

Is it Safe to Visit Mexico Now?

By Peter Greenberg | March 10, 2011



As a frequent business traveler, my hat is NOT off to the Texas Department of Public Safety, which issued a release last week warning citizens of the Lone Star State not to go to Mexico over spring break.

Business travelers tend to be smarter travelers, almost by

definition. We are aware of our surroundings, and we tend to be more streetwise than vacationing tourists. As business travelers, we possess less fear, more common sense, and nothing stops us from our mission.

Until a government authority puts out a worrisome press release and scares both business and leisure travelers. The release read:

*"While drug cartel violence is most severe in northern Mexico, it is prominent in other parts of the country as well," said DPS Director **Steven C. McCraw**. "Various crime problems also exist in many popular resort areas, such as Acapulco and Cancun, and crimes against U.S. citizens often go unpunished."*

On the Road in Mexico

I read that press release while I was in Mexico! I was walking down the streets of Oaxaca without incident. The day before, I was in Guerrero Negro then I was in Chihuahua, and Mexico City, and over the last three weeks in many other Mexican states. I bumped into many American business travelers, too. All of us traveled without a safety issue. Without a problem.

I'll try to give Mr. McCraw of the Texas Department of Public Safety the benefit of the doubt and presume his intentions were honorable. But his information was based on fear and flawed statistics and was misleading. "Underestimating the violence in Mexico would be a mistake..." said McCraw. "Our safety message is simple: avoid traveling to Mexico during Spring Break and stay alive."

Analyzing Geography and Crime Statistics

Here are some facts:

- An overwhelming majority of the crime is in the northern part of the country.
- The distance between Tijuana and Cancun almost matches the distance between Los Angeles and New York.

- An overwhelming majority of the crime is drug related, and it is generally cartel versus cartel. Americans aren't targeted.

Misleading Death Statistics

It's estimated that about 34,000 people have been murdered during the drug wars in the last four years. A scary number. According to preliminary figures reported by the Texas Department of Public Safety,

about 65 Americans were killed in Mexico in 2010. But, that stat does not specify the causes of these deaths.

The problem with the Mexico fatality statistics is that if an American is hit by a bus in Acapulco it is listed as an American incident in Mexico.

That can be misleading, and in this case, it IS misleading. News bulletin: Americans die in automobile or bus accidents worldwide, and none of them is crime related. If you just go by the numbers alone, you're safer in Mexico than you'd be in Washington, D.C., and Camden, New Jersey.

Even our own U.S. Department of State points out that "millions of U.S. citizens safely visit Mexico each year" and warns travelers against travel in the northern border states.

Even before the drug wars broke out, how many business travelers regularly went to Ciudad Juarez or Nuevo Laredo? Not many. Even fewer vacationed there. If we're going to be honest, let's admit that practically the only Americans currently "vacationing" in those two cities are a different sort of business traveler.

Business travelers know this, and that may explain why the hotels I stayed at during my trip were all full of American business travelers. They were there without security, they walked the streets without bodyguards. They drove in cars that were not armor plated. The only weapons in their briefcases were business proposals or signed deals. Without exception, every business traveler I talked to expressed little or no concern for his or her safety.

Perhaps the Texas Department of Public Safety, could focus on a more constructive use of their time and resources and resolve the very real safety issues concerning the thousands of gun stores in Texas that line the border with Mexico.

The presence of these stores at the border is not a coincidence. And I don't know a single U.S. business traveler who shops there.

Would you travel to Mexico now, or have government warnings changed your perspective?