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DIPLOMACY THIS WEEK
VACATION & TRAVEL BRIEFING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARAH MCGREGOR, EMBASSY

More Than Just A Pretty Beach

Mexico is spending big money to attract the next generation of tourists

By Sarah McGregor

“OK, we’re going to put on our walking shoes and take a little trip to Mexico,” beamed Mary Schraee, of Destination Ventures, from behind a podium in Ottawa’s Marriott Hotel meeting room. “Please turn to page 53 in your books.”

A few dozen (mostly female) travel agents, settled comfortably around tables, dutifully flipped their visitor manuals to the first resort destination of Puerto Vallarta. A show of hands determined that only a few attendees had actually been to the Pacific coast resort town, and Ms. Schraee was clearly tickled to make the introduction. Her 15-minute monologue, punctuated by an overhead screen showing photos and a promotional video, gushed over the unforgettable restaurants and beaches of the popular getaway.

To an outsider, the presentation was a little like enduring a friend’s vacation slideshow. In contrast, the travel agents who’d paid to be there were spellbound, nodding enthusiastically every so often, jotting notes and even asking questions. The armchair tour, it’s later

explained, is the tourism industry’s equivalent of a professional development day.

Governments routinely host tourism “markets” to drum up awareness about some of their unspoiled regions. The state-sponsored travel shows give industry practitioners insight about destinations they can recommend to clients. The shows, combining oral presentations and exhibition booths, are the next best option to hopping a plane for a first-hand look – which can be expensive and time-consuming.

Waiting outside the Ottawa meeting last week, a middle-aged mother of two explained that she was hoping to find a place on the map to send clients in an exceptional circumstance. “I’ve got this really tough (case) right now,” explained Nancy McCall, a travel and tourism student at Algonquin. “It’s a devout Muslim couple and I’m hoping today to find them today a place with a private beach.” Religious conviction dictates the wife

will not wear a bathing suit in public, and Ms. McCall is on the hunt for an isolated, but economical, spot. “It’s been really hard,” said Ms. McCall, an independent agent of K. Walsh and Associates. She added, “being here I’m broadening my knowledge, to know what sort of product is available. I love these, especially when you don’t have the time to travel yourself.”



The “product,” in this case, is Mexico. The seller is the Mexico Tourism Board, an arm’s length government promotional agency. This year, the organization, working jointly with travel agents and tour operators in both Canada and Mexico, is rolling out an enhanced multi-pronged strategy to draw Canadian tourists southward.

Last week, the Board invited delegations from a handful of Mexican states to strut their stuff in not only in Ottawa, but also Toronto and Montreal. Canadians comprised 3.7 per cent of the total 18.6 million visitors to Mexico

in 2004. The vast majority of those, about 70 per cent, stayed at all-inclusive resorts on the Atlantic Coast’s Mayan Riviera, including Cancun. Alfonso Sumano, Deputy Director of the Mexico Tourism Board, said Canada represents a huge growth market for Mexican tourism. Overall, that industry comprises about 8.2 per cent of the Mexican economy, and provides about 1.9 million jobs.

The Mexico Tourism Board has Canadian offices in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, with about five employees apiece. This year, that presence has been boosted by a nearly four-fold budgetary increase in comparison to last year, to nearly \$2.6 million. About half of this is provided by the government agency, the rest is split evenly by tour operators in Canada and Mexico. This year’s marketing budget is being spent by the prestigious American public relations firm, Burson Marsteller, driven by the equally high-profile Young and Rubicam, an advertising outfit which is implementing a strategy aimed directly at North Americans.

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A Green Light From China

Canada's tourism industry is gearing up, but final approval may be up to a year away

By Peter Schneider

As one of the most high-profile achievements of Prime Minister Paul Martin's recent jaunt through Asian countries, the Jan. 21 announcement by Industry Minister David Emerson that China had granted Canada approval to proceed with its application to become an approved destination country for tourists was met with cheers at home. Said Minister Emerson on Jan. 21, "China is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and the recognition of Canada as an officially approved travel destination has significant economic potential for the Canadian tourism industry."

However bright the outlook, the Approved Destination Status (ADS) negotiations are still to be completed, and much remains to be done in order to facilitate increased tourist flows from China. The green light has been a

long time coming. Since 1999, the Canadian Tourism Commission has been seeking Approved Destination Status. More than 60 countries have already finalized an ADS agreement and are reaping the benefits of increased access to the world's most populous country. The World Tourism Organization estimates that by 2020, there will be 100 million Chinese tourists annually. By contrast, in 2004, Canada received 77,000 overnight visitors from China.

Canada's Tourism Industry Prepares

Randy Williams, president of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, says, "What ADS allows for is over and above what we've had in the past. We get close to 100,000 Chinese visitors to Canada a year already. Those folks are coming through as individual travelers or they're coming through as business groups.

What ADS allows for is mass-marketing in China, so that we can promote the Canadian brand, and our provincial brands, and so on. As well, it allows for group leisure travel, which wasn't permitted in the past. ADS allows for groups to come into Canada, and these would be leisure travelers looking for group tour activities. What we expect, from what we've seen from other countries with ADS, is that in two to three years, that 100,000 visitors could double or triple, so 100-200,000 more visitors a year to Canada is significant."

Cindy Gobin, marketing development manager responsible for the Asia-Pacific region for Tourism BC in Vancouver, says, "Because China is such an important emerging market, it's important that we go in as a national initiative. We're working closely with the Canadian Tourism Commission on this, because in China

it's Canada that they understand, and what they want, but we're being very much part of a national initiative. We're a part of the China National working group, which was struck last year by the CTC, and it involves all kinds of different partners: government agencies, the provinces, and the gateway cities of Vancouver and Toronto. As well, the immigration and border services and foreign affairs people. There's more than just the tourism marketers involved in the ADS negotiations, it's basically a government-to-government thing, and there are several ministries involved."

Ms. Gobin affirms that the recent developments with Canada's ADS application came without warning. "I think it was a bit of a surprise," she says. "We'd been kind of

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New Vistas

Designing vacations for all age groups

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The idea behind the new campaign is to reshape the Mexican image in the minds of some Canadians. The strategy is employing the tag line, "Beyond Your Expectations," making at least partial reference to a misperception that Mexico is just a spring break party place. "Mexico is so diverse, it's not just sun and beach," says Mr. Sumano. "And I think Canadians feel that strong cultural connection, they want to explore." Media saturation will be achieved through the purchase of advertising spots, but also through 'fam' trips. This is industry lingo for the jam-packed, all-expenses-paid junkets for journalists and tour operators. Mr. Sumano says between five and 10 of these have been planned this year.

In January, *Embassy* participated in a five-day (including travel) whirlwind tour of a largely unwritten-about region of Mexico, Michoacan. That central western state, in coordination with a Mexican tour company called On Visa, designed the trip to push a new direct flight being launched in March between Montreal and the state capital of Morelia, as well as a new series of tour packages.

More broadly, the state government is trying to tap into what they consider a lucrative market: senior citizens looking to escape Canada's harsh winters. The colonial region enjoys a moderate climate. The state has other unique features: It's home a few months each year to monarch butterflies that have traveled from southern Ontario and elsewhere. It's renowned for its authentic production of handicrafts, and each town specializes in something different, from textiles, to chandlery and toys, pottery, strawpainting and cut paper. The state also boasts about 200 kilometres of untouched coastline.

"We're doing a big push in Canada and the U.S.," says Romon Serrano, the Secretary of Tourism for the state, noting he began the aggressive pursuit this year after a successful campaign to increase domestic travelers. He says the state rose to being the number one domestic 'non-beach' destination from a 20th position in just two years.

Whether expensive government strategies to draw tourism from Canada will pay off has yet to be seen. But for Ms. McCall, the session in Ottawa last week has already proven fruitful.

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thinking that it could happen any day, but we've been thinking that before over the last couple of years, so for some of us it was a bit of a surprise. We've been anticipating that it could happen at any time, which is why the working group was formed last year."

Consular Concerns

Processing the visa requirements of hundreds of thousands of prospective tourists presents unique challenges for Canadian consular offices. Testifying on Feb. 8 before the House subcommittee on International Trade, Ken Sunquist, Assistant Deputy Minister for International Business and Canada's Chief Trade commissioner, discussed consular pressures in China. "Immigration has probably their best officer in the world, who currently heads up the immigration office in Beijing," he said. "[We have] strong operations ability, handle 80-some thousand visas per year and do a tremendous job, but now we're going to have the ADS, which means you're going to get x hundreds of thousand more, so how do we handle it?"

Continuing his testimony, Mr. Sunquist expressed concern that increased tourism flows would have a negative impact on trade relations. "The worst thing from a trade perspective and investment perspective is you just have so many visas that the people we need to get to Canada get the back of the queue and you wait six months and by then the business opportunity is gone. It's an issue, we need to solve it," he said.

Mr. Sunquist also touched upon issues of immigration and security in his remarks. "I don't want to say that it happens all the time, I just want to say it happens often enough that it forces our young immigration visa officers into a police role abroad, which is not what they were ever supposed to do. But for instance, a company in China wants to send five people to view a Canadian company, what they do is there's four legitimate people and they sell off the fifth position to somebody who just wants to come with them and then disappears in the woodwork. It gets you into actually tracking who the people are and finding bona fides and all of a sudden you have people spending a lot of time trying to solve who the fifth person is and whether they're legitimate or not. So what's happened, there has been a slow down. We're handling record numbers, but it's a difficult situation. [...]"

"We have people who were criminals, who left China and [are] sitting in Canadian jails under detention orders and removal, but they're still here," Mr. Sunquist said. The most high-profile such case is that of Lai Changxing, who has been in Canada since 1999. Refused as a refugee claimant in 2002, he remains on China's most-wanted list and is currently awaiting a deportation hearing in Vancouver. There has been persistent speculation that China's long delay in approving Canada's ADS application was largely due to Canada's failure to deport the high-profile fugitive.

Walls Come Down

Canada has to play catch-up in China's burgeoning tourist market



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM HILLMAN, EMBASSY

Prime Minister Paul Martin and his wife Sheila visit China's Great Wall during an official visit to the People's Republic of China in Jan. 2005.

tors have to put up a bond with the Chinese travel agency, which obviously provides for some security."

In terms of the sheer number of visa applications, Dr. Woo says, "Perhaps they won't go down, but I think the point of ADS is to allow for a more expeditious flow to Canada through processes that make the visa determination process more streamlined. That should make it easier for consular officials. Bear in mind that ADS does not change the processes by which independent travelers come to Canada from China. ADS applies only to the tour group market. There's a much larger and growing market of independent travelers who already have passports, and the purchasing power and desire to visit Canada. They can continue to apply to get visitor visas to come to Canada. That number will also grow with ADS, because of the broader ability that the Canadian tourism commission now has to market Canada in China."

Canada is in the unenviable position of having to play a game of catch-up in the rush to capture China's burgeoning tourist market. "There has been a deeply held perception in China that Canada is not open to tourism. I suspect that there are many high net-worth Chinese individuals who do not consider Canada as a viable option," Dr. Woo says. "What ADS does is it allows the Canadian government to more clearly communicate that Canada is open to tourism, not just for groups, but also to individual travelers. Over 50 countries have leapfrogged our place in the queue."

The Real Benefit of ADS

Dr. Woo points out, "The most important outcome of ADS has already been signed, sealed and delivered, and that is the ability to open a CTC office in Beijing and to market more broadly to the Chinese population. You have to remember, the Chinese tourism market is segmented. You have on the one hand this regulated sector, which is the tour-group market, which travel under these very arcane licenses called ADS, and then you have the much bigger market of independent travelers which can only with time overwhelm the ADS market as more and more Chinese get passports and have both the wealth and desire to travel. And the constraints on that market have everything to do with marketing, the availability of flights, and the ability of Canadian tour operators to respond and to service Chinese tastes and preferences."

The most important logistical hurdle still facing the increase of travel between the two countries is the negotiation of more airline flights. "The air services agreement is a very important piece of the puzzle that has to be worked out," Dr. Woo explains. "Even if we had the ability to bring tour groups over and to market services in China, the flow of tourists will be constrained by the number of flights. Currently, Canada and China have an air services agreement that allows 15 flights per week, each way. Both countries are close to the maximum number of frequencies, and we'll have to negotiate an agreement to expand those frequencies significantly. The Americans have already negotiated an expanded air services agreement that will take them up to hundreds [of flights] each way within a couple of years. We have the ADS pretty much on its way to completion but we haven't covered off the other piece of the puzzle."

Has Canada neglected China over the past decade? "Only relative to our OECD and G-8 partners," Dr. Woo says. "It's not that we haven't been putting a lot of effort in. On the commercial front, we've been paying much more attention to American business opportunities and by default have neglected China. It shows up in our trade figures; our market share has been declining steadily."

Repeated calls to the Chinese Embassy in Ottawa for comment on the ADS process were not returned as of press time.

An Economist's Perspective

Yuen Pau Woo, chief economist at the Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada in Vancouver, has a different view of how ADS will affect consular pressures. He says, "It would probably lessen the burden. The point of ADS is to streamline the application process, and for the Chinese in effect to take on some of the burden of pre-screening. The idea is to provide a channel for Chinese visitors to travel to Canada in tour groups in a way that provides added security for Canada, in terms of the risk of overstayers, refugee claimants, and so on. My understanding is that the Chinese visi-

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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF JOANNE LEGAULT

Joanne Legault (left) of Foreign Affairs Canada enjoys a day at the Grail Springs Spa with her friend Kathleen Tracey (right).

By Sarah McGregor

For those who've passed Joanne Legault in the halls of the Pearson Building envying her radiant skin tone or cheery spunk, she's about to share the secret to life's bliss. Ready? Frequent spa trips.

Ms. Legault swears, up and down, that routine pampering isn't an extravagance. Rather, spa treatments are vehicles to achieving both personal and professional success.

She's relied on caviar masks and rain massages for about 25 years, as a way to unwind from her globetrotting career in Foreign Affairs. And now the manager of FAC's Management & Technology Bureau is challenging her colleagues to act on her recommendation and book an appointment.

"I have to say that in all these years, the Foreign Service has definitely been a chal-

lenge," she concedes. "My colleagues and managers often comment that I handle matters calmly and work very well under pressure. I definitely attribute this to many years of yoga, meditation and feeling fit."

Q: Describe your first spa experience.

A: In 1980, I went on a two-week tour of Mexico. Part of the package included three days at a spa. It was located in the mountains. The location was breathtaking. There were sulfur baths and mud baths and hot springs located in caverns. When leaving this resort I felt very relaxed and completely revitalized. It was an awesome experience!

Q: How soon were you hooked?

A: Right away! I just loved the pampering!

Q: How long did it take to book your next appointment?

A: After returning from Mexico, my mom and I would regularly go to Montreal for the day, and go to an aesthetic salon to get pampered.

Q: How frequently do you visit a spa or a salon?

A: I try to book an appointment every two weeks, when I am tired or stressed out.

Q: Hands, feet, face or full body: Where should a first-time spa-goer begin?

A: Any of the above. It really comes to personal preference. Usually people love having a foot massage and/or a pedicure.

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EMBASSY | Listings

Wednesday, February 23

It is the **National Day of Brunei Darussalam**, commemorating the sultanate's independence from British protection in 1984. Contact the high commission (613-234-5656).

35 years ago today, **Guyana's Republic Day** was established. Contact the high commission (613-235-7249).

50 Years of Pedro Páramo Café Velada, National Autonomous University of Mexico in Canada (UNAM), 55 prom. du portage, Gatineau. (819-777-8626; www.unamesca.com). 6:30 p.m. Celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of *Pedro Páramo* by Mexican author Juan Rulfo (1918-1986) with a Spanish language discussion of the text at the University of Mexico in Gatineau.

Thursday, February 24

On this day in 1918, **Estonia** declared its **Independence** from Soviet Russia. Contact the embassy (613-789-4222).

Symposium: "Ethics of Citizenship" Marion Hall, University of Ottawa. (613-254-7177; Shelmerani@yahoo.ca) 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. Through Feb. 26. How can Muslims be faithful to their principles while participating in civic Canadian life? How can mutual trust be built to promote a positive and participatory presence? Dr. Tariq Ramadan attempts to answer these questions tonight in the first part of the Muslim Presence Ottawa symposium: "The Ethics of Citizenship, Democracy and the Future of Islam."

Metamorphoses Canadian Museum of Nature, 240 McLeod St. (613-749-2590; www.geocities.com/ikebanaottawa) 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Through Feb. 27. Free with museum admission. Discover the ancient art of Japanese floral design. This exhibition is on for four days only! Workshops take place on the weekend.

Hyanga Lek Main Lobby, Peason Bldg, 125 Sussex Dr. (613779-0079; jbmilira@yahoo.ca). 12 - 12:45 p.m. Quebec-based music group Hyanga Lek is in Ottawa to perform their original Afro fusion compositions as part of Black History Month celebrations

Lecture By Paul Jackson Room 156, National Library of Canada, 395 Wellington St. (susanne_klausen@carleton.ca) 8 - 10 p.m. Free. Ottawa Historical Association presents Dr. Paul Jackson, who will be giving a public lecture based on his new book, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military During World War II*.

Friday, February 25

Today is the 55th anniversary of **Kuwait's National Day**. Ambassador Musaed Al-Haroun celebrates the occasion with an invitation-only reception at the Westin Hotel Feb. 24. Contact the embassy (613-780-9999).

Newsmaker Breakfast National Press Club Dining Room, 165 Sparks St. (613-233-5641; www.pressclub.on.ca). 7:45 a.m. Former BBC News correspondent Michael Buerk, internationally known for his coverage of the Ethiopian Famine, speaks on the 20th anniversary of Live Aid: "What Good Did It Do?"

Symposium: "Ethics of Citizenship" Marion Hall, University of Ottawa. (613-254-7177; Shelmerani@yahoo.ca) 9 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.; 7 - 9 p.m. Through Feb. 26. This morning's session discusses "Building upon our shared experiences post 9-11: strategies for working with the Muslim Community," with keynote speaker Dr. Tariq Ramadan. The evening session's theme is "Western Muslims and the Future of Islam" moderated by CPAC's Ken Rockburn.

Saturday, February 26

Metamorphoses Canadian Museum of Nature, 240 McLeod St. (613-749-2590; www.geocities.com/ikebanaottawa) 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. \$10 per family. Through Feb. 27. Try your hand at Ikebana, the Japanese art of arranging flowers into more than 50 ways, to symbolize time, place and emotion.

Symposium: "Ethics of Citizenship" Marion Hall, University of Ottawa. (613-254-7177; Shelmerani@yahoo.ca) 7 - 9 p.m. Globe and Mail columnist Dr. Sheema Khan is today's speaker at the Muslim Presence symposium, and will speak on "Facing the Challenges of the Contemporary World".

Sunday, February 27

161 years ago, the **Dominican Republic** gained **Independence** from Haiti. Contact the embassy (613-569-9893).

Monday, February 28

Le Culte de l'Urgence Maison de Citoyen, 25 rue Laurier, Gatineau. (amoffat@flammarion.qc.ca). 7:30 p.m. Free. Nicole Aubert, professor at the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Paris, is in Canada promoting her new French language book, *Le Culte de l'Urgence: la maladie du temps réel*.

Ottawa Symphony Orchestra National Arts Centre, 53 Elgin St. (613-231-7802; www.ottawasymphony.com) 8 p.m. \$23 - \$57. The fourth stop on the OSO's "Five Great Cities - Five Great Concerts" season is in London, England, with a program featuring works by British composers Benjamin Britten, Edward Elgar and Arnold Bax.

Tuesday, March 1

Lecture: "Alcan on Canada-EU Trade" 5050 Minto Building, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive. (613-520-2600; www.carleton.ca) 5 p.m. This year's Canada-Europe Business Lecture stars Dr. Hugh Porteous, Director of Research and Corporate Relations with Alcan Inc. Dr. Porteous will speak on "Canada-EU Trade and Issues to be Faced: The Alcan Perspective."

Wednesday, March 2

Seminar: "Understanding Southern African HIV/AIDS Epidemics" A220 Loeb Building, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive. (613-520-2600; www.carleton.ca) 2:30 p.m. The Department of Geography & Environmental Science invites you to hear Professor A.W. Whiteside discuss "Understanding Southern African HIV/AIDS Epidemics: Susceptibility and Vulnerability." Prof. Whiteside is Director of the Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division, University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is also a member of the UN Commission on HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa.

Panel: "Sharia Law and Ontario Muslim Women" Dunton Tower 2017, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive. (613-520-2600; www.carleton.ca) 2:30 - 4:30 p.m. "Sharia Law and the Implications of the Ontario Arbitration Act for Muslim Women" is the topic of discussion between panelists Alia Hogben, Executive Director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW); Dr. Sheema Khan, Chair of the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-CAN); and Dr. Farhang Rajaei, Political Science and Humanities Professor at Carleton.

CIIA Meeting Le Salon, National Arts Centre, 53 Elgin St. (rsup 613-233-3207; DebrahETaylor@rogers.com) 7 p.m. dinner, 8 p.m. presentation. \$40 (dinner & presentation); \$35 for members & students. \$5 (presentation only). The Canadian Institute of International Affairs presents York University Prof. Wesley Cragg, who will speak on "The Corruption Pandemic: What Role for Canada?" Corruption in governments throughout the world is more serious than most realize and encompasses issues relating to human rights, economic development and democracy.