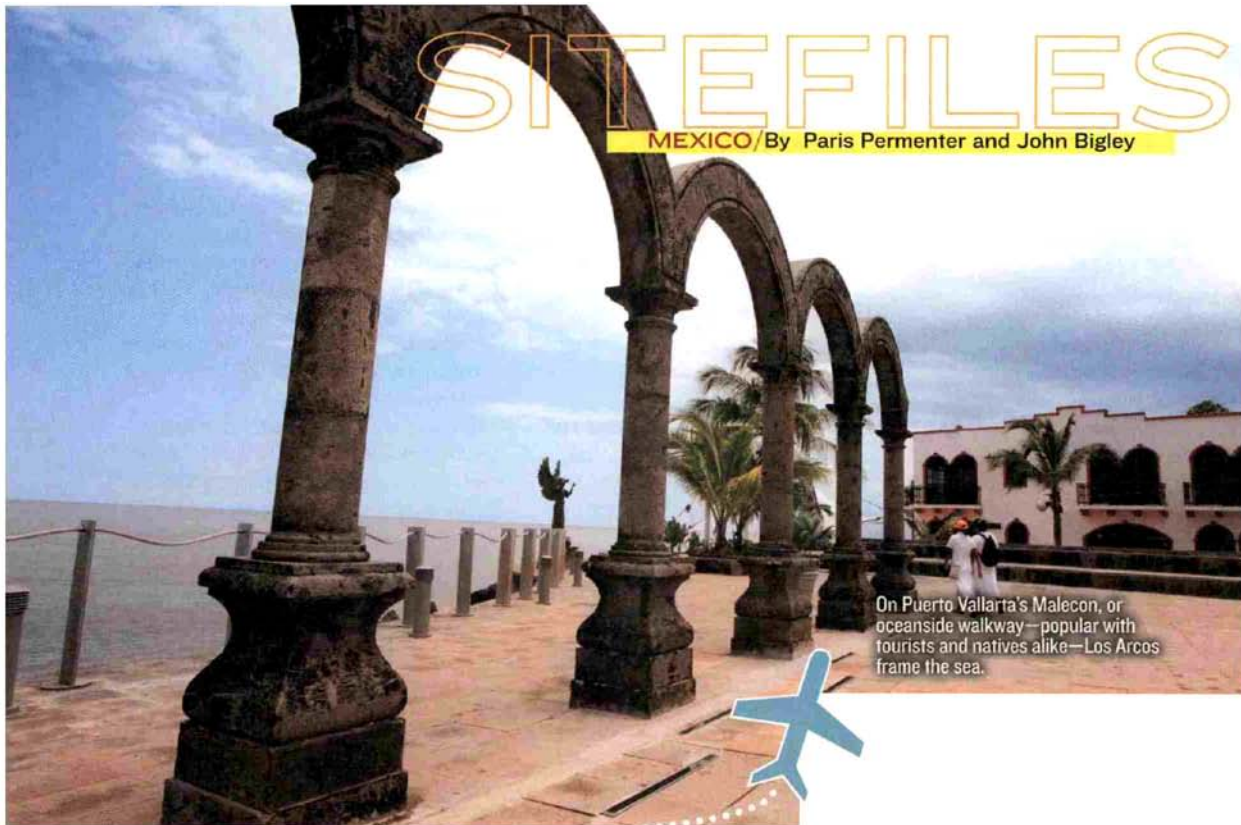


CORPORATE MEETINGS & INCENTIVES



SITEFILES

MEXICO/By Paris Permenter and John Bigley

On Puerto Vallarta's Malecon, or oceanside walkway—popular with tourists and natives alike—Los Arcos frame the sea.

Mexico is reinventing itself after a year made difficult by the economy, the outbreak of the H1N1 virus, and sporadic reports of violence. However, the AIG effect has, in some cases, helped Mexico, says Eduardo Chaillo, regional director, North America, for the Mexican Tourism Board. “The current economy gives us the opportunity to get the North American events that were planned for Europe, Asia, or even South America,” he notes. “Due to the recession, Mexico is a good option since planners will get more value [in] Mexico.”

Official warnings about travel to Mexico because of H1N1 have been lifted. Cruise lines have returned to Mexican ports. And tourism officials are doing all they can to show meeting planners why Mexico belongs back on their short lists of meeting sites through extensive promotion and marketing efforts—plus exceptional packages and concessions.

Those same officials are look-

ing forward to welcoming members of the largest association of international meeting planners in the world to its shores when Meeting Professionals International takes its annual conference, MeetDifferent, to Cancun February 20–23, 2010. The association has created a hosted-buyer program for its upcoming event at Moon Palace in Cancun. One hundred qualified meeting buyers will get free housing and registration in return for their participation in a series of prescheduled appointments with suppliers.

Fact-finding and site visits are essential to booking international meetings, according to international meeting planning experts. “What people tend to forget is that the news, while factual, can be very misleading,” says Eli Gorin, CMP, president of boutique meeting management firm gMeetings Inc., Aventura, Fla., who has long experience bringing groups to Mexico. “People need to do a little more research of their

own and connect with the local primary sources of information in the destination that they want to visit.”

Today, meeting executives are finding a revitalized Mexico with a more extensive selection of venues than ever before. Convention centers and exhibition venues in 12 Mexican cities are under construction, renovation, or expansion. Along with expanded accommodations and meeting facilities, Mexico is home to 59 international airports with good airlift to the U.S. and Canada.

Mexican tourism officials have launched a Web site to keep planners and travelers updated: www.mexico-update.com.