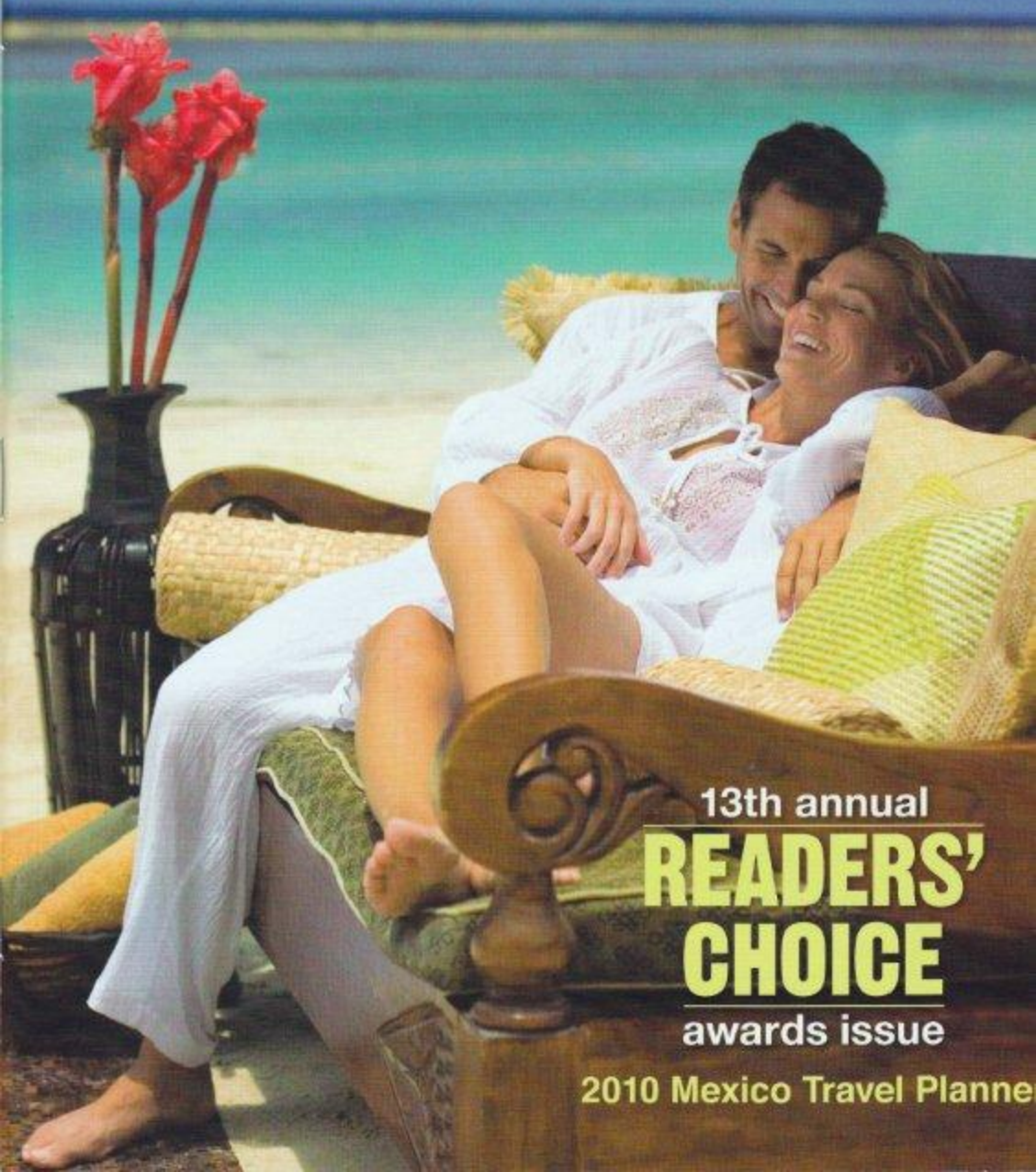


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2010 Mexico Travel Planne

MEXICO

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Ongoing trends and spiffy new products paint a pretty picture for 2010.

sarah muñoz

If we've learned anything this year, it's that Mexico's tourism machine is unstoppable. We're not just talking about its rosy positivism, grounded in whatever reality it faces each day, but in its millions upon millions of tourism industry workers who took a hit in 2009 and still greet us with nothing but genuine warmth each time we show up—not to mention the millions upon millions of pesos, euros, dollars and other currency still pouring into its multiple destinations.

Mexico's heart, coupled with old-fashioned determination, is setting the stage for fireworks in 2010. Properties are tweaking and adding, cities and towns are primping and there is many an ear stuck to the ground, listening to what travelers want. We're seeing a few trends that continue to bloom with better amenities and enhanced offers for visitors of all budgets. Here's a sneak peek at what's happening and what's coming for Mexico.

1. all-inclusives will go for gold

One thing we all learned in 2009 is the value of our hard-earned money, and nothing speaks to a tight wallet better than all-inclusives. One of Mexico's latest comes courtesy of **AMResorts**. **Dreams Riviera Cancun**, which opened in October, features 486 octagon-shaped guestrooms and suites with jacuzzis, as well as shimmering pools and all

the Dreams trademarks: *Dreams Spa by Pevonia*, the *Unlimited Luxury* program, a wide array of gourmet dining options and a packed *Explorer's Club* for kids complete with climbing wall and Wiis, supervised by Red Cross-certified staff.

"American vacationers are asking for more of this kind of luxury—an affordable, all-inclusive product—and AMResorts hits the mark. The new **Dreams Riviera Cancun** is a huge hit already after being open for just four weeks [as of press time]," says Tim Mullen, **Apple Vacation's** senior v.p., adding that Apple is looking forward to the new **Zoëtry Casa del Mar Los Cabos** and those coming up in Punta Cana and Cap Cana.

Zoëtry Casa del Mar Los Cabos opens this month as a boutiquey, 42-suite (huge ones) beachfront hotel right by the beach with jacuzzis and Rivolta bedding. The hacienda-style property also offers gourmet dining, multiple tennis courts and access to the nearby championship 18-hole golf course in Cabo Real. Zoëtry has its own all-inclusive plan called *Endless Privileges*, which goes a step above by including not just all in-house gourmet dining and entertainment options but also special extras such as a welcome bottle of tequila, thrice-daily maid service, complimentary laundry service, no check-in or check-out time, unlimited worldwide calls, and daily afternoon tea. ▶▶

In Baja Peninsula Sur there's also the all-inclusive **Barcelo Los Cabos Palace Deluxe**, just 10 minutes away from San José. The property, which opened just this month, has more than 600 suites (including the only swim-up suites in Los Cabos), as well as three pools totaling more than 50,000 sq. ft., a childrens-only water park, jacuzzis, in-water hammocks and a pool lounge. There is also an 18,000-sq.-ft. spa with 16 cabins and three outdoor palapas, as well as nine casual and fine dining options and a host of fun bars and nightclubs.

Some traditional hotels are sneaking into the all-inclusive market by offering this as an option upon booking. **Pueblo Bonito Rose Resort & Spa**, which overlooks the Sea of Cortez, lets guests choose this cost-effective alternative if they stay three or more nights. It includes meals, snacks, selected alcoholic beverages and room service, with small additional charges applicable to a couple of dinner options. The cost for the all-inclusive option is \$100 pp per day for those 12 and over, in addition to room rates; children between 5 and 11 pay \$50 pp per day.

Speaking of all-inclusives, **Palace Resorts** and **Le Blanc Spa Resort** have a new agent booking site that not only facilitates bookings but also presents different offerings so you can provide clients with the best rates and promotions. Each agent gets a personal profile to track existing reservations, whether it's a land-only (resulting in a direct 12 percent commission) or any number of vacation, spa or anniversary packages, which provide a 10 percent commission. You can also do an "advanced search" for specific parameters, review and choose flight itineraries and room categories, and e-mail price and itinerary quotes to clients for approval.

In addition to the direct commissions given for booking through this new site, the resorts' **Travel Agent Bonus Commission Program** now offers an incremental bonus commission for direct bookings, as well as those made through a preferred wholesaler or GDS—an earning potential of up to \$1,250 for every 10 rooms. Agents who book at any Palace or Le Blanc Spa Resort with individual stays for three or four nights will receive a \$50 bonus commission per room; individual stays for five to six nights receive a \$75 bonus commission per room; and individual stays for seven nights or more receive a \$100 bonus commission per room.

Furthermore, for every combined 10 rooms booked within one calendar year, you get an additional \$250 bonus. Keep in mind that the per-room incentive and \$250 bonus is rewarded for every additional 10 rooms booked. Group bookings are also good for bonus commissions: the first 25 rooms booked with any group can be applied to this program, with a total earning potential of \$3,000 for group blocks.

Palace wedding packages booked through the site get three commissions: the 20 percent wedding package commission, up to 14 percent commission associated with room blocks and the **Bonus Commission Program** incentive.

2. kids will be spoiled rotten

Properties are also coming up with more sophisticated ways to entertain their younger guests, knowing that they are more worldly, tech-savvy and in tune with today's tendencies than we ever were. If the littiest clients are not happy, there's a good chance the adults won't be, either. To that effect, many hotels and resorts are offering better-than-

ever entertainment options for kids—including **Barcelo Los Cabos**, which has a great water park with water cannons and interactive jets.

Fairmont Mayakoba has unveiled *RU Ready?*, an interactive fitness program designed by youth sports expert Scott Lancaster for children 7-17 that combines kids' love of computers and video games with outdoor play. The program uses cards and online interaction to create special experiences to help improve children's athletic performance in a wide range of activities. Once they go back home, they can receive e-mail updates and customized web pages to continue training. **The Fairmont Acapulco Princess** will welcome *RU Ready?* next year.

The Fairmont's home, **Mayakoba Resort** (site of *El Camaleon* golf course), has also unveiled a state-of-the-art **Jim McLean Golf Academy**—the only McLean Golf Academy in Mexico—featuring a 2-bay SuperStation and the latest technology in golf analysis computer software, as well as personalized instruction programs created by certified Master Instructors.

In Puerto Valarta, **Buenaventura Grand Hotel Spa** has introduced a new kids' spa at the open-air *Shakti* (for ages 5 to 13), with a menu of treatments that is as delicious as their parents'. They can choose anything from a lemon ice cream pedicure to a fruit massage with chocolate, pineapple, mango and coconut essences, and each treatment comes with a milk shake of their choice. The hotel also has a kids' club with a slew of fun activities, including sandcastle building and swimming lessons.

3. condo-hotels will keep coming

The condo-hotel trend has caught up with Mexico. From a traveler's standpoint, it's a perfectly fine (and commissionable) alternative to a traditional hotel (many are managed by established names).

"...it is a trend that is partially dictated by the current economy, but also influenced by the need for privacy and cultural exposure while visiting a foreign country," says Jack Periman, owner and developer of **Condo Hotels Playa del Carmen**. "Condo-hotels are becoming a new popular alternative to such options as all-inclusives or traditional hotel rooms. First of all, by staying at condos, guests are in the middle of it all, as opposed to the limiting confines of all-inclusive hotels," he explains, adding that his properties are right by the beach and steps from the fun and revelry of *Playa del Carmen's* 5th Avenue.

"By staying at condo hotels, guests can feel like they are at their own home—condos usually have equipped kitchens, pools, jacuzzis and more—but still have the services and amenities of a luxury hotel. Most condo-hotels have a 24-hour front desk, maid and babysitter services, parking garages and more. The current economy also contributes to the growing popularity of condo-hotels, since guests are now taking advantage, more than ever, of using modern kitchens and state-of-the-art equipment provided by condos to cook their homemade meals instead of eating out every time."

Popular wholesaler **Condominium Connection** offers special booking bonuses for many of their properties—a \$25 bonus for each booking at several **El Cid** properties, for instance, with a 5-book minimum—as well as rates that rival those of many hotels in Mexico. Its *Escape with Savings* program, good Jan. 3-March 31, offers deals such as \$114 pp dbl per night for a studio unit at **El Cid Granada** in Mazatlan.



Lobby at the soon-to-open Hilton Mexico City Reforma.

El Taj Oceanfront will open next month in Playa del Carmen, part of **Condo Hotels Playa del Carmen**. With a Bali-inspired design, elegant amenities and gorgeous views of the Caribbean Sea, El Taj is one of several condo-hotels making waves in the travel landscape. Accommodations at Condo Hotels Playa del Carmen vary from 1-bedroom apartments to 3-bedroom penthouses; rates start at \$265 per night.

new properties

Next year, **Hilton Worldwide** will open its first full-service Hilton hotel in Mexico City, steps away from Reforma Avenue. Now a **Sheraton**, the property will undergo quite a few upgrades to incorporate Hilton brand standards before opening as the **Hilton Mexico City Reforma** by the end of 2010—the sixth Hilton in Mexico—with 458 guestrooms and suites, many with views of Alameda Central Park and the *Palacio de Bellas Artes*, as well as a spa of more than 5,000 sq. ft.

Also coming in 2010 is the luxurious **Montage Los Cabos**, the first **Montage Hotels & Resorts** property in Baja. Then there's the recently launched **Quivira Los Cabos**, a new residential resort community that will feature two Jack Nicklaus-designed courses (scheduled to open early next year) and **The Ritz-Carlton Los Cabos, Quivira**, which will come in 2011.

In Riviera Nayarit, **Imanta Resorts** has chosen Punta Mita as its new address, offering guests access to the Greg Norman-designed golf course and 120-acre nature reserve in the neighborhood, as well as lots of watersports and horseback riding. Imanta will feature three *casas* managed as a five-star hotel and spa. Nearby, in Litibu, **La Tranquila** is set to open next fall as private residences—from studios to 3-room affairs—also operated and managed as a boutique hotel. It will also feature the service of *La Tranquila Spa Club*. ■

contact information

Barcelo Los Cabos Palace Deluxe: (800) BARCELO; barceloloscabos.com
Buenaventura Grand Hotel Spa: (888) 859-9439; hotelbuenaventura.com.mx
Condo Hotels Playa del Carmen: condohotelsplayadelcarmen.com
Condominium Connection: (800) 423-2976; condoconnection.com
Dreams Riviera Cancun: (866) 2DREAMS; dreamsresorts.com
Fairmont Mayakoba: (800) 257-7544; fairmont.com
Palace Resorts/Le Blanc Spa Resort: (800) 635-1836; palaceresorts.com/travelagents
Pueblo Bonito Rose Resort & Spa: (800) 990-8250; pueblobonito.com
Zoëtry Casa del Mar Los Cabos: (888) 4ZOETRY; zoetryresorts.com