Castillogrande (Big Castle), two renowned restaurants.

And when the inevitable vendors came up to me wherever, whenever, from the official entrance to downtown through Puerto del Reloj (Clock Portal) to the Plaza de los Coches (Coach Square), they respected my "no dinero, sorry" and invariably asked me, politely, how I liked their city. And when I told them I had passionately fallen in love with Cartagena, they invariably nodded and uttered variations of "si, it is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and I am glad you like it."

But the name of the game is still making money, and TravelMart went beyond falling in love with Cartagena, passionately or otherwise. It provided, for example, the chance to meet tourism pros like Cristina Guerrero de Miranda, executive director of Quito Tourism, who said her splendid city had spent more than \$500 million over the past several years in restoring Quito to its former glory as the first UNESCO World Heritage site.

Quito is already looking forward to showcasing its facelift at the next Latin America TravelMart, from its "new town" with most of its hotels to the "old town" that has just finished its ten-year renewal program with its rich repository of religious architecture (including the San Francisco Cathedral, the first grand spiritual fortress on the continent) and decorative arts.

Indeed, Patricio Tamariz Duenas, Ecuador's executive director for Tourism Promotion, echoed Cristina's enthusiasm for Ecuador's image enhancement at the upcoming TravelMart because studies show there is a large segment of the traveling public that doesn't even know The Galapagos belongs to Ecuador. And that potential market doesn't have a clue as to what the country has to offer, from Quito to Guayaquil (traditional jumping off point for The Galapagos) and beyond, as the emerging "hot" ecological and historical destination.

And so it went, from Pablo Retamal, Chile's Tourism director for North America, attending his first TravelMart to observe how it was done and run while hoping to showcase the glories of Patagonia to future TravelMart attendees, to Jorge Rodriguez, Cruceros Australis spokesperson for one of the leading expedition cruise lines to Antarctica and Patagonia, who said he hoped to sign nearly \$1 million in new business as a result of TravelMart.

And so it went on land, sea and air, from viewing the 41 high



Cartagena a big hit with TravelMart delegates.

rises under construction since May 2007 (including an effort to create Colombia's tallest, the Torre de la Escollera, 56 floors currently being dismantled because of a construction defect revealed following a hurricane's impact) to improved port infrastructure that has helped Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines International up its number of sailings to and from Cartagena to Avianca incorporating 57 Airbus jetliners to its fleet as of 2008, with an option to purchase 32 additional aircraft. Thus Avianca becomes the Airline with the most modern fleet in America.

First timers at TravelMart like Jose Rodolgo de la Guardia and his wife, Ana Maria, president and marketing director for Panama Marine Adventures, were enthusiastic about business prospects for their week long upscale catamaran cruises featuring the Panama Canal experience.

And industry veterans such as Nathaniel Waring, president of Cox & King, Tampa, Florida, high end bookers to Latin America, Africa, Asia and beyond, had nothing but good things to say Cartagena in general and TravelMart in particular because it brought them to what Waring called "one of the most beautiful and best preserved colonial cities I've ever seen" as well as "gave me the chance to charter boats to check out the out islands and beaches of Cartagena" while drumming up new business and contacts in "an efficient, extremely well-run TravelMart setting."

TravelMart Latin America,

www.travelmartlatinamerica.com;

Proexport Colombia, pmiami1@proexport.com.co;

Avianca, 800-284-2622

Argentina Invites Your Clients

National Institute For Tourism And Promotion Opens The Country For Exploration

More than 50 U.S., Canadian and Mexico tour operators enjoyed three days in Buenos Aires before flying out to explore other areas of South America's largest country.

JOAN GONZALEZ

With American Airlines providing international segments and Aerolineas Argentinas flying invitees to various domestic destinations, Argentina's official tourism arm pulled off a rather complicated but highly successful introduction to one of South America's most scenic and fascinating countries. Argentina is the 9th largest country in the world and is bordered to the west by Chile, east by the Atlantic Ocean and to the north and northeast by Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

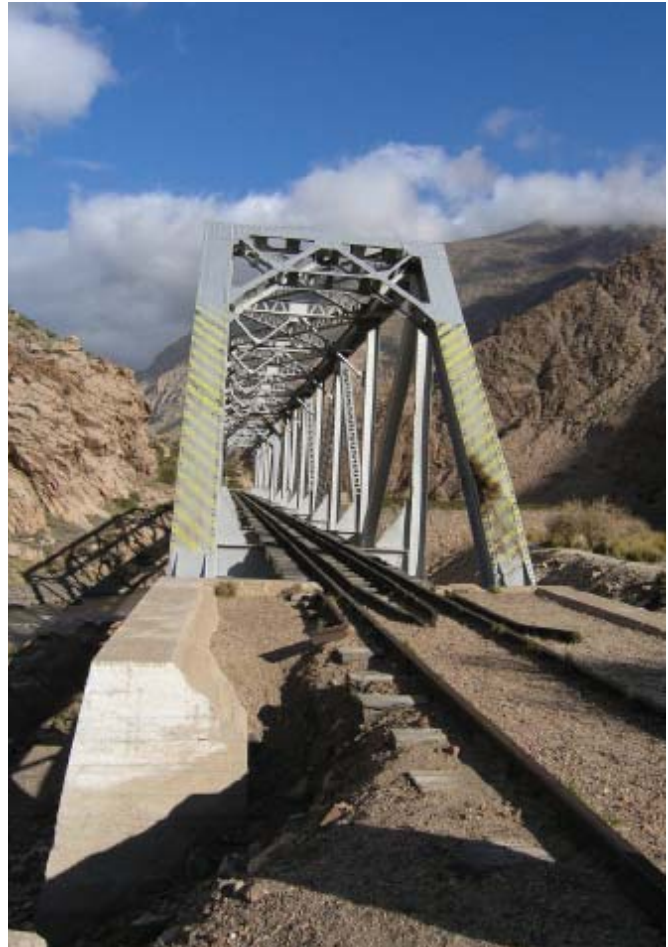
Officially called, "Argentina Invites You," the program gave tour operators from the United States and Canada the opportunity to personally visit various areas of Argentina, attend mini-trade shows to meet with individual hotel representatives and suppliers and return home armed with invaluable information, including brochures, CD's on all areas of Argentina and in many cases, signed agreements for future tourism packages.

After three days in Buenos Aires the group split and headed out for selected side trips that included Mendoza, the heart of Argentina's wine country and also known for three nearby ski resorts, Valle de Las Lenas, Penitentes and Vallecitos; Ushuaia, the world's southern-most city; the northwest circuit, known for its rich folklore where sightseeing ranges from modern cities to adobe villages; Bariloche, a ski resort area called, the District of Seven Lakes; Argentina's side of spectacular Iguazu Falls and Calafate, famous for its glaciers. Actually, the trip was more than an introduction, it was total immersion.

Argentina is definitely on the tourism radar screen and more popular than ever. Every seat on American's Boeing 777- 200 on the overnight run out of Miami to Buenos Aires was filled; however, flight attendants handled the crowd efficiently and pleasantly and passengers were off the plane, through immigration and collecting their baggage in a surprisingly short time.

Sophisticated City

Buenos Aires is one of South America's greatest cities with more of a European flavor than South American. It is known for its shopping (especially leather and wool clothing), fine restaurants, nightlife and cultural events. Accommodations were at the impressive Panamericano Hotel & Resort, with its striking black and white-checked marble floors and friendly staff. At the top of the hotel's North Tower is a spa, heated swimming pool, solarium, gym, sauna, beauty salon and a



JOAN GONZALEZ

Trains may once again cross this old bridge as early as October 2009 if plans come through to restore a portion of the old TransAndine railway that once carried passengers between Mendoza and Chile. Part of an Inca bridge can still be seen along the scenic highway that follows railroad tracks where trains once carried visitors between the two countries. There is some hope that at least part of the railroad will eventually be running again, at least for tourist trips.

spectacular view of the city. There is also a Panamericano Hotel in Bariloche.

Located along the city's famous boulevard, Avenida 9 de Julio, the hotel is just a few steps from the 219.76 foot-high concrete Obelisk built in a record 31 days in 1936 to commemorate the city's 400 year anniversary.

The hotel is also just a few blocks from Calle Florida (famous pedestrian-only street). The street has lost some of its shine, but bargains can still be found in the shops, street entertainers are still entertaining and it's a great place for a superb

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shoe shine. Also nearby is the Suipacha Factory Center at Suipacha 971, in the business of producing leather jackets, hand and tote bags, sweaters and et cetera for 40 years. Although it's within easy walking distance, free transfers plus bilingual assistance is offered from the Panamericano Hotel.

Panamericano Hotel & Resort,
buenosaires@panamericana.us,
www.panamericano.us

Entertainment

The Colon Theater (Teatro Colon) that rivals Milan, Italy's famed La Scala opera house is also near the Panamericano Hotel. April through December is prime opera and ballet season but the theater's opulence is so incredible, even a tour without a performance is awesome.

And of course you cannot allow your clients to leave Buenos Aires without seeing at least one tango show—they come in all sizes, depending on whether you prefer an intimate atmosphere or a "grande" performance. If the weather's good dancers perform continuously in the square in the colorful La Boca district.

About 100 years ago Italian workers built cheap houses in the area and

painted them with whatever color paint they could pilfer from their ships. (About 40% of the population is of Italian descent.)

If your clients would like a bit of history on their tango night out, the place to go is "The Viejo Almacen Dinner Tango Show." This was the scene of the first tango show in Buenos Aires, founded in 1969 by Edmundo Rivero, a popular tango singer. However, tango dancers at even the smallest restaurants or bars are always excellent and thrilling to watch.

"We have two tango houses," said Cristina G. Varas, El Viejo Almacen's sales manager, "the original, that has been declared an historical site by the Argentine government and another, larger one that is especially good for corporate or social events, both located in the San Telmo district."

To make special arrangements for groups, contact: Cristina Gomez Varas, sales manager.

Colon Theater, cristinagv@hotmail.com, www.viejoalmacen.com

Dining out

It is impossible not to over-eat in Buenos Aires. Order a steak at a restaurant along Puerto Madero (where a few

small ships still dock) and you may find yourself wondering how you're going to consume that huge slab of meat. One of the Canadian tour operators found a solution. She slipped out the door with her leftover steak wrapped in a napkin and shared it with a stray dog. (Name withheld to protect the guilty.)

And, the Café Tortoni at 825 Avenida de Mayo is an interesting place to stop for a cup of coffee. They've been serving coffee at the same spot since 1858. His Majesty Don Juan Carlos de Borbon, King of Spain, sipped a cup there as did Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Country Living

On the last day of touring Buenos Aires before setting out for other destinations of choice, the group was treated to lunch and a polo demonstration at the Resort de Campo & Polo, located less than an hour from the center of town. Polo was introduced to the Argentines by the English. The resort is an excellent place to unwind and especially for clients (adults and children) who think it would be fun to learn to play the game.

There is a swimming pool, the food is good and for those needing a break from city life, acres of land for quiet walks. Contact: Commercial Director, Esteban Giganti.

Resort De Campo & Polo,
marketing@poloresort.com,
www.poloresort.com

Mendoza, Wine Country

Mendoza is getting ready to explode. Really. And not just with vineyards, although grape vines are sprouting on every acre that hasn't been taken over by new hotels, motels, apart hotels, mountain hotels and rural hotels. But no need to panic, the wine industry is what fuels this lovely town and vineyards are not being plowed under to make way for hotels, although Sheraton is coming on strong. A new Sheraton is scheduled to open in 2009 and will be Mendoza's highest building.

Right now one of the most elegant is the Park Hyatt Mendoza Hotel, Casino



JOAN GONZALEZ

"La Boca" is the most colorful area in Buenos Aires, where buildings are painted all colors of the rainbow, where tango dancers perform in the streets and if you're looking for souvenirs, this is the place.

& Spa. The entrance looks like a grand old mansion, but the similarity ends there.

Park Hyatt Mendoza Hotel, Casino & Spa,
www.mendoza.park.hyatt.com

Accommodations for the group were at the 4-star Huentala Hotel Boutique with an excellent location. Walk out the door and the town is spread out in front of you. The atmosphere is friendly, the restaurant casual, it has a pool, spa, art gallery with interesting antiques and a cozy wine cellar that really is in the cellar.

Huentala Hotel Boutique, www.huentala.com

Wine of course is for drinking; however, in Mendoza, the "IXIR" company has developed cosmetic uses for red wine or at least from the grape extract. They advertise that they have found the secret of true youthfulness, using it for everything from moisturizing lotion to shampoo and including anti-aging treatments.

IXIR, www.ixir.com.ar

Visiting Wineries

Please advise your clients that prior arrangements, typically with a tour operator, should be made for visiting all wineries. It isn't advisable to just show up at the door.

Mendoza's wineries come in all sizes and the area is listed as eighth in importance in the world for wine production. There are four main regions, most within easy driving distance from the city and many have overnight accommodations, especially smaller wineries.

Most tour operators in Mendoza in addition to offering wine tours, operate interesting adventure trips throughout the region. Turismo Aymara, for example, was recently awarded an ISO 9001 in tourism in mountain areas, one of the few companies in the world to carry this designation. They offer excursions to the top of the Aconcagua and wine tours with a specialized enologist guide. (Loose translation: a person with a sensitive nose and sharp taste for judging wines). Manuel Martin, who heads up Aymara Tourism lives in Mendoza and has more than 15 years experience in receptive, adventure, educative, outdoors, corporate and adventure tourism.

Aymara Tourism, mmartin@aymara.com.ar,
www.aymaraturismo.com.ar

The Cavas Wine Lodge in Mendoza has only 14 rooms and sits at the foot of the Andes in the midst of a 35 acre vineyard, but it made it into Travel & Leisure Magazine. It's where Ana Barbeito, General Manager of Aventura & Wine, Personalized Tourist Services sends her clients.

Aventura & Wine, info@adventureawine.com,
www.adventurawine.com

Abax Travel, headquartered in Buenos Aires, offers group and individual travel, honeymoons, eco-tourism, incentive trips and luxury travel. Contact Guillermo Fernandez, Sales Manager.

Abax Travel, salesabax@abaxtravel.com.ar,
www.abaxtravel.com



JOAN GONZALEZ

Mendoza is Argentina's main wine region with more than 20 main wineries. Tour operators and agents from Canada and the U.S. enjoyed not only learning all about how wine is produced, but also enjoyed the "tastings."

Amahuaca, Destination Management Company covers Argentina catering to leisure groups, conferences Self drive (Fly and Drive) and "A la Carte" tours with guide/driver, also VIP guests. The company operates scheduled tours to Patagonia, Iguazu and northern Argentina.
amahuaca-5@uolsinectis.com.ar,
www.amahuaca.com

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Conquistar, received certificate of the NORMS ISO for high quality service, incentives and special tours. In business since 1988, also handles flight and maritime fares.

Conquistar,
www.conquistartravel.com.ar

Eurotur, wholesale and tour operator, special interest tours includes tours on some of Argentina's best and most scenic golf courses, polo, bicycle tours, weddings, tango tours, skiing. Mountaineering and kayaking.

Eurotur, correo@eurotur.com.ar,
www.eurotur.com.ar

Nature Style, Mariana Reschini in the incoming department emphasis their emphasis on adventure tourism including mountain biking, horseback trips, and trekking.

Nature Style,
mariana@naturestyle.com,
www.naturestyle.travel

Orbe Travel, based in Mendoza, covers the whole spectrum of fun activities in their part of Argentina with tours to wineries and the harvest festival, mountains, water therapy in thermal waters, mountain treks, paragliding, rating, mining and geological tourism.

Orbe Travel,
receptivo@orbetravel.com.ar,
www.orbetravel.com.ar

Siga Turismo. Golf tours are their specialty with nine courses to choose from. Also offer fishing trips and, to cover all bases, fashion shows. Contact Juan E.Schreiber, Director.

Siga Turismo, 877-835-6433,
jscheiber@sigaturismo.com,
sac@sigaturismo.com,

Turicentro, Covers the tourism spectrum in Argentina arranging business trips, trade fairs, conventions, and sports events and golfing.

Turicentro,
pmaggio@turicentro.com.ar,
www.turicentro.com.ar

Scenery Travel Service has been operating with offices in Buenos Aires since 1991, specializing in moderate prices for individuals, groups and incentives. Contact Natalia Veronica Dral.

Scenery Travel Service,
Ope16@scenery.com.ar,
www.scenery.com.ar

Helling's Travel, Lic. Valeria Manfra concentrates on the northwest, that is getting renewed attention. June, July and Sept. are the best months. Oct. through March/April is best for Patagonia.

Helling's Travel,
ahelling@hellingstravel.com.ar

Shopping of an unusual stone and other things

Argentina's national stone is rose-red in color and exists in such small quantities that it isn't even exported.

It was discovered by Inca Ripac, also called Viracocha when he conquered the northern part of Argentina for the Rahuantinsuyo or Inca Empire and mined by the Incas in the northern mountain range in the 12th or 13th century. Amulets made with the stone were found in Inca tombs alongside mummies. Rhodochrosite, the formal name, was formed millions of years ago. One of the mines producing the best quality is in the northern province of

Catamarca, near the mountain village of Capillita. A necklace with the Inca Rose makes a nice gift to take home from Argentina, but it can also be found in an endless variety of jewelry and ornamental settings.

More shopping

Top quality leather goods from shoes to purses, jackets and ladies suits to wallets, belts, briefcases and luggage. Also, shop for woolens, Shetland wool sweaters and cardigans, silver and semi-precious stones and on Sundays at the San Telmo Flea Market for everything.

Argentina Tourist Office,
800-555-0016,
www.sectur.gov.ar

FALKLAND ISLANDS TOURISM OUTLOOK FOR 2007-08

The coming season will see several exciting developments for tourism in the Falklands, most notably the appointment of a General Manager to FITB (Jake Downing), and an anticipated 81,000 cruise ship passengers, with the first boat due at West Point Island on October 20, 2007. A key part of Mr. Downing's role will be the development and implementation of a national tourism strategy, and the sourcing of funds to support the identified strategic actions. Current forecasts indicate that the 2007-08 cruise ship season will be the busiest on record for the Falkland Islands. Over 81,000 passengers are projected to visit the Islands, an increase of 58 percent on the 2006-07 season. Stanley is projected to receive 113 individual visits - an increase of 24 percent on the previous season. The town's busiest day is currently December 4, 2007, with 4,900 passengers anticipated from three vessels.

46 different vessels are anticipated to visit the Falklands during the course of the season (as compared to 42 previously). Sullivan shipping has managed to secure nine new vessels that will make their maiden call to the Islands in 2007-08.

Falkland Islands Tourist Board,
tourism@horizon.co.fk,
www.visitorfalklands.com

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LEARN ABOUT AND TASTY HANDCRAFTED LIQUORS IN THE COLCHAGUA VALLEY WITH SPORTSTOUR

Fruits and herbs such as boldo, raspberry, coffee and blueberry are mixed in to give life to the homemade liquors in the Colchagua Valley.

A few steps away from the Santa Cruz Plaza Hotel, travelers will find the mystic house where "Espiritus de Colchagua" liquors are created.

This trip is among the favorites of the hotel guests, not only for the chance to taste some of the liquors but also because it is a unique opportunity to learn about the elaborate process of creating these exquisite elixirs, which revive centuries old traditions.

The tour begins with a toast and a view of the raw material of the liquors. Then spices and fruits are selected which will give life to the "Espiritus de Colchagua" flavors.

Once the creation, by virtue of its natural and medicinal properties is done, the tour continues to the maceration cellar where the fruit, herb, and alcohol mixture rests.

There is where the ingredients free all their energies and eventually become the final product.

After an aging period, liquors are ready to be bottled and marketed. The magical trip ends with a tasting; flavors that stand out can include mint, lemon, blue-berries, cinnamon and rosemary, among others.

Beginning with only a few flavors, nowadays there are 40 varieties available. Cristian Marin, the producer, seeks a product whose purity begins with the ingredients that end up in their bottles.

He has an organic philosophy, with no synthetic agents interfering with its creation: "We are talking about an organic orientation because, sometimes, we take fruits or herbs from home gardens, and we know for sure they don't use pesticides. We look for something healthy and sustainable," he explains.

Sportstour, mailbox@sportstour.cl,
www.sportstour.cl

SOUTH STAR FEATURES CARNAVAL 2008 AND OFFERS BONUS COMMISSION

Carnaval is the ultimate party and nothing compares to the fast approaching world famous Carnaval in Rio de Janeiro. South Star Tours is offering two options for those who wish to attend and embrace the World's Greatest Party.

The first choice is a seven-day trip beginning on January 31, which allows revelers to freely explore the celebration that unfolds in the heart of Rio. It includes a choice of hotel accommodations ranging from four to five stars, and the opportunity to see and experience the Carnaval first hand and at your own pace. The second option, departing on January 26, is a 12-day trip which visits cosmopolitan Buenos Aires, amazing Iguassu Falls and ends in Rio de Janeiro's Carnaval, for those interested in experiencing the greatest highlights of South America, before the final celebration.

Rio's Carnaval 2008, from January 31 - February 6, 2008 (seven-days/five-nights) is priced at \$1,999 and up, according to the hotel selected. Rio Carnaval, Iguassu & Buenos Aires, from January 26 - February 6, 2008 (12-days/10-nights) is priced at \$3,179 per person. Both depart from Miami. LAX departure is \$150 additional. Other departure gates are also available upon request and at additional cost. Airport taxes not included. 11% agent commission is guaranteed and South Star Tours is offering \$50 cash back for all bookings received during the month of November.

South Star Tours, 800-654-4468,
info@southstartours.com,
www.southstartours.com

ORIENT-EXPRESS HOTELS ACQUIRES HOTEL DAS CATARATAS

Orient-Express Hotels Ltd. has announced its latest acquisition, the 200-room Hotel das Cataratas, the only hotel within the UNESCO World Heritage designated Iguacu National Park in the Paraná region of Brazil. The company will take over the operation of the hotel on October 1, 2007 and plans extensive renovations.

First opened as a hotel in 1958, the Hotel das Cataratas is a two-story Portuguese colonial style building. It has one of the most impressive and enviable locations in South America, with the world famous Iguacu Falls a two minute stroll from the property, and surrounded by national park.

The hotel now offers 85 standard rooms, 64 superior rooms, 49 deluxe rooms, three suites and two presidential suites. A number of rooms have direct views of the waterfalls. The Hotel das Cataratas houses two restaurants, The Restaurante Itaipu, serving a blend of Brazilian and international cuisine, and The Ipê Bar & Grill located by the main pool. The gardens contain a swimming pool and playground, tennis court, volleyball court and look-out point towards the Iguacu Falls.

The Hotel das Cataratas was the first property in Latin America to qualify for the ISO 14001 Environmental Management certification in recognition of its ecological operating policies.

This will be Orient-Express Hotels' third business in Brazil, where it also owns and manages the Copacabana Palace Hotel in Rio de Janeiro.

Orient-Express Hotels, Trains and Cruises,
www.orient-express.com

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THE VILLA GROUP BRINGS WEDDING BLISS AND HONEYMOON HIDEAWAYS TO CABO AND VALLARTA



Situated in Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta and Nuevo Vallarta, The Villa Group properties are ideal for vow renewals or holding a destination ceremony.

Celebrating Puerto Vallarta Style

At Villa del Palmar Beach Resort & Spa in Puerto Vallarta, the Golden Sand Wedding Ceremony package covers the bridal bouquet, groom's boutonniere, bottle of wine, ceremony, tax and service charge for \$482 through December 20, 2007.

The 2007 Honeymoon Package offers three nights stay, fruit basket, bottle of wine, strawberries with chocolate in-room, one in-room breakfast for two, and a romantic dinner for \$575 plus tax per couple through October 31, 2007 and for \$643 November 1 – December 20, 2007.

Celebrating Vallarta Nayarit Style

At Villa del Palmar Flamingos, a Wedding Ceremony with decorations, bouquet, boutonniere, hair and makeup, coordinator services, judge or minister, certificate, wine, and cake is \$1,600 through December 21, 2007.

The Honeymoon Package, available through December 21, 2007, starts at \$1,076 per couple and includes three-night stay, breakfast, fruit basket, moonlight couple's massage, flowers, wine, and certificate for a complimentary two-night stay on the first wedding anniversary.

Celebrating Cabo Style

Options in Cabo San Lucas include the Villa La Estancia Beach Resort & Spa; the Villa del Arco Beach Resort & Spa; and the family-oriented, all-suite Villa del Palmar Beach Resort & Spa.

A private Wedding Ceremony covers choice of sites on property, bouquet, boutonniere, coordinator services, photography, marriage

license, judge's fee, dinner on the beach, and taxes and gratuities. This ceremony is \$1,570, with a minimum stay of three nights. A civil Wedding Ceremony includes five-days/four-nights with breakfast, champagne, fruit basket, coordinator services, ceremony, bouquet, boutonniere, photography, and taxes and gratuities. Rates for this legal wedding ceremony and honeymoon are from \$2,730. Both Cabo ceremony packages are valid until December 23, 2007.

At Villa del Palmar, a Romantic Escape package features three-night accommodations, fruit basket, sparkling wine with strawberries, in-suite moonlight massage for two and a romantic dinner from \$1,475 plus tax per couple. The Villa La Estancia's three-night Gold Honeymoon package includes the same, plus in-suite check-in from \$1,875. The Villa del Arco's three-night Perfect Romance Package offers the same, plus a certificate for a complimentary night on an anniversary stay from \$1,770 per couple.

The Villa Group, 877-845-5247, weddingspvr@villagroup.com, weddings@villagroup.com.mx, www.TheVillaGroup.com

TABACÓN GRAND SPA RANKED AMONG WORLD'S BEST



Besting several "big name" spas in Central America, Tabacón Grand Spa Thermal Resort, a relative newcomer on Costa Rica's spa scene, has been selected the "Favorite Spa in Central America" and one of the world's "Top 10 Best Mineral Spring Water Spas" by the well-traveled spa-goers who recently weighed in on the 2007 Luxury SpaFinder Readers' Choice Awards. Resort Managing Director Uwe Wagner and Spa Director Rosa Paulina Perez, will accept the award at The Spa Experience 2007, a global spa showcase in New York City on November 1. The rainforest-sited resort completed an extensive renovation and enhancement program this past year which included the addition of The Grand Spa.

Wagner noted, "Following several months of thoughtfully considered enhancements aimed at elevating our guests' spa and resort experience, we have achieved our goal to operate what many feel is the finest spa facility in Central America," referencing other recent awards and accolades, including being selected as a "Recommended Property" in the prestigious Condé Nast Johansens Recommended Hotels, Inns, Resort & Spas collection (one of only four recommended resorts in Costa Rica and the only recommended luxury spa in Central America), and as a "Leading Spa of the World" by Leading Hotels of the World.

Tabacón Grand Spa Thermal Resort, 877-277-8291, www.tabacon.com, www.lhw.com

PANAMA MARINE ADVENTURES PROMOTES NEW "JOURNEY BETWEEN THE SEAS"



Pamela Ponce, Marketing Manager Panama Marine Adventures Cruises; Clark Kotula, Associate Director-Latin America Geographic Expeditions; Ana María de la Guardia, Marketing Manager Panama Marine Adventures Tours; José Rodolfo de la Guardia, President/CEO Panama Marine Adventures.

Panama Marine Adventures (PMA) attended their second Travel Mart Latin America in Cartagena, Colombia from September 14 – 15 to promote their new Panama expedition cruise product "The Journey Between The Seas" aboard a new luxury yacht the MV Discovery. During the event, PMA had the opportunity to meet with the representatives of some of the leading companies in the industry, who found this to be a very promising product. "We are excited about this new offering and think it is exactly the type of experience and level of service our clientele are looking for in Panama," said Clark Kotula, Associate Director – Latin America for Geographic Expeditions.

The Journey Between The Seas is an eight-day/seven-night expedition cruise that will take passengers to places of great interest along Panama's inter-oceanic route navigating from one ocean to the other. It is a beautiful way to experience everything that Panama has to offer, including native Indian cultures, beaches, the Panama Canal, its rainforests, and history that dates back to the days of Christopher Columbus. This seven night package includes seven nights on board, all meals (Panamanian gourmet), a splendid wine selection, all beverages (alcoholic and non-alcoholic), all on-board and shore activities (including the use of kayaks and other equipment), expert guides, and superb staff.

Panama Marine Adventures, Inc., 888-836-0102,
www.pmatours.net

CHAA CREEK WEBSITE WINS 2007 TRAVEL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

The Lodge at Chaa Creek's website, www.chaacreek.com, received the 2007 Travel Standard of Excellence Award during the Web Marketing Association's annual Website Awards Competition. The Web Marketing Association's Website Awards is the premier competition that names the best websites in over 96 industry categories while setting the standard of excellence of all website development. Chaa Creek's website competed with several other websites from countries around the world and received high points for design, innovation, content, interactivity, navigation, copywriting and use of technology.

The competition was judged by a team of independent internet professionals representing a variety of relevant disciplines of website development. Judges included members of the media, advertising executives, website designers, creative directors, corporate marketing executives, content providers and webmasters.

The Lodge at Chaa Creek is the premier destination in Belize for natural history travel. Chaa Creek offers the discerning traveler first-class accommodation and a wide-range of guided tours and activities in a unique jungle setting. Their programs are designed for travelers seeking both physical and intellectual challenges, or those who just want to sit back, relax and enjoy a truly unforgettable and enriching rainforest experience within the 365-acre private nature reserve along the banks of the Macal River.

The Lodge at Chaa Creek, reservations@chaacreek.com,
www.chaacreek.com

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toll free: 1-800-826-1631

DISCOVER HISTORIC CHICHICASTENANGO WITH CLARK TOURS

Clark Tours is the number one Tour Operator/Travel Agency in Guatemala. Since day one, Clark Tours of Guatemala has been dedicated to serving tourists in a highly professional and personalized manner. They are dedicated to providing the most efficient and reliable travel service in the country.

Their Inbound Division is dedicated to serving the clients every need, as well as promoting and selling Guatemala in all major markets of the globe. The Outbound Division promotes and sells travel to all parts of the world, as well as within Guatemala, to Guatemalans and foreigners living in Guatemala.

Their featured destination is Chichicastenango, located approximately 90 miles from Guatemala City. The open air market is widely known, offering native handicrafts. The merchants come down from the hills on Thursdays and Sundays to sell their wares in the central plaza. This is the most important and impressive indige-

nous market in the country and it has changed little throughout the centuries.

There are two Catholic churches, one on each side of the plaza where the Maxenos celebrate rituals that are typical of the combined beliefs in religion of the country, worshipping indigenous images such as Maximon (Saint Simon) in a completely Christian Catholic context.

The hills of Chuicatalina, Mucultzib, Pocojil and Turcaj or Pascual Ab'aj are located on Chichicastenango territory. 25 rivers cross the area, including the Zepela (the origin of the Motagua River), two creeks, seven ravines and a brook. The entire town is renowned for its archeological and artisan attractions.

The Mayan Inn has been welcoming guests to the area since 1932. There are 30 different rooms and three unique dining rooms for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The chef's prepare a tasteful blend of international and local dishes.

Clark Tours' Glimpse of Guatemala tour departs on Wednesday or Saturday for Antigua, the former Spanish-colonial capital, for sightseeing. After lunch continue to

Chichicastenango. On Thursday or Sunday visit the colorful open-air market and Church of Santo Tomas. After lunch return to Guatemala City via Lake Atitlan for a brief stop at the lake side village of Panajachel.

Clark Tours, info@clarktours.com.gt



HOLIDAY PACKAGE IN COSTA RICA WITH ALBEE ADVENTURES

Albee Adventures of Costa Rica is offering a special Holiday Package for 2007 from December 22, 2007– January 1, 2008.

This package includes a meet and greet at the San Jose International Airport by an Albee Adventures representative; private ground transfer to the Arenal Volcano Area; two nights at Tabacon Resort in a Garden Room with entrance to the Tabacon Hot Springs; a private jeep-boat-jeep transfer to Monteverde Area; two nights at El Establo Hotel in a Deluxe Room with complementary breakfast daily; private ground transfer to Guanacaste –Conchal Beach; and six nights at Paradisus Playa Conchal Hotel in a Deluxe Garden Room (all inclusive). Price pppo (land only) is \$3,495. International airfare, airport taxes, gratuities and tours not mentioned in the itinerary are not included.

Package can be adapted for two adults and two small children.

Albee Adventures, 800-326-0202, reservations@albeeadventures.com, www.albeeadventures.com

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50 Washington Street,
South Norwalk, CT 06854-2710
Voice: 203-853-4955 • Fax: 203-866-1153
www.travelworldnews.com

Charles Gatt, Jr., Publisher
charlie@travelworldnews.com

Jennifer M. Lane, Editor
editor@travelworldnews.com

Linda Rogers, Design Production Manager
production@travelworldnews.com

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BUENAVENTURA GRAND HOTEL & SPA ANNOUNCES NEW HONEYMOON PACKAGE



The newly renovated Buenaventura Grand Hotel & Spa welcomes couples to experience the romantic charm of Puerto Vallarta with the announcement of the resort's new Honeymoon Package. Couples can stroll the beach, discover the colonial district or relax and rejuvenate with spa treatments.

The Honeymoon Package is priced at \$840 per couple and includes three-nights/four-days all-inclusive accommodations in a Honeymoon Suite with ocean view and Jacuzzi; private dinner on the beach with romantic décor; one bottle of complimentary sparkling wine upon check in; and 30 minute couples massage.

Set in the heart of lively Puerto Vallarta, a five minute walk from Puerto Vallarta's beloved "Malecon" promenade, Buenaventura Grand Hotel & Spa provides a first-hand experience of local Mexican excitement and charm. Its 238 newly renovated rooms and suites plus two handicapped accessible rooms warmly host guests between daily beach activities and a night in town. All rooms have been remodeled, upgrading floors, bathrooms, furniture, amenities, accessories, linen and air conditioning.

Round-the-clock service ensures no desire is left unmet. Spacious rooms and suites feature great amenities, casual décor, balconies and ocean views.

Decorated in Contemporary Mexican detail, rooms include Satellite TV, safety de-

posit box, hair dryer, individually controlled air conditioning, daily maid service and more.

Rates include accommodations, all meals, gourmet dining, 24-hour room service, all drinks and cocktails, daily activities, non-motorized water sports, and all hotel taxes and tips.

The Honeymoon Package is based on double occupancy and is priced at \$840 valid for travel from now through December 21, 2007 and \$1,415 valid for travel from December 22, 2007 through January 1, 2008. Package pricing for 2008 is \$1,120 valid for travel from January 2, 2008 to March 31, 2008 and \$819 valid for travel from April 1, 2008 through July 7, 2008, and August 12, 2008 through October 31, 2008. This offer only applies to direct bookings only and is non-refundable, subject to hotel availability, and may not be combined with any other offers. A minimum stay of three nights is required.

Buenaventura Grand Hotel & Spa,
888-859-9439,
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KOR HOTEL GROUP TRANSFORMS HOTEL VILLA DEL SOL INTO THE TIDES ZIHUATANEJO

Advancing the international expansion of its recently launched Tides brand of luxury hotels and resorts, Los Angeles-based Kor Hotel Group has announced the transformation of its newest Mexico acquisition, Hotel Villa del Sol on the Mexican Riviera, into The Tides Zihuatanejo. To welcome the resort into The Tides family of elite properties, Kor has introduced an array of signature Tides amenities including an enhanced beach experience, exclusive butler services, and a seafood-themed restaurant offering private lagoon dining. Recently appointed General Manager, Carlos Blanco, previously with Jumby Bay in Antigua, has led the resort's transformation to-date and continues to work with the staff to build upon the resort's success.

"Kor Hotel Group continues to challenge traditional concepts of luxury hospitality through its commitment to provocative design and intuitive service in the most sought-after locations," said Nicholas



Clayton, President of Kor Hotel Group. "The Tides brand plays a key role in this strategy, offering chic beachfront resorts that emit a spirited, romantic ambience designed for travel connoisseurs who share our vision."

Two-story, adobe-inspired casitas house the resort's 35 guestrooms and 35 suites in a garden-setting. The resort features infinity pools and a 600-foot beach. The resort's new La Marea restaurant offers a beach club ambience and carefully crafted menus of Mediterranean/Mexican fare. The newly renamed Coral Bar offers colorful ceviche selections and a Tequila Maestro who facil-

itates tastings of Mexico's world-famous spirit. The resort's spa will soon be re-envisioned to include hacienda-like interiors, updated spa suites and an inspiring relaxation lounge.

The Tides Zihuatanejo's newly enhanced beachfront provides a number of enhancements, such as a high-noon complimentary beverage refresher service. Beach Butlers offer tanning products, neck cushions, pre-loaded iPods, pool and ocean-side dining, and cocktail services. After dark, The Tides Zihuatanejo's sands become a bonfire beach lounge.

The Tides, www.thetidesresorts.com

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VILLA PREMIERE HOTEL & SPA OFFERS GOLF PACKAGE



Villa Premiere & Spa, the 83-room beachfront retreat on Puerto Vallarta's beach on the Bay of Banderas, invites golf enthusiasts to sample three of the region's top courses with its new golf package.

The "Tee it Up" package starts at \$455 per person, per night and includes three-nights/four-days accommodations in a spacious premiere oceanfront guestroom with Jacuzzi; one green fee at Vista Vallarta Golf Club; one green fee at Marina Vallarta Golf Club; one green fee at El Tigre Country Club; one 50-minute Therapeutic Massage; all meals and drinks; and welcome glass of champagne.

The 'Tee it Up' Package is based on single occupancy and is priced at \$465 valid for travel from August 1 through October 31, 2007. Package pricing for 2008 is \$455 valid for travel from January 1 through April 1, 2008. Package includes all hotel taxes and tips. Reservations for each golf course must be made three days in advance. Green fees include 18 holes of golf, shared cart and range balls. The package is subject to hotel availability and may not be combined with any other offers.

Rates include accommodations, chilled towels and champagne upon check-in, a five-minute anti-stress massage on neck and hands at check-in, special in room hotel amenities, complimentary use of gym, yoga lessons, reflexology lessons, meditation workshops and access to the sauna and steam room at Villa Premiere Spa.

Villa Premiere Hotel & Spa, 877-886-9176,
reservations@premiereonline.com.mx,
www.premiereonline.com.mx

NATUREAIR MAKES NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ADVENTURE'S TOP ENVIRONMENTAL LIST

Fly carbon free with NatureAir, the world's only carbon neutral airline. NatureAir, a family owned airline, is making history and National Geographic is taking notice. NatureAir's owner, Alex Khajavi was picked as one of nine people that are helping to save the planet in National Geographic's 2008 Green Edition. NatureAir founded in 2000, now has seven efficient De Havilland Twin Otter Turboprops flying to 17 ecotourism destinations in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama. Studies show that NatureAir out-

puts as much carbon in one year compared to what one commercial jet outputs from New York to London in 10 days. NatureAir keeps their carbon output down by taxiing on one engine and minimizing idling. The company also voluntarily compensate 100 percent of its carbon emissions, through its conservation of tropical forests. Last year it was able to offset 6,320 tons of carbon output.

"If we can prove on a smaller scale that an airline can be sustainable, then maybe we can excite other airlines to follow. We want our clients asking, 'Why isn't my international carrier doing this?'" says Khajavi.

The company is also working to save the planet by replacing light bulbs, limiting copy paper and recycling. By going green the company as a whole has been able to additionally reduce carbon emissions by 10 percent.

NatureAir, 800-235-9272, www.natureair.com

GRUPO POSADAS EXPANDS PORTFOLIO OF PROPERTIES

Grupo Posadas has announced the broadening of its current portfolio of 98 properties with the opening of 10 new hotels in 2008. In addition, eight hotel openings will conclude by the end of this year, as well as the unveiling of AQUA Cancun, the first resort to be introduced under the new modern lifestyle brand, AQUA.

The company's eight distinctive brands include the new modern lifestyle brand, AQUA; the elite luxury brand, Fiesta Americana Grand; the classic luxury brand, Fiesta Americana; the luxury business brand, Lat 19 Degrees; the classic business brand, Fiesta Inn; and the economy class brands, Caesar Park and Caesar Business.

Posadas' first modern lifestyle brand, AQUA, readies for the grand re-opening of AQUA Cancun in December 2007. The AQUA Cancun embraces a "sensory stay" philosophy, with unique design elements such as aromatherapy mists; international cuisine; deep-tissue Shiatsu massages; live DJs; and panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea. Boasting 371 guestrooms including 36 suites, three celebrity chef restaurants, and a world fusion spa, AQUA Cancun sets the bar high for this much-anticipated brand debut.

The Fiesta Americana Grand Guadalajara Country Club debuted this August with 208 rooms. It is equipped to serve guests and business executives with a state-of-the-art meeting facility, as well as a new restaurant, 4 Estaciones.

Posadas' Fiesta Inn brand looks forward to its hotel openings for 2008, including seven new locations in Mexico. Fiesta Inn includes 52 distinct hotels and guarantees functional facilities, comfortable work areas and high standards of service.

The newest addition to the Caesar Park hotels is the Caesar Park Buenos Aires Obelisco. Opening its doors in November, the hotel will offer 74 guestrooms, two meeting rooms and an authentic Argentine restaurant.

Following the completion of its eight hotel openings this year, Posadas looks forward to 10 new properties in 2008, including Fiesta Inn Chetumal, Fiesta Inn Cuernavaca, Fiesta Inn Durango, Fiesta Inn Insurgentes, Fiesta Inn Morelia, Fiesta Inn Tepic, Fiesta Inn Toluca, One Acapulco, One Aguascalientes, and One Culiac.

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