

# Moving up the value chain

## INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDIA RUIZ MASSIEU

SECRETARY OF TOURISM, UNITED MEXICAN STATES



CLAUDIA RUIZ MASSIEU

holds a BA in Law from the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, and later studied Political Science at the Center for Political and Constitutional Studies in Madrid. She also has an MA in Comparative Public Policies from the Latin American Social Science Faculty (FLACSO). She has been a Federal Representative in the Mexican Congress and was President of the Justice and Human Rights Commission. Before taking up her post as Tourism Secretary, she was Secretary to the Government Commission in the Mexican Congress. She is also the current Vice-President of the Colosio Foundation.

**President Peña's tourism master plan is based on four key pillars: legislative and sector transformation; innovation and competitiveness; development and promotion; and sustainability and social benefit. What do these mean, in practical terms, for the Tourism Board, hotel and resort developers, local communities and visitors?**

Mexico is one of the most diverse and rich countries in tourism matters. Our country offers a lot of tourist attractions, from some of the world most beautiful beaches to colonial cities and archaeological sites, trendy bars and world-class restaurants, as well as sustainable, nature and eco-tourism destinations.

Thus, the vision of the government of President Peña Nieto is to boost Mexico's tourist potential to become a world class destination. Our National Tourism Policy's main objective is to consolidate and exploit our touristic capital, in order to collaborate in the development of a more prosperous and inclusive country.

In this regard, a year ago, the President instructed the insertion of a strong touristic approach to the National Infrastructure Programme (PNI). For the first time, this programme includes Tourism within its six strategic areas: Communications and Transport, Energy, Hydraulic, Health, Agricultural, Territorial

and Urban Development, and Tourism.

In practical terms it means that the Mexican Government is positioning Mexico as an ideal place to invest in a wide variety of tourist destinations; in addition to facilitating the decision of visitors, communities, developers, and companies to support the tourism industry in the country.

**What are the underlying trends shaping the evolution of the industry in Mexico? How can the industry diversify its offering, without losing its strengths in the sun and beach segment?**

Tourism in Mexico is enjoying its best moment ever; 2014 was the most successful year ever for tourism in our country, achieving record numbers and impressive growth compared with other countries. In 2014, Mexico received 29.1 million international tourists, recording an increase of 20.5 per cent compared with 2013 numbers.

The growth of tourism in Mexico during 2014 was almost five times higher than the global average (4.7 per cent) and almost three times the growth rate of the Americas (8 per cent). Another outstanding fact is that while growth in Mexico was more than 20 per cent, countries like Canada, USA, Peru, Chile, China,



Heavenly view: Huamantla, one of Mexico's 83 Magical Towns

Photo: Mexico Tourism Board/Ricardo Espinosa - REO

Thailand and Austria did not exceed 7 per cent growth.

We expect the growth of Mexican tourism in 2015 to remain in double digits, as occurred in 2014, when we achieved historic figures. We acknowledge that every new tourist arriving to the country means more growth for the sector, an increase in foreign exchange inflows and, consequently, development for the country. Our goal is clear: we want more tourists, but we also want tourists who spend more.

The tourism sector in Mexico is on the right path, but we are by no means complacent. The Ministry of Tourism is fully committed to the development and diversification of the industry. Our sun and beach destinations will not be neglected, but this focus undersells the country's potential as a destination for visitors. We will place greater emphasis on advertising our potential in cultural, eco, adventure and medical tourism, and promote the investment opportunities in these segments accordingly.

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**In the past, attempts to draw tourists to areas of Mexico outside developed resorts have been only partially successful, in part because hoteliers are reluctant to build and airlines to provide service to places unless their popularity is proven. What can be done to resolve this dilemma?**

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There's huge potential in so many aspects of Mexican tourism, including culture, adventure, medical and sustainable tourism, also with our heritage and our gastronomy. The key is to promote strategies for each segment, rather than a general strategy for all Mexico. We're targeting specific segments, such as devising specific tours for cultural and gastronomic routes.

These were just concepts in the past, but we're now moving forward with real products for the marketplace.

Also, the Government of Mexico is committed in providing infrastructure through the National Infrastructure Programme, with a focus on tourism development. Mexico has ambitious plans for the construction and modernisation of airports, cargo and commercial ports, railways and highways to link well-known transportation hubs with lesser-known tourism destinations.

In connectivity matters, we have outstanding potential, because today we have the necessary airport infrastructure to be a bridge between Central America and the Caribbean to any international destination in Europe, Asia and even Africa, which will be reinforced with the new Mexico City International Airport.

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**Mexico's mega-tourism centres, Cancún and Los Cabos are now more or less complete. Where do you see the greatest potential for comparable developments elsewhere?**

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We have traditionally leaned heavily on sun and beach destinations such as Cancún and Los Cabos, which of course are very competitive, but we also have other important destinations such as Puerto Vallarta, Huatulco, Riviera Nayarit, Riviera Maya, Acapulco, Cozumel, and Ixtapa, among others.

But Mexico is more than sun-and-beach; we want to show to the world our other competitive advantages, such as our cultural and natural heritage, tourism know-how and human resources. Mexico runs 2,000 miles from its northern border with the US to its southern border with Belize, Guatemala and the Caribbean

**Tourism in Mexico is enjoying a 'sweet spot', achieving record numbers of visitors and posting impressive growth**



Photo: Mexico Tourism Board/Ricardo Espinosa - REO

Puebla by night: the city is one of Mexico's most historic, as well as the centre of the country's automotive industry

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Sea, which is why Mexico's tourism attractions are so diverse and complementary.

The Ministry of Tourism has re-launched the 'Pueblos Magicos' (Magical Towns) Programme, which consists of 83 of the most beautiful towns across the country from north to south, recognising them for their traditions and the beauty of their picturesque streets and buildings. The features that a site must have to be a Magical Town include being located in areas near large cities or tourist sites, accessible by road and with a high historical, religious and cultural value. Their common denominator is having a great importance in the national tradition.

Finally, we also plan to develop archeological tourism destinations within our country, with a common strategy. These efforts are aimed at identifying the real tourism potential of each region and site, as well as the particular segment, and determining how we can better channel investment to ensure their development

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**Mexico has some of the best eco-tourism potential of any country in the world. How important is this segment in economic terms? What is the Government's strategy for nurturing it?**

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Worldwide, nine per cent of trips are related to eco-tourism. According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association and George Washington University, this market represents 263 billion dollars, and it has grown at impressive rates in recent years.

Mexico has identified 1,186 eco-tourism companies, of which only 927 operate tours all year round. It is estimated that each of these companies employ between 1 and 8 people, depending on the season.

As part of the strategy for the development of ecotourism, the marketing of the various tourism products is driven through the celebration of the Adventure Mexican Fair (ATMEX), which in its three editions to date has become a unique international, professional, dynamic and highly productive event, where major suppliers specialised in nature tourism in our country interact with major retailers from countries of origin, where a significant number of business appointments are made and trade agreements signed.

This event is unique, and its fourth edition will be held in the second half of 2015.

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**President Peña's State Visit to the UK in March promises to be one of the highlights of the Dual Year of Mexico in the UK and the UK in Mexico. What is your Ministry and the Tourism Board's strategy for capitalising on this important platform?**

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Supporting and stimulating tourism is one of the priorities of the Mexican Government. We have set

ourselves the objective of growing Mexico's market share, primarily by focusing on showcasing the diversity of our tourist products to British people, adding attractions and value to complement the travel experiences in many of our well-known destinations and highlight those gems of Mexico that are not so well known overseas.

My Ministry's goal is to increase British Tourism to Mexico from around 450,000 visitors in 2014 to 500,000 during 2015. To achieve this we already launched the second phase of the "Live it to Believe it" campaign, showing Mexican sites with a cultural vocation and showcasing our country's diversity and unique experiences.

The Dual Year also includes an ambitious agenda which features artistic activities, education, science, innovation, technical and scientific cooperation, economic development, trade, tourism investment and gastronomy.

We are aiming to position Mexico as favourite destination in Latin America and the Caribbean for UK travelers. But we also want to make sure that British people are aware of the wealth of tourist experiences all over Mexico, not just the typical beach holidays in Cancun and Los Cabos. Our main objective for this Dual Year is to communicate the richness of Mexico internationally, as a modern, dynamic, attractive country with an amazing cultural, touristic and economic potential.

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**Both countries benefit from a combination of rich cultural heritage and a youthful, creative contemporary arts and design scene. What lessons can each learn from the other, in your view?**

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Under the framework of the Year of Mexico in the UK we will seek to inform the British of the diverse cultural heritage, rich history and traditions of Mexico, whilst at the same time, seeking to project its economic and commercial dynamism as a privileged destination for trade, investment and tourism. Similarly, the Year of the UK in Mexico will provide the perfect context to show the best of UK creativity and collaboration, to build a legacy for the future that further supports political, economic and cultural relations.

With the Dual Year Declaration, our governments have committed to support programmes of cultural activities, economic promotion events and academic seminars, as well as cooperative efforts between public and private institutions.

Finally, I also want to highlight Mexico's strategy to use our gastronomy as a key tool for promotion and recognition of our country in the UK. We want to share with the British people our Mexican culinary heritage, which two years ago was recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. **F**