

# Putting tourism on the agenda

## INTERVIEW WITH GLORIA GUEVARA MANZO

SECRETARY OF TOURISM, MEXICO



GLORIA GUEVARA  
MANZO

graduated with a BSc in Computer Science from Anahuac University and holds an MBA from Kellogg School of Business, Northwestern University, with post-graduate studies at Anahuac, IPADE and George Washington University. She began her professional career at NCR Corporation in 1989 and over the last 15 years has worked in the travel industry at Sabre Travel Network and Sabre Holdings, including two year in the Information office with global responsibilities as Vice President. She was named Tourism Secretary by President Felipe Calderón in March 2010.

### How has the tourism sector benefited from Mexico's Presidency of the G20, and what impact has it had on the Leaders' Summit agenda?

The first thing I would like to point out is that this is only the fourth year that there has been a tourism component within a G20 presidency, and this year's has been the most important by far. This is also the first time that the T20 [the grouping of tourism Ministers that advises the G20 Leaders] has been part of the official G20 meetings; in past years it has only met on the fringes of the main event.

The second thing worth noting is that at the T20 Summit in Mérida, in May, we had the largest participation ever. Not only did we have all the representatives from the G20 countries – including the US and others who had not participated previously – we also had seven other countries and multilateral organisations that we invited as guests. One of those was the United Nations, which is significant.

What was also important about the T20 Summit in Mérida is that we focused the agenda on a single topic. At previous Summits there were five or six topics on the table, which makes it hard to reach an agreement. So this time we had only one theme, which was job creation. A study done by Oxford Economics, commissioned by UNWTO and WTTC, which looked at visas and immigration facilities in the G20 economies, came to the conclusion that we can create an estimated of 5.1 million additional jobs if we modify certain aspects of our visa processes and other facilities in order to increase international visitors to G20 countries.

### Along the lines of the Schengen Agreement in Europe?

Yes. Because the tourism industry is becoming ever more important to the global economy: it makes up 9 per cent of global GDP. It's bigger than manufacturing, bigger than several other major industries. This year, for instance, we are going to reach the landmark of 1 billion travellers, which is a huge achievement: one-seventh of the world's population will be travelling over the next couple of years. So, one recommendation that the T20 is making is for the introduction of regional visas. Asia is way ahead of us in this regard; the ASEAN and APEC visas mean that travellers to the region only have to have one visa, which allows them to visit all the different member states.

### Which, of course, makes life a good deal easier for travellers.

Exactly, and this is another area where Mexico is leading by example: we make life easier for travellers. In 2010, for example, President Calderón took the decision to accept the US visa as a valid visa for Mexico, meaning that if a Brazilian or Russian has a US visa, they don't need to apply for a Mexican visa. In the case of Brazil, Russia and China, we also implemented online visa processing: in the past it took Russians 45 days to get a visa, now it takes 24 hours. And as a result of these two changes, we have seen more than 750,000 people come to this country from those three countries alone.

It's a simple idea: if someone has already gone through the hassle of getting a visa, why don't we accept that visa as a valid visa also? Because that person has already been vetted as a safe traveller. President Calderón has offered to put this idea to the leaders of the G20 in Los Cabos.

### What about security issues?

It's been over a decade since 9/11 and we have made a lot of progress in terms of security measures. We need to balance security with the need to get tourism working to create jobs. We need to speed up the processing time through technology such as e-visas, something that the US is already working on, as are we.

### One of the other main pillars of this year's G20 is 'green growth'. What is your strategy to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism sector in Mexico?

We have a lot of initiatives underway, both medium- and long-term. In conjunction with the Ministry of Natural Resources we have a programme called *Leadership in Environment* involving more than 250 hotels, so that they can be certified in sustainability best practices. We're also working with small communities, with ethnic groups on issues related to reforestation, and how to protect our natural resources and assets. We have also launched a programme called *Natura*, which is related to eco-tourism.

In addition, we have an initiative called *Centros Integralmente Planeados*: hotels that are conceived from the outset in terms of minimising environmental impact. We have five of them now, all of which have been certified by EarthCheck. The first destination in the world that they certified was Huatulco, on the Pacific coast, in Oaxaca.

Then, last year we launched Playa Espíritu, in Sinaloa, which has all the expertise that we acquired from the other hotels. This is 100 per cent sustainable, from the design stage onwards. We work with the community, we work with the hotels, we work with everyone, and now it's sustainable. We're also working with the Rainforest Alliance to help us certify providers in Mexico with sustainable practices, giving them an 'S' certification, so that ecologically-aware travelers can more easily choose to stay at responsibly-managed destinations.

**What was the reason for choosing Los Cabos as the venue for the G20 Leaders' Summit?**

That's probably more a question for President Calderón, but he told me that he wanted the world to see a different side of Mexico, rather than Cancún, where we hosted the UN Climate Change Summit in 2010, and Los Cabos is not that well known outside of the US. Also, he wanted to have the Summit in a location that would not create chaos in the surrounding area. Can you imagine having it in Mexico City, with 26 heads of state? Los Cabos will also give people a chance also to see 'the other Mexico'. That's why our campaign in the US is called 'Mexico, the Place You Thought You Knew'. There are a lot of preconceptions about Mexico and I think that generally, there is little understanding of our geography, our diversity, our culture.

**What can the delegates and media corps expect?**

I hope that first of all they will be pleasantly surprised by the gastronomy, by the infrastructure, and by the quality of service. The service at the hotels in Los Cabos is top class. And I hope that they'll enjoy the scenery; I particularly like the combination of the ocean and the desert that you find in Los Cabos. And also, it's not that hot, at least not so humid as southern Mexico.

**How will you judge the success of the G20 Summit?**

I hope that the recommendations that we have made regarding speeding up and simplifying visa applications will be given due consideration, and I hope that we will see an increase in visitors to Mexico as a result. On another level, I also hope that everybody who attends the Summit, from the world's leaders to the journalists covering the event, enjoy their stay, and really feel that they have had an authentically Mexican experience. I am confident that they will!

We interview around 10,000 people every year about their holidays in Mexico and we have learnt that we have a very high repeat factor, 98, which means that of every 100 people that come to Mexico, 98 have been in Mexico before, or are planning to come back. That's a lot of happy customers, and it puts us in the top five countries worldwide.

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Family photo of the T20 Summit in Mérida

