

It's Complicated

Los Cabos remains a bright spot for a country in transition

By Ashley Alvarado

There is very little about the ongoing violence in parts of México that is black and white. In 2013, a rash of violent incidents once again grabbed the world's attention, prompting would-be visitors to question whether the country was a safe travel destination. The answer: It depends on where you're headed. Before we continue, it's worth pointing out that those planning trips to Los Cabos in Baja California Sur can rest assured.

The federal government's years-long war on powerful organized crime has brought with it positive changes ... and a death toll that cannot be ignored. Human Rights Watch estimates 60,000 people were killed in drug-related violence in the years 2006 through 2012. In June, CNN reported, "Outside of war zones, more Americans have been killed in México in the last decade than in any other country outside the United States, and the number of U.S. deaths jumped from 35 in 2007 to 113 in 2011."

But you cannot classify all of México into one simple category: dangerous or safe.

More than 10 million visitors arrived to México by air in 2012—nearly 6 million of them from the United States, according to a report released by the country's Secretary of Tourism. Those numbers appear to be increasing, according to the ministry and reports from *The Atlantic*. And there have been very few incidents. It's no insignificant measure that some 1 million U.S. citizens now call México home, and 80 percent of those expats reside on the Baja Peninsula.

From CNN: "Analysts and travel experts agree that security in México varies—sometimes dramatically—from place to place. It's a contradiction—México is both as dangerous as ever or as safe as ever, depending on one's destination, actions and common sense."

The Mexican and U.S. governments—and the mainstream media—seem to agree that México's beachside resort towns are largely safe. This is where the majority of U.S. residents in México are headed, and the tourist areas are typically the safest. The U.S. State Department warns against travel to many Mexican states, mostly in the north and west. Los Cabos has never been mentioned in any of the Department's travel advisories. And, in fact, the state of Baja California Sur boasts crime rates so low that they would put many U.S. metropolises to shame. The safety of Los Cabos, coupled with its natural beauty and plethora of luxurious accommodations, are among the reasons it has been selected as the site for major international events like the G-20 Summit of world leaders and the Baja International Film Festival in 2012 and 2013.

Cruise ship routes are another indicator of a region's attractiveness as a safe tourism destination. Cruise companies extensively research crime and violence reports—not to mention any sort of illness, as those of us who were in México during the days of swine flu can recall—and have increasingly turned to Los Cabos as a destination. (More than 5 million international travelers arrived in México in 2013 by cruise ship.)

The local and federal governments have taken extra steps to ensure the safety of Los Cabos visitors and residents. Soldiers execute searches along the highway to prevent the introduction of drugs or stolen property. A dedicated tourism police force patrols the streets and walks the marina; the officers are fully bilingual and available to answer any questions you may have. Roadblocks throughout the Baja Peninsula, as well as the interdiction efforts of the Mexican Navy and U.S. Coast Guard, have also kept the cartel drug routes that plague much of the rest of the country out of the state of Baja California Sur.

As the Baja California Sur governor announced in an open letter to "Friends of Los Cabos": "Municipal and state agencies work closely together to oversee the safety and comfort of all visitors...We look forward to welcoming you to Los Cabos soon so that you may experience the best México has to offer."