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ISSUE BRIEF:

Cancun in Crisis

APRIL 2, 2019 // PREPARED BY PROFESSOR WINN



Your Issue Brief

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Professor Winn

INTRODUCTION

Cancun, Mexico, bordering the tranquil inviting warm waters of the Caribbean Sea, offers rest and relaxation for travelers from around the world.

Indeed, since its humble beginning in the 1980s and coming of age in the 1990s, the sun-kissed frolicking playground of funseekers had largely escaped the “other Mexico.”

No more.

The general pall of insecurity created from the unrelenting drug wars between cartels, namely Sinaloa and Gulf, blankets the entire country of Mexico.

The government and its institutions in Mexico City have proven unable to combat the bloody rampage of what the US Drug Enforcement Agency transnational criminal organizations (TCOs).

Do not forget the Cartel de Cancun reportedly run by a woman named Leticia Rodriguez Lara, a former police officer and one of the only women in Mexico to lead her own drug gang. [\[1\]](#)

While researching other issues, news in Spanish about the decline of tourists in Cancun piqued my interest. Thus, I pursued one lead to another and the following report is a result.

Besides the rising tide of cartel violence, two other issues contribute to falling tourist visits to the Maya Riviera, the beaches of Quintana Roo, among them Cancun: the environment and a surprise hotel tax.

Each is addressed in the section Concise Commentary followed by my own Recommendations if you plan a vacation getaway to the once calm Cancun.

Concise Commentary

The following includes research drawn from both Spanish and English public sources.

Security Situation - Cancun, Mexico, April 1, 2019

Cartel violence directed at opponents and civilians now involves the Cancun-Playa de Carmen tourist zone.

The Sinaloa Cartel is successfully imposing its will against the local Cartel of Cancun and the upstart Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) which has moved into the resort city, pushing out other groups such as the Gulf cartel.[2]

Still, 15,000 to 25,000 Spring Breakers are expected to brave the increasing danger in and around the Maya Riviera and despite the so-called US-led “dirty war” the local hotel association leader charges.[3]

Rapid Decline in Security

These merry partiers from around the world who seek fun in the sun should be more aware of the deteriorating security situation around them.

Even the locals fear for their safety as their city ranks fourth in Mexico for insecurity. [4]

The situation is so severe that the Mexican military to the tune of Mex\$ 680 million established a headquarters for the 10th Military Police Brigade in 2018 at Isla de Mujeres, usually a laid-back haven for fisherman, artists, and musicians to divers, chefs and expats.[5]

The military still guards some beaches - an incongruous image of beachgoers and thrillseekers amid troops carrying heavy machine guns.

However, the homicides have not stopped despite the deployment of 3,000 troops and regular patrols of main tourist avenues.

In August 2018, the local police force rebelled against its chief and violently rustled him to the street to protest the corruption and lack of support against the rising tide of cartel warfare.[6]

Ecotax Hits Hoteliers

Negative publicity of cartel savagery in the streets of Cancun, the bomb blast of a ferry to Isla Mujeres last year, and a surprise hotel tax approved in late December 2018, have combined to substantially depress hotel occupation along the Maya Riviera.

Hotels have endured a 20% decrease in profits as compared to 2018.[7]

The so-called “ecotax” of about USD\$1 a night per room, an unexpected hit to hotel profits, begins on April 1, 2019, after a slight reprieve given from its initial January 1 start.

In addition to the unexpected tax, a host of issues confront hoteliers in the Cancun-Playa de Carmen tourist zone.

Since the government promotion agency for tourism was disbanded by the new administration, each state has to engage in its own promotions for tourist visits.[8]

Some see the lack of tourist promotion, a growing universe of hotel rooms leading to lower prices, insecurity causing a drop in international, and the rise in taxes as a “perfect storm” eating away at the profits of hotels.

The Environment

Mother Earth is increasingly a factor in the assessment of global events.

The sugary white pristine beaches of the Mayan Riviera continue to be besmirched with reddish brown sargasso.

What has been called “red tide” in Florida is typically an oceanic seaweed now coming ashore, covering coral reefs, covering beaches, and interacting with coastlines of the Caribbean Sea.[9]

Heaps of sargassum have washed ashore Cancun beaches spoiling the

famous white powdery sands for beachgoers.

The seaweed is smelly and can cause skin irritation with contact.

Though crews have tried to remove the unsightly seaweed, it keeps coming ashore.

Recommendations

Tourists should delay any travel plans to the Mayan Riviera in general and the Mexican state of Quintana Roo in particular.

While tourists are not directly targeted by the rising tide of cartel warfare, civilians are often and unexpectedly caught in the crossfire of rivals or police actions with deadly consequences.

The local government and its security forces are too weak (even with suspect Mexican military police reinforcements) to control the contagion of violence that now spoils the once safe Cancun-Carmen de Playa tourist zone.

Visitor safety cannot be guaranteed.

As in other parts of Mexico, international visitors are prime targets for kidnappings, express ATM robberies, and gang-related shootings amid petty sometimes violent street crime.

Finally, anyone considering a vacation in the Cancun area should be aware of their government’s travel alerts.

The US State Department does not currently forbid employee travel to the region.[10]

However, the February 2019 deadly attack by four gunmen at a popular club

in Cancun, where at least five people were killed and another five were wounded, underscores the severe security threat in the area.[11]

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