

Debunking the US Travel Warning for Mexico

On January 26, 2005 the US State department issued the following Public Announcement regarding travel to Mexico.

This Public Announcement is being issued to alert U.S. citizens to the current security situation along the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border in the wake of increased violence among drug traffickers. Although the majority of travelers in the region visit without mishap, violent criminal activity, including murder and kidnapping, in Mexico's northern border region has increased. The overwhelming majority of the victims of violent crime have been Mexican citizens. Nonetheless, U.S. citizens should be aware of the risk posed by the deteriorating security situation. This Public Announcement expires on April 25, 2005. ([more...](#))



The Public Announcement is short of the impact of a Travel Advisory, but the action met with instant reaction from Mexico City. Mexico's foreign secretary is calling a U.S. State Department alert to Americans traveling along the border "exaggerated." From the perspective of travel throughout the majority of Baja, it IS exaggerated. Improvements in roads, accommodations, attractions and public safety all serve to make travel throughout the majority of Baja more inviting than ever before.



Also on January 26th. the US Ambassador to Mexico, Tony Garza made a blistering statement to Mexican officials regarding the general lawlessness of these border towns and the responsibility of the federal government to get things under control.

John Naland, the U.S. consul general in Matamoros said, "...the straw that broke the camel's back was the murder of six 'innocent civilians' on the streets of Matamoros." The six were prison guards at a high security prison where several drug kingpins are incarcerated, which might call into question

their 'innocence'. ([more...](#))

Luis Ernesto Derbez, Mexico's foreign secretary, says his nation has proved that it is successfully combating violence and drug trafficking in the region. In fact, much of the instability in Tijuana is a result of the arrest of Benjamín Arellano Félix and death of Ramón Arellano Félix of the Arellano Félix cartel in 2002



The announcement's concerns were amplified by reports circulated in US media, defining the area of concern as "northern Mexico". Whereas; the violence referred to in the US Announcement is specific to a handful of border towns.

On February 4, the University of Arizona and Arizona State University [advised its student against travel to Mexico](#) for Spring Break. Although the statement focus were

those who come to Mexico to party in border towns, it appeared to also caution those headed to popular destinations like Acapulco, Cancun and Cabo.



A little perspective: The murder rate for January, 2005 in Tijuana is high, 30-41 people, depending on the source. This rate is on a par with Los Angeles, which is about three and a half times the population. A bulk of these murders were attributed to drug traffic, two involved police officials and none that I could find reported, involved tourists. There have been 27 incidents along the Texas/Mexico border, some referred to as "ATM Kidnappings" and other incidence of violence involving tourists. This is not news. In fact, there is an organization in Texas that seeks to find information for the families of almost

200 people missing in the Texas border area over the last decade.

The Mexican government acknowledges these issues. Avoiding travel problems is as simple in Mexico as it is in any other tourist destination. Solo travelers and those heavily under the influence make easier targets. If travelers frequent more established tourist venues and avoid seedy establishments and bad neighborhoods they will find that the climate for tourism in Mexico has never been better.

In Baja Sur for example, roadways have been improved, facilities have been expanded and corruption is on the defensive.



The Malecon in La Paz has been completed and makes an excellent place to take an evening stroll with confidence. Loreto is expanding air service and developing long term retirement and resort communities. In Los Cabos, development is almost frantic. New restaurants and resort destinations anxiously await this years winter tourists.

So, what is the purpose of a Public Announcement at this time? Spring Break is upon us and the throngs of college students will now be aware of the need for increased vigilance. However, the diplomatic stroke of a travel announcement is usually reserved to apply political pressures in a heavier style, to broader issues.

There are [many theories](#) as to why the Bush administration would put Mexico on a par with other travel advisories for countries that includes Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan and Sudan. Trafficking people and goods (including drugs) across the border has long been a profitable business in many border towns, and in many countries. Perhaps, this power struggle within the criminal element makes the Department of Homeland Security nervous, when they can't stop up to [15 thousand people a day](#) from crossing the border illegally.

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