

EXCELENCIAS

No. 206 / 2023
MONTHLY

from the Caribbean & the Americas

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

**The Caribbean must
lead in Development**

**GLOBAL
CENTRAL AMERICA**
Tourism unification

**MIDDLE OF THE
WORLD CITY**
**From myth to experience
in Ecuador**

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WTM...

The Start or the End?



When choosing a trade fair for our company, we look for the best moment, either geographically or in terms of contracting dates. It is very important if we value WTM as the first fair of the following year, because here we prepare contracting operations for the next season, which will normally be closed at Fitur.

However, the post-pandemic crisis and the exit of the European Community have caused it to lose strength and at this time the contracting strategy is changing; it continues to shine in Africa and Asia, they were the leaders in the English-speaking Caribbean and strong issuers towards destinations of proximity and good weather.

Two destinations have attracted tourists in a special way, Spain and Greece, and now Turkey. However, the recovery of tourism in this part of the world will be slow, as stated by professor and now mayor of Miraflores, Lima, Peru, Carlos Canales, who, also with a far-sighted and premonitory vision, in a CND Escucha de Excelencias broadcast, in the middle of the pandemic, told us that, according to his calculations, it would take **NO LESS THAN 4 YEARS** to get close to the figures of 2019.

That's what we must work towards, and fairs must be part of that recovery.



José Carlos de Santiago

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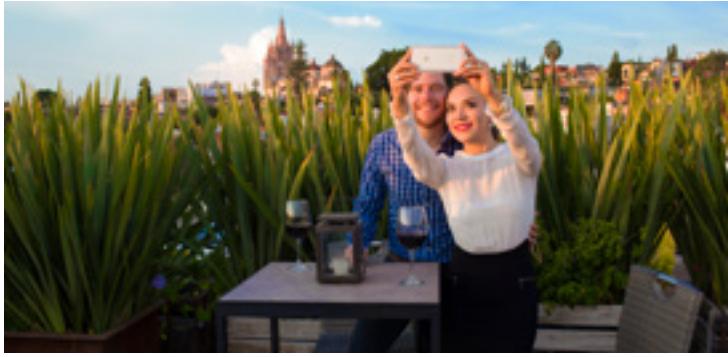
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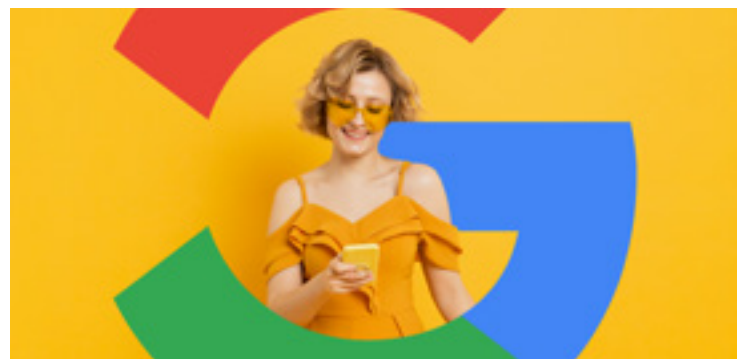
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25 Years Later Google Continues to
Transform Travel and Tourism

Antonio Santos del Valle
President of the Tourism
and Society Think Tank (TSTT)

ACCORDING TO THE EXPERT, THE PREFERENCES AND EXPECTATIONS OF TRAVELERS TOWARDS DESTINATIONS IN THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN HAVE EVOLVED, NOW INCLUDING A DEMAND FOR EXPERIENCES AND IMMERSION IN LOCAL CULTURE, GASTRONOMY, AND TRADITIONS



THE DIGITAL ERA has Revolutionized Travel

TEXT: EXCELLENCES EDITORIAL
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE INTERVIEWEE

Conducting an interview, even remotely, with Mr. Antonio Santos del Valle, President of the Steering Committee of the Tourism and Society Think Tank (TSTT), Director of the Global Shopping Tourism Network, and international advisor and consultant, can be a truly enriching experience. His knowledge of the tourism sector, frequent

exchanges with experts, and personal experiences often guarantee a stamp of credibility in any conversation delving into contemporary challenges in the leisure industry. Excellences Turísticas del Caribe y las Américas recently addressed precisely these topics with him.

THE TOURISM AND SOCIETY THINK TANK (TSTT), WITH AROUND 100,000 MEMBERS FROM 92 COUNTRIES, WHAT MAKES THIS SPACE SO ATTRACTIVE TO INDUSTRY EXPERTS?

The Tourism and Society Think Tank (TSTT) is highly attractive to industry experts for several reasons. Firstly, its broad representation of 92 countries ensures a diversity of perspectives and experiences that enrich any discussion or initiative related to tourism. This geographical diversity allows for a deeper understanding of global trends as well as regional and cultural specificities influencing the industry.

Furthermore, with a membership of 120,000 professionals, academics,



The diversity in TSTT's membership allows for a deeper understanding of global trends.

entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders, TSTT creates a multidisciplinary space that enhances innovation and collaboration. Members not only have the opportunity to learn but also to build meaningful networks, opening doors to new opportunities and collaborations.

In a dynamic and ever-evolving sector like tourism, staying updated is crucial. TSTT offers its members access to cutting-edge research, news, case studies, lecture series, and other educational resources, ensuring that experts are always aware of best practices and the latest advances in the field.

Collectively, these features make TSTT an invaluable space for any tourism professional seeking to stay at the forefront and actively contribute to the sustainable and responsible development of the industry.

AFTER THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC, WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER THE MAIN CHANGES THAT HAVE MARKED THE TOURISM INDUSTRY?

After the impact of the pandemic, the tourism industry has undergone numerous changes. Some of the main ones include the need to minimize physical contact and facilitate adaptability, driving the adoption of digital technologies.

Cancellation and rescheduling policies have become more flexible. Many airlines, hotels, and tour operators have adjusted their terms and conditions to attract travelers in such a changing environment.

Another significant aspect is increased awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism and the need to travel responsibly to minimize environmental impact. Many people have become

interested in exploring nearby and local destinations, boosting local economies and discovering and appreciating the beauties of their own country or region.

While the pandemic presented significant challenges for the tourism industry, it also offered opportunities to rethink, adapt, and evolve in ways that could have long-term benefits for travelers, the industry, and the planet.

Additionally, the profile and behavior of tourists have undergone significant changes in various dimensions.

Travelers now prioritize hygiene and safety. Before making reservations, they often research the cleanliness and sanitizing protocols of accommodations, transportation, and attractions.

The pandemic presented significant challenges for the tourism industry but also offered opportunities to rethink, adapt, and evolve

Travelers are more aware of the environmental and social impact of their actions. This has led to an increase in demand for sustainable and ethical tourism experiences, and above all, tourists rely more on technology, informing themselves before travel not only about attractions but also about health regulations, restrictions, and recommendations at the destination.

WHAT EXPERIENCES FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT DO YOU THINK COVID HAS LEFT AS A BALANCE FOR TOURISM?

COVID-19, being one of the deepest and widespread crises the tourism industry has faced, has left numerous lessons and experiences for managing adverse situations.

The crisis highlighted the importance of having contingency and emergency response plans.

The constant restrictions and regulatory changes showed that tourism businesses adapted quickly to changing situations. For example, companies with diversified offerings in terms of markets, products, or services were better able to cushion negative impacts.

Above all, technological adaptation became a lifesaver. Companies that invested in digital solutions, whether for sales,



One of the latest projects is the presentation of the Religious Tourism Destinations Network.

operations, or marketing, gained a competitive advantage.

The crisis forced many companies to reassess and reinvent their business models, identifying new opportunities and abandoning obsolete or unsustainable practices.

The idea that tourism must be sustainable and beneficial for both visitors and destinations was also reinforced.

REGARDING TECHNOLOGY, WHAT VALUE DO YOU ATTRIBUTE TO CONCEPTS LIKE SMART CITY AND THE DIGITIZATION OF THE SECTOR?

Technology has had a transformative impact on the tourism industry and how cities are managed and developed. Concepts like "Smart City" and the digitization of the tourism

sector have seamlessly integrated into tourism, primarily due to the need to adapt to the industry's own requirements.

Smart Cities have allowed for the optimization of resources, cost reduction, and improved service quality through the use of technologies and data. Similarly, digitization has automated processes, simplifying operations, and enhancing business management.

Through digitization, it has been possible to collect and analyze data, enabling the provision of personalized experiences tailored to travelers' preferences and behaviors.

Digitization has revolutionized how tourist destinations are promoted. Through social media, virtual reality, and other digital platforms, it has become more effective to attract and captivate



potential visitors, giving destinations a competitive edge in the global market by offering more integrated, efficient, and enriching experiences to visitors.

AND CONCERNING CURRENT TOURISM TRENDS, WHICH ONES DO YOU FIND MOST INTERESTING?

There is a growing awareness of the environmental and social impact of tourism. Travelers are seeking destinations and experiences that promote sustainability, respecting nature and local cultures.

Beyond visiting places, travelers seek immersive and meaningful experiences. This can range from local cooking workshops to participating in cultural rituals or conservation activities, aligning with a growing focus on health and wellness as many travelers seek destinations

and activities offering rejuvenating experiences, such as yoga retreats, natural spas, or nature hiking.

The adaptation to remote work has led to a trend where people combine work and travel, choosing destinations with good connectivity and amenities for working while exploring a new place.



Similarly, many tourists are rediscovering the wonders of their own regions, opting for short getaways and local adventures, whose evolution has been and will continue to be constant.

I also believe that artificial intelligence, digitization, and mobile applications will continue to transform the tourist experience, from planning to experiencing the destination.

Regarding tourism services, I think the coexistence between traditional

With a membership of 120,000 members, TSTT brings together professionals, academics, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders



Travel cancellation and rescheduling policies have become more flexible after the pandemic.

hotels and the growth of platform accommodations like Airbnb and others should be established with clear rules for everyone, including tourists.

Another important idea I believe is that due to the aging population in regions like Europe, the demand for tourist experiences that are accessible to everyone, regardless of physical abilities, age, or special needs, will continue to grow.

Artificial intelligence, digitization, and mobile applications will continue to transform the tourist experience

Similarly, the trends of both new and current generations will seek trips that provide personal and spiritual growth.

These trends reflect an evolution from the traditional concept of travel, moving toward more personalized, conscious, and enriching experiences.

YOU MENTIONED IN ONE OF YOUR INTERVIEWS THAT, IN YOUR OPINION, THE CONCEPT OF TOURISM "HAS EXPANDED CONSIDERABLY." WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

Previously, tourism could be seen primarily as leisure travel to popular destinations or beach vacations. Now, tourism encompasses a wide variety of experiences, from ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural and gastronomic tourism to wellness tourism and even astronomical tourism, among many others.

Thanks to technological advances and globalization, travel has become more accessible to a greater number of

people. This has led to tourism not being a luxury for a few but an activity within reach of many.

The digital era has revolutionized how we plan, book, and experience travel. Social media, online reviews, and booking platforms have changed the landscape, expanding the perception and expectations of tourism.

Tourism is no longer just about standardized packages. Travelers seek personalized experiences that reflect their interests, passions, and values, and there is a growing awareness of the impact tourism has on the environment and local communities. This has led to an expansion of the concept, where tourism is not just about visiting a place but doing so responsibly and beneficially.

From an industry perspective, tourism is now recognized as a key economic force in many regions,

There is a growing demand for community-based tourism.

significantly contributing to GDP, creating employment, and fostering local development.

Tourism has become a form of cultural exchange, where travelers and host communities interact and learn from each other.

Given these developments and expansions in how we understand and experience tourism, it is evident that the concept has grown and diversified enormously, reflecting the changing interests, needs, and values of global society.

FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE, DO YOU THINK WHAT TRAVELERS SEEK IN DESTINATIONS LIKE THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN HAS CHANGED IN ANY WAY?

Destinations in the Americas and the Caribbean have always attracted travelers with their natural beauty, rich culture, and diversity. However, the preferences and expectations of travelers towards these destinations have evolved over time. Some of the most notable variations include a search for authenticity through the demand for genuine and local experiences. Travelers seek to immerse themselves in local culture, gastronomy, and traditions.



I also believe that due to the rich biodiversity of the Americas and the Caribbean, many travelers seek ecotourism experiences, from exploring the Amazon rainforest to diving in coral reefs. Additionally, there is a growing awareness of sustainability and environmental protection, leading to a demand for responsible tourism practices.

With a rich tradition in natural therapies and serene environments, the tourism offering is redirecting towards wellness destinations, with an increase in cultural and heritage offerings, not forgetting the essential gastronomic offerings.

We can also see a growing demand for community-based tourism, where travelers can interact directly with local communities, learn from them, and support them economically.

And, as in other international destinations, with digitization, travelers


have access to more information and can discover hidden gems, plan better, and connect with local communities through online platforms.

These trends reflect an evolution in the expectations and desires of travelers towards the Americas and the Caribbean

Due to the rich biodiversity of the Americas and the Caribbean, many travelers seek ecotourism experiences

WTTC reveals the power of RETAIL TRAVEL





THIS SEGMENT
BEGAN TO RECOVER
FROM THE
PANDEMIC DURING
2021 IN MOST
MARKETS, WITH
THE AMERICAS
AND EUROPE IN
THE LEAD

TEXT: EXCELENCIAS NEWSROOM
PHOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

The launch of “Global Retail Tourism: Trends and Insights”, one of the most recent reports published by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), could change the way we conceive shopping tourism.

The joint research between the WTTC and the Hospitality & Tourism Research Center at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, in collaboration with The Bicester Collection, was released during an event held at La Roca Village, part of The Bicester Collection, in Barcelona, Spain, coinciding with the Village's 25th anniversary.

The study is based on a survey of nearly 4,600 "shopping tourists" in 24 global markets for this report, the average shopping spend of those who visited Spain on their last trip from the UK, Italy, France, the Netherlands and the US was 347.3 euros. They spent most on food, alcohol and tobacco, followed by clothing.

The leadership as a shopping destination by contribution to GDP is held by the United States with a \$23.9 billion impact in 2021 on its economy.

The latest WTTC report revealed that retail tourism has left a significant footprint on the global economy by generating revenues totaling a staggering \$178 billion in 2019. The findings highlight the growing relevance of this sector, which accounts for 6% of the total value of the global Travel & Tourism sector.

The trend involves travelers personally planning and organizing every aspect of their trip in an ever-increasing manner in recent years. Moreover, its economic impact is notable in several destinations, where it has exceeded 15% of the local tourism industry.

Despite these numbers, it has been revealed that retail tourism has been historically under-researched, leading to a significant lack of critical data for strategic forecasting. This means that, despite its economic importance, there are limitations in gathering accurate information that would allow for informed and strategic decisions related to this sector.

Experts suggest that further study and research on retail tourism is essential to better understand its impact, forecast its future evolution and ultimately develop effective strategies. It is hoped that through a thorough analysis of this form of tourism, opportunities can be identified to further boost the global economy and maximize benefits for tourism destinations worldwide.

According to the WTTC document, this segment began to recover from the pandemic in most markets in 2021, with the Americas and Europe leading the way.

By 2022, retail tourism played a key role in the recovery of the Travel & Tourism sector, whose inbound tourism revenues increased by 82% last year.

The new report highlights the growing impact of shopping tourism on travel decision-making, foreign exchange earnings and support for local brands and products.

It also reveals the emerging trend of "retailtainment," which combines retail and entertainment to enhance the shopping experience. The study also reveals changes in tourists' preferences, showing that online shopping is adding to traditional shopping experiences, while out-of-town retail is also gaining in popularity.

The report highlights emerging themes, such as "retailtainment," or the



Through 2022, inbound tourism revenues increased by 82%

Retail tourism has been historically under-researched, leading to a significant lack of critical data for strategies

merging of retail and entertainment, to encourage shopping and enhance the customer experience.

It also offers valuable insights into spending patterns, the preferences of today's shopping tourists and the merger with experiential tourism.

While high street stores remain popular shopping destinations, out-of-town retail is also growing: a third of respondents agreed to go to these destinations. Moreover, online shopping complements, rather than replaces, traditional retail experiences.

The report also offers valuable recommendations for retail tourism stakeholders by providing guidance on how to successfully navigate these emerging trends.

While the future of retail tourism looks positive, it is essential to recognize

and address certain obstacles, such as challenges related to labor legislation and the impact of duty-free shopping policies.

Shopping tourism is increasingly an important component of the tourism value chain. Shopping has become a determining factor in destination choice, a prominent component of the overall travel experience and, in some cases, the primary motive. Destinations therefore have a great opportunity to take advantage of this new market trend to add value to their tourism offer, while reinforcing, and even defining, tourism branding and positioning.

Even more importantly, shopping represents one of the main categories of "tourism spending" and is a significant source of revenue for national economies, both directly and through the many linkages with other sectors of the economy.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The research summary describes the findings as "immense untapped potential" for both destinations and businesses as it is a unique investigation into the economic impact of retail tourism globally and regionally, as well as within specific economies.

As part of this in-depth study, nearly 4,600 shopping travelers from 24 global outbound markets were surveyed and provided insights into their experiences, habits and retail preferences (primarily related to spending patterns and choice of shopping location) on their most recent trip abroad, and their intentions for future travel.

In addition, data is provided taking into account market segmentation and analysis of demographic and other factors influencing traveler behavior; as well as the most commonly chosen origin-to-destination routes.

Emerging retail trends such as sustainability, technology and retailtainment are based on 13 in-depth interviews with industry leaders and identified key challenges and opportunities for retail tourism stakeholders, including examples in specific destinations and recommendations for businesses, DMOs and governments on how to successfully navigate current trends.

Political, economic, social and technological factors that are currently shaping retail tourism globally were also considered.

As a bonus, detailed case studies for the United Kingdom and Hong Kong were included.

"In Travel & Tourism, the importance of retail tourism cannot be underestimated. Accounting for over \$178 billion of global GDP in 2019, it is time to recognize its true potential. Our report reveals that retail tourism is not just about shopping; it's about revenue, job creation and influencing travelers' decisions. It is our collective responsibility to embrace these opportunities, shape the future of the industry and embark on an exciting journey," Julia Simpson, President and CEO of WTTC, said of the research.

SCHEDULE YOUR OWN TRIP

Retail tourism, also known as individual tourism or unorganized tourism, refers to the form of travel in which tourists personally plan and carry out all aspects of their trip, without the intervention of travel agencies or intermediaries.

As such, travelers have the freedom to choose and organize by themselves the different aspects of their experience, such as booking flights,

accommodation, transportation and activities.

This trend has become more common thanks to advances in technology, such as the availability of online information and booking platforms.

Travelers now have access to a wide range of online resources, such as flight and hotel search engines, booking websites and reviews from other travelers.

For more than 30 years, WTTC has conducted research on the economic impact of travel and tourism in 185 countries and issues such as overpopulation, taxation, policymaking and many others to raise awareness of the importance of the travel and tourism sector as one of the world's most important economic sectors. Its members and partners include more than 200 CEOs, chairmen and presidents of the world's leading travel and tourism companies from all geographies and industries.

High street stores remain popular shopping destinations, but out-of-town retail is also growing



The study is based on a survey of nearly 4,600 "shopping tourists" across 24 global markets

THE NITTY-GRITTY OF RETAIL TRAVEL

Autonomy: Tourists have the freedom to choose and decide every aspect of their trip, from the destination and duration of the trip, to the activities and attractions to visit.

Flexibility: By organizing their own itinerary, they can easily adjust their plans according to their interests and preferences.

Search for better prices and deals: By making the reservations themselves, they can compare and search for the best deals and prices for flights, accommodations and other travel-related services.

Increased contact with the local community: By making decisions on their own and exploring destinations on their own, tourists can have more opportunities to meet locals, experience local culture and traditions in a more authentic way.

Personalized experiences: They can choose the places that interest them most, participate in specific activities and explore destinations according to their own interests and motivations.

The Caribbean must lead the way in Sustainable Tourism Development

ON THE ROAD TO PROMOTING
RESPONSIBLE PRACTICES, THE REGION
HAS BECOME A ROLE MODEL FOR
DESTINATIONS AROUND THE WORLD

TEXT: JORGE COROMINA
PHOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

"We believe that the Caribbean must lead, not follow, in investing in a healthy, sustainable and productive future for the prosperity of our people and our planet," declared Dona Regis-Prosper, the newly appointed secretary general and CEO of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), during the keynote address at a Caribbean virtual forum to celebrate World Tourism Day 2023.

Echoing this year's message from the United Nations World Tourism Organization, Regis-Prosper spoke about the holistic strategy that focuses on more and better targeted investments "for people, for the planet and for prosperity." This strategy encompasses community empowerment, environmentally responsible growth and equitable wealth creation underpinned by resilience.

Underscoring the urgency of the call to action, the regional head of tourism posed three fundamental questions: How will the Caribbean, the most tourism-dependent region in the world, respond to this international call; how will we contribute our unique experience and expertise to the global debate on issues such as renewable energy, climate change and carbon neutrality, inclusiveness and the need for economies of scale to increase local linkages and reduce leakage; how will our leaders in the tourism sectors translate this call to action into action; and how will we contribute our unique experience and expertise to the global debate on issues such as renewable energy, climate change and carbon neutrality, inclusivity and the need for economies of scale to increase local linkages and reduce leakage? How will our leaders in the public, private and non-profit sectors translate theories

into policies and practical applications that enable our communities and our industry to develop more sustainably and equitably?

The new CTO secretary general elaborated on the three foundational pillars underpinning this year's World Tourism Day theme: people, planet and prosperity.

Regis-Prosper emphasized the need to focus attention as part of tourism on people, which requires addressing the Caribbean's knowledge and skills deficit.

Affirming the critical importance of interpersonal relationships in tourism, he

Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic are three of the most visited Caribbean destinations each year.

shared his view that "research confirms what those of us in the travel and tourism industry know firsthand: that interpersonal, face-to-face interactions with others play a significant role in the visitor experience."

On global coexistence, he pointed to the Caribbean's role as a guardian of fragile ecosystems and stressed the urgency of "green investments and environmentally friendly practices."

Dona Regis-Prosper was appointed Secretary General and Executive Director of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) on September 1, 2023. She hails from St. Lucia and is the first woman to head the intergovernmental body. She has a 22-year career in the industry





Caribbean tourism as a whole stood out as the fastest recovering industry worldwide after the pandemic.

Citing initiatives such as the Caribbean Hotel Energy Efficiency Action Project, he underscored the region's commitment to sustainability: "As a global brand, Caribbean tourism must continue to adopt best practices in environmental, social and governance activities that demonstrate our commitment to future generations," he said.

He also stressed the need for public-private-community partnerships to leverage the benefits of tourism for prosperity.

He stressed the need for diversity, equity and inclusion, and cultural respect, stating that "UNWTO supports the call for new and innovative solutions and investments that stimulate and underpin the growth, productivity and sustainability of the tourism sector."

"It is a call to simultaneously invest in our talented human capital. When our people, our communities and our planet thrive, our industry and our destinations thrive," he added.

On issues such as social inclusion, the relationship between sustainability and destinations, and smart business, Regis-Prosper envisions Caribbean tourism led by green growth, involving green investments, green technologies and green business practices.

The virtual forum, held in late September, was a joint initiative of the Caribbean Tourism Organization in collaboration with the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association, the University of the West Indies, the Organization of American States, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Commission, the Caribbean Broadcasting Union and CTO's allied members: George Washington University's International Institute for Tourism Studies and Hibiscus International.

TIPS FOR A RESPONSIBLE PARADISE



CONSERVATION OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Caribbean is home to impressive biodiversity, including coral reefs, rainforests and unique marine habitats. Realizing the importance of preserving these ecosystems, many Caribbean countries have implemented eco-tourism practices and established marine and terrestrial parks to protect their natural resources. They are leading marine conservation efforts, including protecting sea turtles, restoring coral reefs and combating water pollution.



RENEWABLE ENERGY

More than a few nations have adopted renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels. This not only reduces the carbon footprint of the tourism industry, but also ensures a more sustainable future.



SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Many resorts and tourism companies in the region are committed to working with local communities to promote sustainable development. This includes creating local jobs, purchasing local produce and food, and investing in community infrastructure. The Caribbean has demonstrated that sustainable tourism is not only beneficial to the environment, but also to local economies and visitor satisfaction.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The Caribbean has recognized the importance of education in promoting sustainable practices. Schools, NGOs and research centers are working to raise awareness among residents and tourists about environmental protection. Many Caribbean governments have implemented strict regulations to protect sensitive areas and limit construction in coastal areas.



GREEN CERTIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS

Many establishments in the region seek sustainable tourism certifications, such as Green Globe or Rainforest Alliance certification, to demonstrate their commitment to responsible practices. The region offers a wide range of adventure tourism activities, such as hiking, diving and snorkeling, with a focus on conservation and respect for nature.

BY UNIFYING RESOURCES AND EFFORTS, AND BY
ESTABLISHING COMMON OBJECTIVES, WE WILL
OPERATE DECISIVELY IN OUR TARGET MARKETS,
STRENGTHENING US AS A REGION

TEXT: CAROLINA BRIONES PEREYRA, FORMER
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CENTRAL
AMERICAN TOURISM AGENCY (CATA)



CENTRAL AMERICA'S TOURISM UNIFICATION

A Strategy to Compete
in the Global Marketplace

For many years I have worked for the Central American tourism sector and have witnessed its remarkable evolution. Despite our progress, we face significant challenges in positioning ourselves to compete in international markets. However, these challenges can be overcome through a common strategy: tourism integration and unification.

Faced with this approach, it is natural that questions arise, as if this strategy would imply the renunciation of our individual identities as destinations,



which could jeopardize the uniqueness of our countries and benefit some to the detriment of others. I strongly believe that integration and unification will have the complete opposite effect.

By unifying resources, efforts and establishing common objectives, we will operate decisively in our target markets, strengthening ourselves as a region. We will take advantage of our individual potentialities, complementing them with those of other countries, and we will build a strategically consolidated offer. This will allow us to radiate an indivisible image that will take root in the minds of travelers, who will include Central America among their options for their next vacation.

In 1965, the foundation for our tourism integration was laid with the creation of the Central American Tourism Council (CCT). This crucial

step was consolidated in 1996, when our government leaders declared tourism a priority economic sector. This declaration led to the formation of the Secretariat for Central American Tourism Integration (SITCA) and the Central American Tourism Agency (CATA).

Both agencies have achieved successful collaboration between the public and private sectors, developing sustainable strategies to position the region in the tourism market. Since 2015, the Dominican Republic has joined these efforts.

The fundamental thing is to foster an integrationist culture that permeates both institutions and the population in general. Integration is not only a goal, it is also a path that all Central Americans must travel. Of course, increasing the budgets allocated to CATA and SITCA is essential to achieve the desired

objectives and increase the scope of their intervention in terms of marketing, positioning and professionalization of the sector.

We must focus on creating business opportunities for our small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, improving the quality and sustainability of our products and services through the Central American Integrated System of Tourism Quality and Sustainability (SICCS), and adopting coherent regional policies, as has been done with the Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2021 - 2025.

This plan is committed to the integration of strategies and actions that contribute to achieving development objectives with an economic, social, environmental and cultural focus, ensuring the balanced use of heritage resources and optimal results and benefits for local



One of the most beautiful landscapes in the region is Tortuguero, in Costa Rica.

communities, as well as for current and future generations.

It is vital to strengthen business management capacity and foster innovation in the sector through the use of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), which will enable our entrepreneurs to compete effectively in an increasingly technological world.

Tourism unification depends on the willingness of our governments to collaborate and coordinate the

implementation of common strategies. We already have shared policies as a starting point. The next step involves establishing and developing effective processes, uniting efforts under specific regional goals backed by solid indicators of compliance. Our mission is to facilitate the transit of travelers through our territories and, at the same time, to significantly increase our presence as a region in both regional and international markets.

Unifying ourselves means growing and equipping the region with the tools and resources to be competitive and stand out on the world tourism map, competing on a level playing field. This means strengthening the solid foundations bequeathed by those who preceded us and building new opportunities for future generations. From CB Turismo, we collaborate and support the region and its business sector, making available our experience, technology, love for Central America and, above all, our professionalism.

Integration is not only a goal, it is also a road that all Central Americans must travel



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- Constant interactivity with readers on Facebook and Twitter

Caribbean News Digital reaches out to the world with issues in such languages as English, Spanish, German, Portuguese and Russian, distributed as newsletters and hosted in their respective websites. It is complemented by Excelencias News Cuba and CND Panama special issues.

Find us in:



Miguel Torruco Marqués
Secretary of Tourism of Mexico

THROUGH A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS, CNDESCUCHA, AN ONLINE AUDIOVISUAL PROGRAM BY THE EXCELENCIAS GROUP, REVIEWED THE CAREER OF THE CURRENT SECRETARY OF TOURISM OF MEXICO, FROM HIS EARLY PROFESSIONAL BEGINNINGS TO THIS LATEST STAGE AS A PUBLIC OFFICIAL



The End of the **AKHENATEN** Syndrome Opens the Way for **New Projects**

TEXT: JOSÉ CARLOS DE SANTIAGO
PHOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

Throughout his career, Miguel Torruco Marqués, Secretary of Tourism of Mexico, has been the recipient of multiple Excelencias Awards, bestowed by the Excelencias Group. His high professional quality is evident in the achievements reached during his tenure, supported by his education as a graduate in Hotel and Restaurant Administration from the Mexican School of Tourism, along with numerous completed diplomas. His career has also been heavily influenced by his roles as an educator and as the Deputy Director of the Mexican School of Tourism.

At the age of 25, he founded his own educational institution, the Pan-American School of Hospitality (EPH), which has trained 17,000 tourism professionals.

Furthermore, he served as the President of the Alumni Associations of Tourism and the Mexican Association of Private Academic Centers of Tourism (AMECAPT). He was the founder of the Pan-American Confederation of Hotel, Gastronomy, and Tourism Schools (CONPEHT) and the Latin American Confederation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations (FLAHR). He also held the position of National President of the National Tourism Confederation (CNT), among other roles.

Through a series of interviews, CNDEscucha, an audiovisual program by the Excelencias Group for the internet, reviewed the career of the current Secretary of Tourism of Mexico, from his early professional beginnings to this latest stage as a public official.

WHAT WERE THE INITIAL CHALLENGES YOU ENCOUNTERED IN THE ADMINISTRATION?

As a lifelong tourism entrepreneur, when I arrived at the Secretariat of Tourism, I asked myself: with the people who were already assigned, how much budget was allocated from 2012 to 2018? The answer was 54 billion pesos for FONATUR (National Fund for Tourism Development), the Tourism Promotion Council of Mexico, and the Secretariat of Tourism. I also wondered: in what condition is the sector handed over to me? What position do we hold internationally? Seventh place. It was commonly said that we were in the top 10, and we often varied three positions in terms of international tourism.

However, this ranking does not measure a nation's tourism potential but is based on an economic perspective. In that regard, I was handed a sector that ranked 17th in terms of



The Green Angels Geointelligence Center received the 2022 Tourism Excellence Award in the Blue category for their role as road tourism guardians in Mexico

foreign exchange earnings, figures that were rarely disclosed, and 40th in terms of per capita expenditure, by the end of 2018.

Being in this position means that there were 39 nations where their leaders, entrepreneurs, service providers, and all those who make up the tourism family had more capacity to create, conceive, integrate, and market new products that would have a greater impact on consumers.

The tourism potential of a nation is measured from an economic perspective.

Another stark statistic we saw was that 92% of the tourists we received concentrated only in six locations: Cancún, Mexico City, Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, Guadalajara, and Monterrey.

I realized this when I had the honor of being the national president of the Mexican Hotel Association. In many places, like Real de Catorce or San Luis Potosí, people would ask me, "Why was it said that we were a tourism power when there

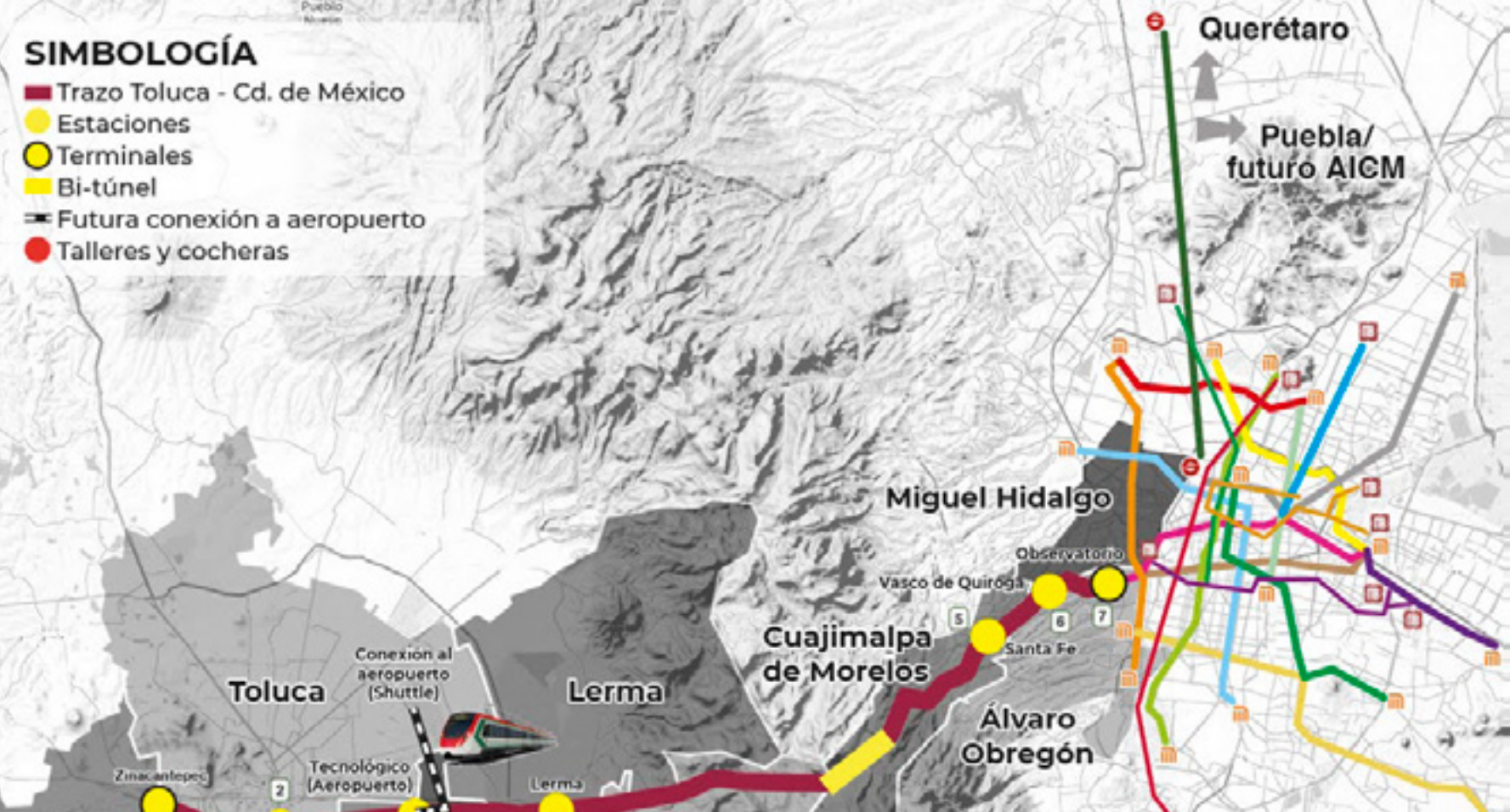
I was handed a sector ranked 17th in terms of foreign exchange earnings, figures that were rarely disclosed, and 40th in terms of per capita expenditure, by the end of 2018

were hardly any tourists?" The answer was that tourists were concentrated only in six destinations. That was the landscape we encountered.

In this administration, led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, one of the achievements has been consolidating what already exists.

SIMBOLOGÍA

- Trazo Toluca - Cd. de México
- Estaciones
- Terminales
- Bi-túnel
- ➔ Futura conexión a aeropuerto
- Talleres y cocheras



Map showing the route and stations of the Interurban Train Mexico-Toluca.

“In this administration, led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, one of the achievements has been consolidating what already exists

WHAT OTHER CHALLENGES DID YOU COME ACROSS AT THE ONSET?

Another issue was the underdevelopment of the southeast of the country. Some places were developed, but there was poverty in the southeast. This was another issue that needed to be addressed: the problem of unfinished programs, something I call the Akenaton syndrome.

This Egyptian pharaoh, the husband of Nefertiti and the father of Tutankhamun, when he came to power, said, "I am the sun, and here it's a fresh start." He ordered the erasure of all hieroglyphics and the cancellation of all ongoing works. This approach has translated into a syndrome that previous administrations experienced.

Who made Cancún the way it is? What projects were lacking? Well, there was the expansion of a boulevard to provide viability during a time of increased tourist influx, but there was also a bridge

planned from the beginning, the Nichupté Bridge in the Nichupté Lagoon, the real distributor to the airport, Playa del Carmen... but it was canceled. The same happened in Santa María Huatulco, where a president left the Oaxaca-Puerto Escondido highway unfinished to support development. Even though the project had started, it was also canceled.

A more modern Akenaton is the case of the Nautical Staircase project. Money was invested in all the points where it was supposed to be built, in the Sea of Cortez, known as the "world's aquarium" by Jacques Cousteau. "Cancel it," says the next one.

WHAT WERE THE VERY FIRST PROJECTS YOU DEVELOPED?

In this administration, led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, one of the points that have been achieved is consolidating what already exists. We conducted an inventory to complete the projects that have cost Mexican taxpayers a lot and were practically stalled. All of that is now being consolidated. The Oaxaca to Puerto Escondido highway will be inaugurated this year, as will the Nayarit highway.

The same goes for the Chetumal Airport, which was abandoned for 48 years, even though it is located in the capital of the most powerful state in Latin America in terms of tourism. How is it possible that Chetumal had an airport with one runway, 23 waiting chairs, and a small sandwich shop? After 48 years of neglect, the Chetumal

International Airport has been renovated and is now larger, more beautiful, and more modern.

Furthermore, Chetumal is expected to have a stop on the Tren Maya route in Quintana Roo. There will be a station to connect Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco, Chiapas... With this train, which will be completed this year, there will be 34 stations in 1,525 kilometers, with 170 high-impact attractions covering everything from the jungle to the beautiful beaches of the Mexican Caribbean.

SPEAKING OF THE MEXICAN CARIBBEAN, WHAT INITIATIVES WOULD YOU HIGHLIGHT IN THIS TOURISM REGION?

Porfirio Díaz used to say in his time, "How is it possible that Chetumal doesn't have access to the Caribbean Sea?" The Zaragoza Canal had to be built because previously, one had to pass through the Caribbean islands of Belize to reach Xcalak, which is the first Mexican point. We are finishing dredging the Zaragoza Canal so that all the yachts coming from Cancún can enter through the canal and enjoy Chetumal Bay.

We have also restored Bacalar Lagoon, which is part of the Magical Towns program. Nine years ago, an influential individual purchased land at the narrowest point, set up a resort, and for those nine years, no government authority at the three levels of government could remove the hotel chain to navigate Bacalar Lagoon from north to south. The chain was removed, the rule of law was upheld, and Bacalar is being renovated, which is part of the



La Chinesca' is a neighborhood in the historic center of Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico, where residents of Chinese origin have lived, worked, traded, and built since the early 20th century.

WATCH HERE



[Talking with Miguel Torruco Marqués](#)

[Geointelligence Center Ángeles Verdes, Tourism Excellence Award 2022](#)

Magical Towns program. This has breathed new life into various places. In Chetumal, the capital, we reduced income tax, value-added tax, and created the concept of "Magical Neighborhoods" to revitalize the historic center.

WHAT OTHER PROJECTS WOULD YOU HIGHLIGHT FROM THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION?

In various parts of the country, we have found many unfinished projects that have been completed. The Akenatan syndrome has ended; otherwise, the Interurban Train Mexico-Toluca would not be completed.

However, the president has new projects, as does the Ministry of Tourism. An example of these is the development within the Corporation of Green Angels Tourist Services.

WHAT INNOVATIONS HAVE YOU IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THIS PATROL?

The Green Angels program is the oldest in the Federal Public Administration, celebrating 63 years of service. It is the hallmark of the Ministry of Tourism, a noble and benevolent service to tourists. When we took over, we found over 200 Green Angels patrol units in the junkyard, uniforms completely worn out, and zero technology.

Green Angels provide free services to domestic tourism, which accounts for 82% of all travelers throughout the country and generates over

\$140,000 in economic contributions. That's why we have taken up the substantive programs to bring them up to 100%.

Currently, we have replaced 40% of the units, and next year, we will replace them all, providing 550 new units.

We have also introduced new uniforms designed by the National Defense Secretariat, perfectly tailored for their highway service. We also created the "Alfonso García González" Green Angels Geointelligence Center, and it is now possible to download an application that allows specifying the license plate, make, and color of the car. This will strengthen the entire service, bringing it up to 100%.

YOU UNDERSCORE THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING CREDIT TO PAST PROJECTS...

63 years ago, Alfonso García González created the Green Angels. The Geointelligence Center is named after its founder to credit him for conceiving this program. The Green Angels Merit Medal also acknowledges Alfonso García González. We are not here to steal programs. In the Magical Towns room of the Ministry of Tourism, you will find the photograph of Leticia Navarro, as she was the creator of this project.

Antonio Enrique Savignac also made a mark in the history of tourism. He was the creator of Infratur, which was later merged to create the National Fund for Tourism Development (Fonatur). He

served as Deputy Minister of Tourism and Minister of Tourism and was the only minister to serve for the full six years. Historically, most ministers only last around three years.

Credit should be given where it's due. The main hall displays the historical photographs of all those who have served in this ministry and is named after President Emilio Portes Gil, who in 1929 created the Joint Commission for Tourism, the first federal executive body to guide, direct, and shape the country's tourism policy. Subsequently, it became the Directorate General of Tourism and, later, in the decree of January 1, 1975, was elevated to the status of the Ministry of Tourism.

WHAT OTHER RECENT INITIATIVES HAVE YOU INAUGURATED?

We inaugurated the Casa Manzanero Museum in Yucatán, established a new venue for the Mexican Open tennis tournament in Acapulco... In Mexicali, we created a Chinatown, the "La Chinesca" neighborhood, with the support of the former municipal president of Mexicali and the current governor of Baja California, Marina del Pilar Ávila.

In Orizaba, we created the Museum of Mexican Hospitality. These are the four major presidential programs, the substantive programs of SECTUR, as assigned by the Organic Law of the Federal Public Administration through the National Development Plan, which are aimed at strengthening new products



EPICUREANISM

MEXICAN-STYLE



TEXT: EXCELENCIAS REDACTION
PHOTOS: GUANAJUATO TOURISM SECRETARIAT

The philosophy of embracing pleasure as the supreme good and a tranquil life as the ultimate goal is a lifestyle that Guanajuato follows. Visitors can explore this new definition of well-being through the region's hotels, former haciendas, and spas, which offer delicate thermal waters, regenerating climates, and hospitality professionals always ready to turn each visit into a magnificent experience.

This is Epicureanism, but with a Mexican twist. Founded by Epicurus, one of the great philosophers of Greek culture, this philosophical doctrine promotes the pursuit of pleasure and tranquility as fundamental values for a happy and fulfilling life. When applied to tourism, it signifies a new way of experiencing and enjoying our travels. Instead of zealously chasing after exhausting or materialistic activities, it encourages finding and savoring simple pleasures, appreciating the little things, immersing oneself in authentic experiences, and cultivating moments of enjoyment and relaxation.

Epicureanism advises us not to focus exclusively on famous tourist destinations or trendy activities when we can find joy in simple aspects, like relishing authentic local cuisine, strolling through picturesque village streets, or unwinding on a tranquil beach. It also encourages avoiding excess and seeking balance in our travel plans. Instead of wearing ourselves out attempting to visit every attraction in a limited time, we can choose activities that bring us greater satisfaction, allowing for rest and enjoyment.

In line with Epicurean philosophy, the focus of tourism is more on the quality of experiences than the quantity. It also emphasizes forming more human and cultural connections. No longer should we merely observe as spectators; we can engage with local communities, learn their customs and traditions, and immerse ourselves in the authenticity of the culture we are visiting.

WITH ITS PRIVILEGED WARM CLIMATE AND A STRATEGIC CENTRAL LOCATION IN THE COUNTRY, THE STATE OF GUANAJUATO IS THE QUINTESSENTIAL DESTINATION FOR THE CONTEMPORARY EPICUREAN TRAVELER

ONLY IN GUANAJUATO

Guanajuato, blessed with fertile soil and abundant sunlight, is a Mexican wine tourism destination. Visitors can explore over 15 options, including wineries and wine-themed hotels, where they can indulge in the tasting of artisanal and organic wines from the region, the perfect complement to the rich local cuisine.

According to the State Secretariat of Tourism, Guanajuato is synonymous not only with culture and history but also with luxury and relaxation. The state's prime location and excellent connectivity provide unmissable experiences for those seeking to discover the essence of Mexico. Guanajuato offers fascinating experiences for visitors, with two UNESCO World Heritage cities, five significant archaeological zones, six picturesque Magic Towns, exciting tourist routes, and an extensive calendar of large-scale cultural, musical, and sports events throughout the year.

Guanajuato's cobbled streets bear the memory of its past glory, where gold, silver, and precious gems once flowed from its mines. Today, this wealth echoes in its luxury hotels, restaurants, thermal spas, nature horseback rides, or the natural wine routes.

For those seeking tranquility, there's no better place in central



The wine tourism offer in the state of Guanajuato is truly one of the best-kept secrets.

The state of Guanajuato boasts a privileged location, excellent connectivity, and includes must-visit destinations

Mexico than the Magic Town of Mineral de Pozos, formerly a "ghost town" and now teeming with life, located an hour from Dolores Hidalgo and San Miguel de Allende to the northeast. This charming Magic Town is an ideal destination for those who explore with a camera in hand, looking to discover themselves in the sound of their own footsteps. Gastronomic opportunities are abundant in the town, where you must try colonche (a fermented fruit), escamole tacos (delicious ant larvae), and, in season, the famous and delicious maguay worms.

At night, boutique hotels await, understanding the need for tranquility and comfort, such as the Loft Boutique Mineral del Cielo, where you can stay in a spectacular stone loft, or the Boutique Hotel Casa Diamante, which offers not only typical amenities but also a beer bath treatment promising skin regeneration with its supply of vitamin B and proteins. It's a total

experience, culminating in the enjoyment of their premium craft beers that are a delight for the most discerning palates.

Guanajuato's wine tourism offer is truly one of the state's best-kept secrets. It includes high-quality wineries producing over 300,000 bottles annually, concentrated near important cities like San Miguel de Allende, Salvatierra, León, and the state capital, also named Guanajuato.

With the launch of the Guanajuato Wine Route "Valle de la Independencia,"

tourists can explore the historical memories of vines in Guanajuato by visiting the beautiful World Heritage city of San Miguel de Allende and touring the Magic Towns of Dolores Hidalgo and Comonfort.

The Guanajuato Wine Route "Valle de la Independencia" distinguishes itself by integrating the tourist offerings of destinations. In a 77-kilometer journey, visitors can choose from at least 300 options, not just related to wine but also lodging, gastronomy, wellness, culture, and many others.



Exploring Guanajuato means delving into the heart of Mexican identity.



Part of the experience in this state is connecting with its historical past

Near the state capital, you'll find one of the world's highest vineyards, situated at almost 2,005 meters above sea level, offering the best views of the region. Camino de Vinos Vineyard is part of the Jesús María Ex Hacienda, a hotel that combines early 20th-century stone architecture with terraces and water features where your view extends into the vastness of the sierra. Further east, near San Miguel de Allende, you'll discover vineyards covering hundreds of hectares, where wine tastings are

complemented by spas and private accommodations—perfect for travelers looking to take a break from the world's noise.

In this scenario, La Santísima Trinidad and San Francisco offer more than just wine tastings paired with cheese and olive oil; they include delightful spa massages, yoga classes, horseback riding, and polo. Other interesting vineyards in the region include Azteca Vineyards, Cuna de Tierra Vineyards, Hacienda San José Lavista, and Dos Búhos Winery, the latter known for its Cabernet Franc bottles, capable of rekindling your love for the texture and delicacy of wine.

After enjoying the warm sun of the vineyards, indulging in thermal waters, massages, and detox treatments in the beautiful city of San Miguel de Allende is irresistible. Here, you'll find places like La Gruta, a spa and thermal pool complex where the pools are filled with thermal waters reaching up to 40 degrees Celsius, known for their medicinal properties due to the high sulfur, magnesium, iron, and calcium content in the water.

This philosophical doctrine, founded by Epicurus, one of the great philosophers of Greek culture, promotes the pursuit of pleasure and tranquility

If you prefer professional care, don't miss the opportunity to visit a prestigious massage establishment like Essential Massage & Watsu or Esencia Yoga Spa, where you can transform your body through Swedish massages, deep tissue massages, or even Watsu therapy (in water).

With this diverse range of experiential, gastronomic, and oenological travel options, along with its strategic proximity to beach destinations, Guanajuato stands out as the region where luxury is not hidden, and a lush tranquility greets visitors. Guanajuato is accessible from Spain through flights from Mexico City, Dallas, Houston, Chicago, and Los Angeles via the Bajío International Airport (BJX). This airport also connects to other significant Mexican tourist destinations, such as Cancún, Puerto Vallarta, San José del Cabo, Mérida, or Monterrey, by road from Mexico City or Guadalajara (approximately 3 hours to either destination).





Ten Million Reasons to Choose the Dominican Republic

TEXT: JOSEFINA PICHARDO
PHOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

As 2023 comes to a close, the Dominican government maintains the projection of receiving 10 million tourists in this annual exercise. The Minister of Tourism, David Collado, stated

that his country is "making history" and will receive 10 million visitors by the end of this year for the first time. "Every day, we are preparing to be the best and safest destination."

The Dominican Republic is among the most popular and diverse destinations in the Caribbean, thanks to its geography, idyllic beaches, lush nature, diverse

landscapes, and the hospitality and kindness of its people. These factors, combined with the development of sustainable tourism and environmental conservation, have contributed to the sustained increase in the flow of travelers and its tourism appeal.

In light of the Dominican Republic's projection to welcome ten million visitors, Excelencias brings you ten of the many reasons not to miss a visit.

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IS AMONG THE MOST POPULAR AND DIVERSE DESTINATIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN, THANKS TO ITS GEOGRAPHY, IDYLIC BEACHES, LUSH NATURE, DIVERSE LANDSCAPES, AND THE HOSPITALITY AND KINDNESS OF ITS PEOPLE

PARADISE BEACHES

Surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the north and the Caribbean Sea to the south, the Dominican Republic boasts over 1,600 kilometers of coastline, including 400 kilometers of pristine



white sandy beaches with crystal-clear waters. Destinations like Punta Cana attract tourists from around the world due to the natural beauty of its beaches. Puerto Plata, where tourism in the country began, remains a favorite for its spectacular and extensive landscape that combines beaches with mountains, lush valleys, and rivers. La Romana offers a dreamy coastline with beautiful beaches from Dominicus to Bayahíbe. In the sea, the islands of Saona, Catalina, and Catalinita host turtle nesting areas near stunning coral reefs.

DIVERSE LANDSCAPES

From Pico Duarte, the Caribbean's highest peak at 3,087 meters, to the

lowest body of water, Lake Enriquillo, the country showcases approximately 6,000 plant species and 7,000 animal species, including cacti, endemic hawks, and humpback whales. Nature enthusiasts can embark on ecotourism adventures in magnificent natural parks, mountain ranges, rivers, green mountain villages, fishing towns, and exotic landscapes. Discovering mountains, waterfalls, tropical jungles, and birdwatching offer a wide range of options in Barahona, home to the largest biodiversity reserve and parks. Jarabacoa, a region of waterfalls and outdoor adventures, is a hub for adventurous travelers offering activities such as rafting, canyoning, and horseback riding. In Montecristi, unusual

In the sea, the islands of Saona, Catalina, and Catalinita host turtle nesting areas near stunning coral reefs

adventures through mangrove tunnels lead to refreshing lagoons.

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The national culture, with elements of Taíno, European, and African influences, has created a diverse population, which also includes Jewish, Japanese, and Afro-Caribbean communities. With a passion for music and dance, being the birthplace of merengue, bachata,



Dominican cuisine fuses African, Spanish, and Taíno influences, resulting in a wide variety of flavors.

and son, the Dominican Republic has a rich history and culture reflected in its colonial cities like Santo Domingo. The capital is the first city founded in the Americas and is now the most modern and dynamic in the Caribbean, blending the old and the new. Exploring the Colonial City, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1990, is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. This historic neighborhood features a labyrinth of narrow streets filled with architectural wonders spanning from the 16th to the early 20th century.

WATER ACTIVITIES AND SPORTS

The Dominican Republic offers a wide range of water activities and sports such as snorkeling, scuba diving, surfing, kitesurfing, and fishing. The crystal-clear waters and ideal conditions make these activities especially popular for visitors.

This country offers a wide range of water activities and sports such as snorkeling, scuba diving, surfing, kitesurfing, and fishing

One of the best snorkeling and diving areas, Cayo Siete Hermanos, is located along Montecristi Bay. The cosmopolitan beach town of Juan Dolio has several diving centers, while Puerto Plata, with its unique geography influenced by constant trade winds, rivers, the vast Cordillera Septentrional, and the Atlantic Ocean, is a paradise for outdoor adventure. The town of Sosúa features beautiful beaches and various diving spots.

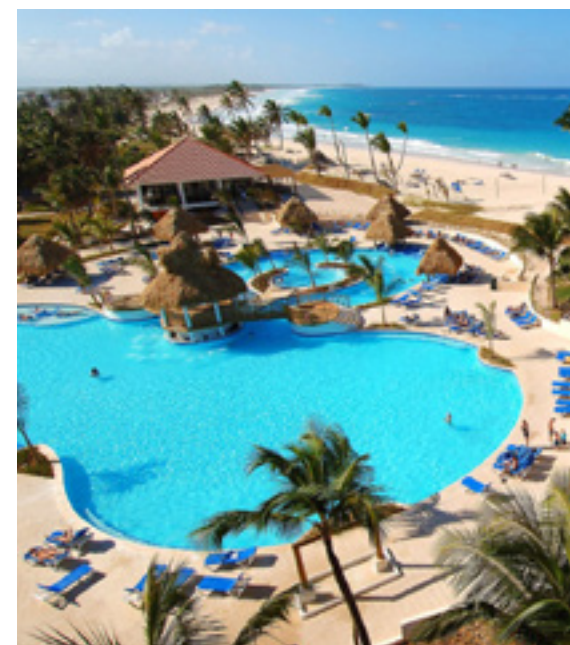
GASTRONOMY

Dominican cuisine fuses African, Spanish, and Taíno influences, resulting in a wide variety of flavors, from fresh seafood to sweet desserts like flan or Dominican cake. Signature dishes include "mangú," a popular dish made from boiled green plantains; the national dish "la bandera," composed of white rice, vegetables, and stewed meat; "sancocho," a hearty stew; "moro de gandules," and "tostones."

EVENTS

Numerous events reflect Dominican culture, music, art, and traditions. The Carnival, a colorful and joyful celebration,

takes place in February, filling the streets with parades, comparsas, music, and dance. In July, the Merengue Festival pays tribute to the country's most iconic music genre. There are also Jazz festivals in November and the Dominican Global Film Festival.





Golf Tourism is noteworthy, with numerous golf courses designed by renowned architects and world-class facilities.

TOURISM MODALITIES

The diversity of attractions in the Dominican Republic contributes to a combined tourism product with various modalities, each offering a different and unique experience. These include Sun and Beach Tourism, particularly in

Punta Cana, Puerto Plata, Samaná, and La Romana. The Dominican destination also excels in Cultural Tourism due to its rich history and culture reflected in its colonial architecture, museums, festivals, and traditions. Nature Tourism and Ecotourism are prominent, thanks to abundant biodiversity and a wide range of natural landscapes. Golf Tourism is noteworthy, with numerous golf courses designed by renowned architects and world-class facilities in places like Punta Cana, Casa de Campo, and Puerto Plata.

Accommodations range from luxury hotels and all-inclusive resorts to inns, hostels, and tourist apartments

Samaná. The country also offers a wide range of tourist services, including travel agencies, tour guides, organized excursions, spa and wellness services, restaurants, bars, and entertainment establishments.



TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

The Dominican Republic has made significant investments in its tourism infrastructure in recent decades, especially in the Punta Cana and Bávaro areas. There is a wide selection of resorts, luxury hotels, and tourist services that provide comfort and satisfaction to visitors, making it one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the Caribbean. Accommodations range from luxury hotels and all-inclusive resorts to inns, hostels, and tourist apartments, with a higher concentration in major hubs like Punta Cana, Puerto Plata, and

ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS

The country has several international airports that provide access to visitors from around the world, as well as domestic airports for internal travel. The primary gateway is the Las Américas International Airport (SDQ) in Santo Domingo, while one of the most important is the Punta Cana International Airport (PUJ). Other international airports that handle passenger flows include Cibao (STI) in Santiago de los Caballeros, Gregorio Luperón (POP) in Puerto Plata, and La Romana (LRM) in the city of the



same name. The country also has a good road infrastructure, highways, and public transportation systems for internal mobility.

DESTINATIONS

The tourist product of the Dominican Republic consists of ten excellent destinations, each with its own beauty and peculiarities:

Known as the "City of Mountains," it is ideal for ecotourism and adventure sports. Surrounded by mountains and crystal-clear rivers, it provides an excellent setting for hiking, rafting, and mountain biking, among other activities

1 Punta Cana: One of the most popular places, renowned for its stunning white sandy beaches and luxury resorts.

2 Santo Domingo: The capital city offers a unique blend of history and culture. Its Old Town hosts the first cathedral and castle in the Americas.

3 Samaná: Located on the northeastern peninsula, it is known for its stunning natural landscapes, pristine beaches, and lush waterfalls. This region is famous for whale watching during the migration season.

4 Puerto Plata: Surrounded by mountains and bathed by the Atlantic Ocean, it offers breathtaking landscapes, dreamy beaches, and a rich colonial history. The Teleférico, which provides panoramic views of the city and its surroundings, is one of its attractions.

5 La Romana: Known for its luxury and exclusivity, it is famous for world-class resorts and top-tier golf courses. It serves as a gateway to the nearby island of Saona, popular for boat excursions.

6 Barahona: Located in the southwest, it harmonizes mountains, beaches, and rich biodiversity. Its standout feature is Lake Enriquillo, the largest lake in the Caribbean, which is home to many endemic species.

7 Cabarete: Globally recognized as the kitesurfing capital, it attracts water sports and outdoor enthusiasts. Consistent winds and waves make it ideal for kitesurfing, windsurfing, and surfing.

8 Las Terrenas: Situated on the Samaná Peninsula, it offers beautiful beaches and waterfalls in a relaxed environment.

9 Jarabacoa: Known as the "City of Mountains," it is ideal for ecotourism and adventure sports. Surrounded by mountains and crystal-clear rivers, it provides an excellent setting for hiking, rafting, and mountain biking, among other activities.

10 Cayo Levantado: A small tropical paradise off the coast of Samaná. Its white sandy beaches, turquoise waters, and dense forests make it a perfect place to unwind and relax in a natural setting.

AÑO 35

LA FERIA DE TURISMO B2B MÁS IMPORTANTE DE AMÉRICA



9 A 12 DE NOVIEMBRE > 2023
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Gran Caribe Invites You to **VARADERO & JARDINES DEL REY**



LAS MORLAS HOTEL

This 4-star hotel offers all-inclusive services. Located in the best beach area, a few minutes from downtown Varadero and very close to its boulevard. It has 148 rooms distributed among doubles, junior suites and duplexes.



VILLA CUBA HOTEL

A 4-star, all-inclusive hotel. Located on the beachfront, near the Varadero Golf Club and a few minutes from downtown Varadero. It has 365 rooms, distributed among bungalows and beautiful villas, some of them with private swimming pool.



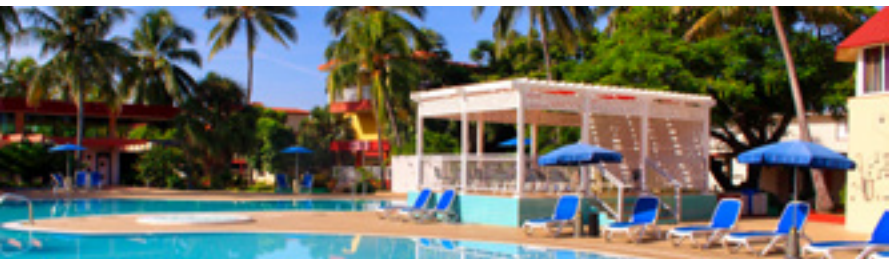
KAWAMA HOTEL

A 3-star, all-inclusive hotel. Beautiful construction from the 1930s overlooking the Varadero canal. It has 336 rooms and a privileged location, as it is situated on an excellent stretch of beach.



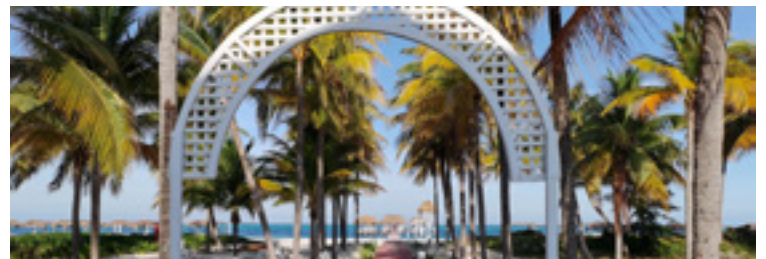
VIGÍA HOTEL

This all-inclusive 4-star hotel is located in Cayo Guillermo, in the midst of a peaceful atmosphere, near Playa Pilar and close to one of the most beautiful coral reefs in the world. It has 268 rooms in the form of bungalows.



VILLA TORTUGA HOTEL

A 3-star, all-inclusive hotel. It has 292 rooms and is located on the beachfront, right at the entrance of Varadero, near the Plaza de Artesanos and the International Financial Bank. Attractive lodging options also await you at Jardines del Rey, located in north-central Cuba. An ideal place for rest and enjoyment under the protection of nature.



CAMINO DEL MAR

A 5-star hotel located in Cayo Guillermo, a few meters from one of the most beautiful white sand beaches, it has 314 rooms and offers all-inclusive services. It is distinguished by a walkway that penetrates the shallow waters of its surroundings, day and night entertainment and non-motorized water sports that will make your stay a memorable experience.



Varadero



Hotel Kawama
★★★★



Hotel Las Morlas
★★★★★



Villa Tortuga
★★★



Hotel Villa Cuba
★★★★★

Jardines del Rey



Hotel Camino del Mar
★★★★★



Hotel Vigía
★★★★★

Is **CUBA** an **EVENT DESTINATION?**





Havana and Santiago de Cuba were the stage for more than 100 concerts at the latest Jazz Plaza.

TEXT: YURISANDER GUEVARA
FOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

CUBA HAS AN EXTENSIVE CALENDAR OF INTERNATIONAL EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, ESPECIALLY IN THE TOURISM, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FIELDS

Is Cuba an event destination? The question is answered when you take a close look at what has happened this year on the largest Caribbean island, and you realize that international meetings have indeed been held in the tourism, economic and cultural spheres, all of them with a wide repercussion.

Among the long list of events held this year in Cuba, we can't fail to mention the recently concluded 10th Excelencias Gourmet International Gastronomic Seminar, which under the title "Hispanic Gastronomy: American Fusions and Projections", brought together experts from several nations as part of the 25th anniversary of the Excelencias Group.

For three days in Havana, they exchanged views on the new gastronomy and delved into the fusions between Hispanic and American cuisines, brought about by the round-trip travel of food. The meeting was attended by experts from Spain, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Peru,

Venezuela and Cuba, among other Ibero-American countries.

Looking back on the calendar, the year began in full jazz mode with the Jazz Plaza International Festival. Lovers of this genre were delighted for several days with the best and brightest in Cuba and several countries around the world.

The second month of the year saw the start of the International Book Fair, a literary festival that has always been prestigious for prominent Cuban and international figures. And in late February and early March, more than 2,000 aficionados and experts gathered in the Cuban capital to enjoy the world's best cigars at the 23rd Habano Festival, an event that included visits to Habano factories, exchanges with producers of the aromatic leaf and a public auction, a spectacle due to the quality of the humidor on display.

The ExpoHolguín 2023 Fair brought together state and private entrepreneurs in eastern Cuba to do business in April, a prelude to the most important tourism event in the largest Antillean Island: the International Tourism Fair of Cuba.

FitCuba 2023, held from May 1 to 5 at the Morro-Cabaña Park, a former Spanish fortress that majestically dominates the entrance to Havana Bay, gathered thousands of tour operators, travel agencies, hotel companies and experts in the sector.

When it comes to nature tourism, Biotur is the appointment par excellence in Cuba. Organized by the Ecotur travel agency, this year the tour covered the eastern part of the country, with locations acclaimed for their exuberant beauty and excellent state of preservation.

In the middle of the year, as is tradition, Santiago de Cuba held the second most important business fair in the coun-



The country has spaces for carrying out various activities related to a business event.

try: ExpoCaribe. On this occasion, some 300 entities from Cuba and 11 countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe attended.

And summer was just beginning when two events of transcendence in different fields took place: Santiago de Cuba was ablaze with the International Festival of the Caribbean and its fire festival, an event that unites the peoples of the region and that had Mexico and its celebrations of life and death as central motifs. Further west, the Meliá International Hotel in Varadero

hosted the 39th Congress of the Federation of Latin American Congress Organizing Entities (Cocal).

The 1st International Sports Fair, another edition of the Gibara International Film Festival, and the Varadero Josone Festival enlivened Cuba's national geography from east to west during the month of August.

For the ninth month of the year, Cuba's most famous beach resort, Varadero, reserved new emotions with the second edition of the Gran Retto, an open-water

sports event that received competitors from countries like Mexico, Cuba, Spain and the United States, and that intends to expand in the future with other disciplines, while, a few days later, it was filled with flavor with the 13th Varadero Gourmet International Festival.

Cuba always reserves a space for the Havana International Fair (FIHAV) almost at the end of the year. The event gathers the most valuable Cuban businessmen and welcomes dozens of exhibitors from several continents to establish business in situ.

It is possible to enjoy the cultural and gastronomic offerings of the Island while carrying out business activities.





GOLDBLACK

i n v e s t m e n t s

Surfing and Kitesurfing in Cuba

How to Practice Them?

TEXT: YURISANDER GUEVARA PHOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

Cuba is a country that offers many options for surfing and kitesurfing lovers, with white sand beaches and crystal-clear waters that adapt to different skill levels.

Although it is not the most popular destination for surfing, there are interesting places with good coves on the north coast, near Havana, such as Brisas del Mar and Mégano.

Both locations are on the long stretch of coastline known as the eastern beaches, and offer very fine white sand, with excellent conditions for water sports in general.

Brisas del Mar Resort is the main lodging option in the area, famous for its varied fauna.

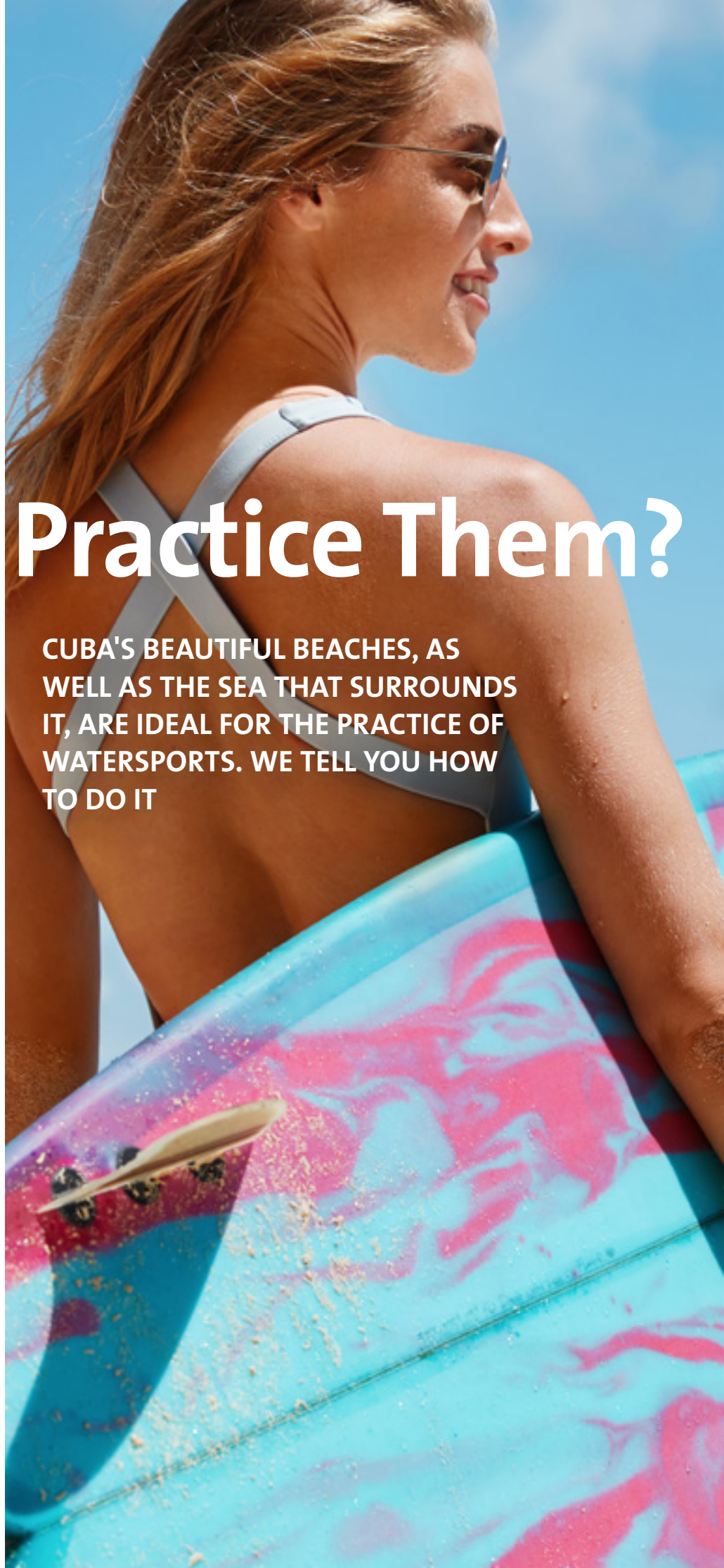
The eastern end of the island, in the province of Guantánamo, offers the best conditions for surfing, as the swell is more constant from the end of September to December.

For example, you can enjoy one of the best surfing spots in Yumurí, 30 km east of Baracoa, which offers a "right-hand wave", as the type of wave that comes towards the surfer and will break in that direction is called.

Other places of special interest are Cape San Antonio, Gibara, Mar Verde

Kitesurfing emerged in the 80's in response to the need for an alternative activity to windsurfing.

CUBA'S BEAUTIFUL BEACHES, AS WELL AS THE SEA THAT SURROUNDS IT, ARE IDEAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF WATERSPORTS. WE TELL YOU HOW TO DO IT





Beach, La Setenta and Cayo Coco. We are talking about locations scattered throughout the archipelago where, in addition, the conditions for ecotourism are exceptional.

For the practice of kitesurfing Cuba has established itself as one of the ideal places for it, since it has perfect weather conditions, especially between the months of October and March.

Many of the kites who go to Cuba prefer the northern coasts, where the prevailing wind is east-northwest almost all year round, specifically in Santa Maria del Mar (on the aforementioned eastern beaches), Varadero, Cayo Guillermo and Cayo Coco.

Throughout Cuba there are many companies that offer private lessons for both beginners and advanced surfers.

KITESURFING EXPLAINED

If you like kitesurfing but have never dared, maybe it is good for you to know some details about this sport.

The basic equipment consists of a kite, a board, a harness, an impact vest, a helmet and a safety leash. You should choose the size and type of kite and board that suit your weight, level and wind conditions. You can consult an expert or a specialized store for advice on the most suitable equipment for you.

Lessons are essential to learn the basics of the sport, such as kite handling, steering and speed control, launching and landing, and emergency techniques.

Safety is the most important thing. You must respect the rules of the place where you practice, such as permitted areas, time restrictions or warning signs.

LEARN MORE ABOUT SURFING

Surfing is a sport that consists of gliding over the waves of the sea with a board. To practice it you need some basic knowledge. For this reason, we recommend you:

Choose a board suited to your level, weight and height. Larger, wider boards are more stable and easier to use for beginners, while smaller, narrower boards are more agile and faster for experts.

Wear a wetsuit that protects you from the cold and chafing. The thickness of the suit depends on the water and air temperature. In general, a 4/3 mm suit is recommended for winter and a 3/2 mm or less for summer.

Attach the leash to your back foot and the tail of the board. The invention is a bungee cord that prevents you from losing the board if you fall into the water.

Apply kerosene to the top of the board where the feet are placed. This serves to prevent slipping and improve grip.

Learn the technique of paddling, take off and balance. The paddle consists of pushing yourself with your arms on the board to reach the waves. The take off is the moment when you stand up on the board when the wave pushes you. Balance is the ability to maintain your posture and control the direction and speed on the board.

Know the safety rules and etiquette of surfing. You must respect the areas set aside for this sport, the preferences of passage, warning signs and weather conditions. You must also be prudent and responsible with your level and limits, and ask for help if you need it.



SPRING and all of
ARGENTINA
to be discovered





LET'S TALK ABOUT ROUTES, ABOUT PLACES TO GET LOST IN, ABOUT A COUNTRY THAT DESERVES TO BE DISCOVERED

TEXT: EXCELENCIAS NEWSROOM STAFF

In the last months of the year, spring arrives in the southern hemisphere and landscapes are transformed by the color of flowers. Even though Argentina is beautiful all year round, since late September it takes on a different flavor. The sun is shining and outdoor plans redouble bets and every corner of the country offers new postcards.

Let's talk about routes, places to get lost in, a country that deserves to be discovered. Let's start with one of the stars of this season: **Chubut**.

To celebrate the months of flowers, a field of tulips grows in Trevelin. Located 14 kilometers from the city, it offers multiple colors to feed the eye and can be visited until November 5.

The field is located in the area of the Cascadas Nant and Fall Natural Protected Area named after the river that travels through it. This site shelters seven waterfalls that vary in shape and height, but can reach 64 meters. And if in addition to enjoying the views you want to delve a little into its history, a few minutes from there is the Nant Fach Flour Mill, where you can learn about the first Welsh settlers in Patagonia.

Another nearby attraction is the Peony Field, which blooms in

December. From there it is ideal to combine the tour with a visit to the Futaleufú Dam or to have a Welsh tea in Trevelin.

Surrounded by the Andes Mountains, Baggilt Lake creates a space in Patagonia that seems to be designed specifically for all nature lovers. Also a protected area, it is a thumbtack on the map for those who enjoy hiking. There are 1500 hectares at 1000 meters above sea level of streams and forests that culminate in the lake born at the foot of Cerro Conico.

We continue traveling to reach one of the eleven World Heritage Sites in Argentina. **Los Alerces National Park** welcomes us with trees that have more than a millennium of life. Its biodiversity must be preserved because it is made up of larch trees that reach 2600 years of life.

And those who reach the Patagonian forest, if they travel several kilometers, can also reach the sea. The Argentinean coast, bathed by the Atlantic Ocean, is in springtime home to a great diversity of marine fauna.

We can pay a visit to the Magellanic penguins, greet the whales and watch the dolphins jump. Southern right whales are a protected species in Argentine waters and visit the country from June, staying until December



Los Alerces National Park welcomes us with trees that are more than a millennium old.

Located in Misiones, the Iguazú Falls are one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World

to give birth to their calves. The Valdés Peninsula, where they gather, has three honorary seals: besides being a World Heritage Site, it is a Ramsar Site and a Biosphere Reserve.

THE IGUAZÚ FALLS, NATURAL WONDER OF THE WORLD

Located in Misiones, the Iguazú Falls are one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. The pleasant weather in the spring months is perfect for walks and

activities such as boat trips on the river that gives its name to the falls, until you reach the Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat).

Its name comes from a legend that is worth knowing as you discover the site, in which the love of a princess with a Guaraní prince filled with anger a god with the appearance of a snake, which split the waters and turned her into a big rock where the waterfall falls and him into a tree.

To reach and contemplate the imposing waterfall you can also go on foot or travel in the ecological train of the jungle. The gorge is made up of waterfalls that reach 150 meters high and, according to the Iguazu National Park, have an average flow of 1500 cubic meters per second.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SKIES

Gazing at the Argentine sky is also a form of tourism and allows you to discover some destinations

that, at night, seem to increase their magic. An ideal place to enjoy the stars is the Salto Encantado Provincial Park, in Misiones, where a Guaraní legend lives.

The story goes that two young people belonging to

enemy tribes fell in love and that these tribes, not accepting their relationship, went to war. During the conflict, when the lovers died, the ground opened up to shelter them, opening the way to a great waterfall, whose spring of water



To reach and contemplate the imposing waterfall you can also go on foot or travel in the ecological train of the jungle.



San Telmo has a peculiar rhythm with which it animates the Argentine streets.

It is known that one of the essential destinations in Argentina is Buenos Aires, its cosmopolitan capital

- it is said - came from the tears of the young woman. After what happened, the clans made peace. Today the area can be visited during the day or, in addition, during some nights, by means of an activity called "Guarani Sky", in which it is possible to learn about the cosmivision of the Mbya people and enjoy an environment privileged by nature.

The first site with certified lodging of the International Starlight Foundation in Argentina is located in Capilla del Monte, in the province of Córdoba. The Villa Cielo Natural Reserve, located in this town, is a perfect natural observatory. Next to it is located on the map the Uritorco Hill, where you can see an unforgettable sunrise. A perfect way to end a night under the stars.

Other places where you can live unique experiences under the stars are also the Astronomical Center El Leoncito

(CASLEO) and the Carlos U. Ceslo Observatory of El Leoncito National Park. This protected area offers at least 300 clear nights out of 365 in a year. Although at first glance it may look like a desert, the park has a very wide

natural diversity between oases and mountains. As for the fauna, it is home to pumas, guanacos and suris cordilleranos, among other specimens. In addition, the Park allows activities such as "carrovelismo", which consists

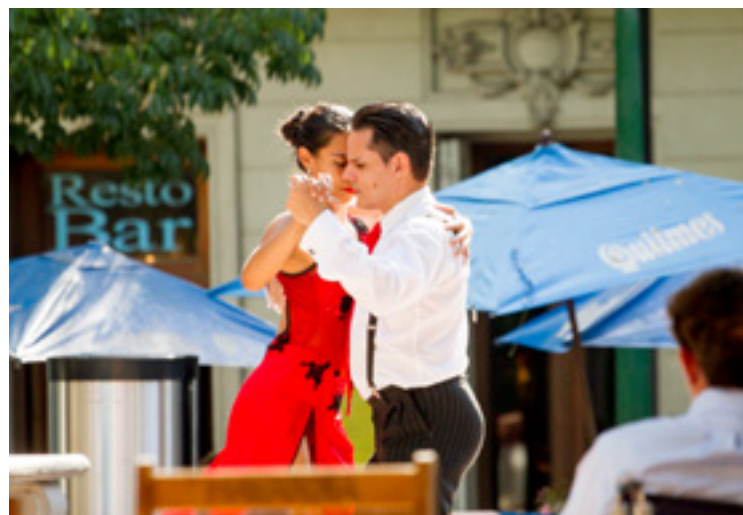
of surfing aboard a vehicle on wheels. Not to be missed!

Astro-tourism proposals multiply in Argentina and to the list can be added, among many others, a visit to the Scientific and Educational Park "Campo del Cielo - Pinguen N'Onaxa" in Chaco, which exhibits some 300 meteorites; or a tour of the Ampimpa Observatory, in Tucumán, ideal for watching the star shower.

NOVEMBER IN THE CITY

Spring is that time of the year when colors change, become more vivid, and people leave their comfortable blankets to open up to the sun and enjoy the outdoors.

In these months, in Buenos Aires, the flowers of the jacaranda trees dye the branches of these trees violet and form a sort of paths of unique beauty.



Enjoying a tango dance in the middle of the street fuels the passions that Argentina awakens.



Touring Argentine landscapes gives visitors a beautiful first-hand experience.

Ushuaia is the capital of Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica and the South Atlantic Islands

It is well known that one of Argentina's must-see destinations is its cosmopolitan capital. In this season of the year, the city is also full of plans that cover entire agendas. It could be called the capital of music, since it is the right place to enjoy a good concert. In November, the destination will vibrate with great stars, such as Taylor Swift with her successful Eras Tour, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, or Andres Calamaro, a national artist of great recognition both inside and outside the country. In addition, Primavera Sound will return to Argentina for the second time in its history, with artists such as The Cure and Blur, among others.

Continuing with the music, the rhythm takes us to the neighborhood of San Telmo. Although all year round you can enjoy shows, for example, tango, in the streets there are more options. Located in the heart of downtown, in this neighborhood you can enjoy murals, bars and art galleries, as well as the picturesque "Paseo de la Comic Strip", with sculptures of iconic characters from Argentine comics and cartoons, such as the famous Mafalda and her friends Susanita and Manolito.

Another plan to get to know Buenos Aires is to get on a bicycle and pedal through different circuits arranged to discover

each of its corners. You can ride through the green lung, strolling through the Palermo Woods and the Costanera Norte, go into the center holding the handlebars through Recoleta and Retiro, or look up and find yourself in Belgrano or Chinatown.

Buenos Aires is also a gastronomic hub. Restaurants on lists such as Eater magazine's Alo's by Alejandro Férauds or Don Julio, considered one of the best restaurants by World's 50 Best Restaurants in 2023, are some of the options for a gastronomic adventure.

If you no longer wish to stay in the city and are looking to get back to nature, country living for a day



may be a choice. From the city you can go to the Province of Buenos Aires or, a little further, to La Pampa, to get into the Argentine rural life. The region offers excursions to gaucho festivals, where you can take part in activities and try traditional food. Many of these ventures offer a day in the countryside and others extend the stay to include lodging.

MENDOZA AND WINE

With urban proposals and in contact with nature, Mendoza is another must-see in Argentina.

In this context, the taste buds open up to the Argentine wine and you can not miss the classic Malbec or taste -among others- a Cabernet Sauvignon, a Bonarda or a Chardonnay, whose common point is the distinctive character and excellence. The wine route in spring has the added bonus that it is possible to see the first bunches of grapes growing in the vineyards, framed by the Andes Mountains.

In Mendoza there are different wine regions (North, Center, Uco Valley, South, East) where the visitor can start learning about this world and listen to its protagonists tell what the sector and its history is. The wineries offer services such as menus or tastings that complete the gastronomic experience.

Although we are talking about spring, we have to make a brief digression to move to another season. At the end of the summer -between February and March- Mendoza celebrates its maximum cultural splendor with the National Grape Harvest Festival. Held since 1936, with the passing of time it has become one of the major tourist attractions of this area.

THE END OF THE TRIP, AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Ushuaia is the capital of Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica and the South Atlantic Islands. It is the enclave known as the End of the World

and, in our case, the conclusion of the trip.

Ushuaia is a city where you can learn about the history of Argentina and enjoy leisure and gastronomy but, as we have seen in other places in the country, the surrounding nature shines with its own light. The End of the World Train, whose departure is 7 km from the city, transports the traveler through these places and also part of the Tierra del Fuego National Park. It is the southernmost protected area of the country and shows in its roots the end of the Andes Mountain Range and its encounter with the water of the Beagle Channel.

We have started our trip in Patagonia, we have entered part of Argentina and finally we have returned to it. Along the way, there are countless destinations and attractions to visit, countless experiences to live and a conclusion: we have to travel and enjoy this immense and diverse country.



Contemplating the Argentine sky is also a form of tourism and allows you to discover some destinations that, at night, seem to increase their magic

Known as “the lighthouse at the end of the world,” this 11-meter-high facility still serves sailors.

THE CITY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD

From Myth to Experience



TEXT AND PHOTOS: JOSÉ CARLOS DE SANTIAGO

THE EQUATOR, THE LINE THAT DIVIDES THE GLOBE INTO THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN HEMISPHERES, PASSES THROUGH THIS AREA

Pichincha, Ecuador - As we speak we are in the middle of the world, an exceptional place, only 30 minutes away from the city of Quito, Ecuador.

From where we are standing we can observe the yellow line that, drawn on the ground and extended to the horizon, marks the parallel that divides the planet into the northern and southern hemispheres.

That same line crosses halfway across the bed of the main room of the new

hotel of the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo, a tourist and cultural complex owned by the prefecture of the province of Pichincha, considered the second most popular tourist destination in Ecuador (after Galapagos) and proclaimed Cultural Heritage of the nation.

HISTORY AND SCIENTIFIC FACTS

General manager of the Empresa Pública de Turismo Ciudad Mitad del Mundo, Jorge Eduardo Carrera, who won the 2015 Excelencias Award with Ecuador's Tourist



Train, accompanies us during the tour of the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo. The man, with plenty of experience, has a thorough knowledge of more than a dozen sites of tourist interest and their cultural connotations for the rest of humanity.

That is why he speaks with passion about the French Geodesic Mission, a scientific expedition carried out in the 18th century in the current territories of Ecuador to measure the distance equivalent to one degree of latitude on the Earth's Equator.

"The French Geodesic Mission set out, in the 18th century, to develop and define the place where half of the world was located, and arrived at this point. It was defined as the center of the Earth, where the northern and southern hemispheres are separated. For that century, they made very few mistakes," Carrera tells us.

A monument to the "Middle of the World" is located there, which pays homage to the equatorial line. From the monument itself, one can glimpse a sort of rod placed in the place where the

Travelers from all over the planet usually come here to live the unparalleled experience of being in two places at the same time.

indigenous people located the center of the world around the 14th century.

"Without instruments they were able to define the exact point, and today, with all the elements we have, the zero point is defined, which generates a lot of energy," he added.

During the tour, for example, we talked with the Bolivian ambassador to Ecuador, Secundina Flores Solamayo, who highlighted the similarities with her country and explained that many Bolivians come to visit this emblematic Ecuadorian destination.

"I am really happy to be able to showcase the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo, with its gastronomy, its handicrafts and its people," she told us.

Travelers from all over the planet usually come here to experience the unique experience of being in two places at the same time and take home an iconic photo of them standing on the Equator, with one foot in the northern hemisphere and the other in the southern one.

They also do the experiment of standing up from 9:00 to 18:00 to receive the sun's rays directly over their head, without casting a shadow, which only happens in the Quitsato Solar Clock, which was inaugurated in 2007 in the town of Cayambe as a circle of 56 meters in diameter and an eight-pointed star inside to indicate the cardinal points, the solstices, the equinoxes and the axes of the Earth's ecliptic.

EXPLORE IT ALL

Every day it is possible to arrive to explore the experiences offered by touring its 19 tourist attractions, which include a planetarium with virtual reality, the



The obelisk measures about 30 meters high

The pyramidal monument was built in iron and cement and is covered with carved and polished andesite stone

Oswaldo Guayasamín pavilion with the works of the famous Ecuadorian artist, artistic plazas, traditional buildings, cultural pavilions, restaurants and especially significant museums.

No one who visits Ciudad Mitad del Mundo will leave without visiting the Mitad del Mundo Monument, an obelisk erected at the point where the Equator is supposed to pass and measuring some 30 meters in height. Each of its faces is oriented towards a cardinal point and is crowned by a five-ton metal sphere, in the center of which is located the Ethnographic Museum, dedicated to the indigenous peoples of the four national regions.

Experts estimate that the obelisk is about 240 meters south of the true equator, which was confirmed by GPS

technology at the end of the 20th century.

Another unmissable stop is the Train Station, an icon of tourism in Ecuador. Its history goes through several national governments that understood the importance of the railroad since its commissioning in 1873 as one of the engines for progress. During its construction, it was considered the most difficult railroad in the world because of its route, which included passing through a territory known as "the devil's nose" in the Condor Puñana or Condor's Nest.

The local gastronomy, as in all of Ecuador, is another of the strong points of the visit. Los Herradores Restaurant, the Yaraví and the Calima, can be especially recommended; especially the latter whose decoration is made up of antiques such as horns, sewing machines, Polaroid cameras, among other objects that could be considered memorable for families and towns.

Among the traditional dishes that can be tasted are aguado de pollo (a rice soup

with chicken and vegetables), corn with cheese, homemade empanadas, or the popular "llapingacho", which is nothing more than a potato omelet with loin or fried pork, chorizo, fried egg, avocado and salad.

To delve into the gastronomic origins of the area a good starting point may be



The sale of handicrafts is present throughout the place.



The works of the famous Ecuadorian artist are exhibited in the Oswaldo Guayasamín pavilion.

the Museum of Craft Beer, whose origin dates back to 1566, when Jodoco Ricke, a friar of Belgian origin, left his mark in Quito by introducing the brewing of beer.

Inside the museum we find all the types of beers produced since that time, and in addition to the historical explanation, one can taste the craft beer "Mitad del Mundo",

brewed only there: an Irish Red Ale with sweet finishes and a certain aftertaste of toffee caramel.

Similarly, it is worth discovering the history of cocoa in the country, and what better place than the Museo del Cacao, where we talked with Francisco Valdés, archaeologist, anthropologist and great connoisseur of the history of the product.

"It was always thought that cocoa was Mesoamerican (in the area between Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua), the Olmecs were the managers of cocoa, but it turns out that in the Amazon we had cocoa 2,000 years before. In this Ecuadorian area corresponding to the Zamora Chinchipe province, the process of cocoa domestication took place. The geneticists demonstrated that not only was wild cacao being used there, but that it was already being manipulated and they were able to produce cacao whenever they wanted," he argues.

Regarding the chocolate production phase, he explains that "the cocoa beans must be dried, roasted and ground to obtain the cocoa butter, which is the chocolate itself.

There we were also able to taste some of the region's products made

from cocoa. This was the case of "Kamm", the first Ecuadorian chocolate brand without sugar, gluten and milk, which uses cocoa from the Chachi community and has received multiple awards. They also surprise us with other very particular products, such as cocoa honey or a "cocoa BBQ" sauce.

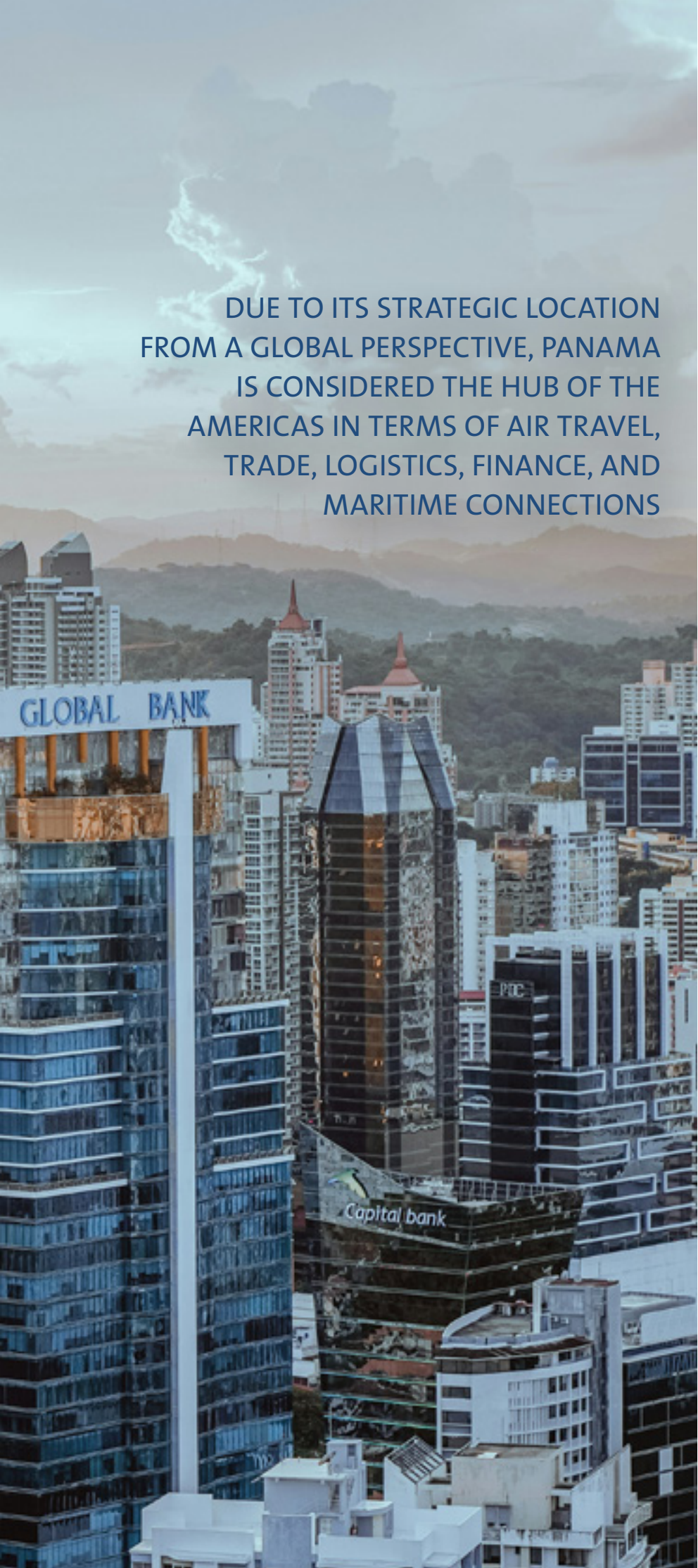
After so many trips, it is possible to recognize when you have arrived at an exceptional place from which, even if the time has come to say goodbye, you will always leave a deep and memorable impression, like the one left by the fact of being for a few hours or a few days in two parts of the world at the same time.

The llama is a typical animal of the Andes (a South American close relative of the camel but without humps) that can also be seen in the area.



PANAMA

A Gem in Central America



DUE TO ITS STRATEGIC LOCATION
FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE, PANAMA
IS CONSIDERED THE HUB OF THE
AMERICAS IN TERMS OF AIR TRAVEL,
TRADE, LOGISTICS, FINANCE, AND
MARITIME CONNECTIONS

BY LUCÍA VÁZQUEZ PÉREZ
PHOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

Panama is one of the gems located in Central America, precisely at the point where the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea merge with the Pacific Ocean. Its breathtaking natural beauty, combined with its rich historical, cultural, and natural heritage, make this country a destination that no traveler should miss.

To explore the wide range of leisure, nature, sun, and beach options, there are several cities and municipalities you can visit during your trip to this nation known as the Hub of the Americas, as it facilitates air connections to North and South America. In the first half of 2023 alone, over 8.5 million passengers passed through the country's main airport, Tocumen Airport, located just 24 kilometers from the arrival and departure point. This airport serves as the first essential destination in Panama City, which is divided into three parts: Panama Viejo, Casco Antiguo, and the modern area.

The oldest part is Panama Viejo, where the remains of the original city founded in 1519 by Pedro Arias Dávila can be found, along with 100 other settlers. This part of the city was declared a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 2003 and became the first permanent European settlement in the Pacific Ocean. Visitors to the area can see the ruins of what was once a city and even some standing Catholic temples, like the Catedral Primada Basílica Santa María la Antigua de Panamá.

Casco Antiguo is known for being a colonial city surrounded by the remnants of a wall. Its ruins hold many stories and colorful buildings, dating

Panama borders the Caribbean Sea to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the south, Colombia to the east, and Costa Rica to the west.



The beaches of Isla Colón are famous for their abundance of starfish, numbering in the dozens.

back to 1673, featuring picturesque streets and iconic sites such as the Metropolitan Cathedral of Panama City and the Plaza Mayor. It's the most gastronomic and photogenic part of the city, often compared for its style of houses and palm-lined streets to the view Miami offers in the U.S.

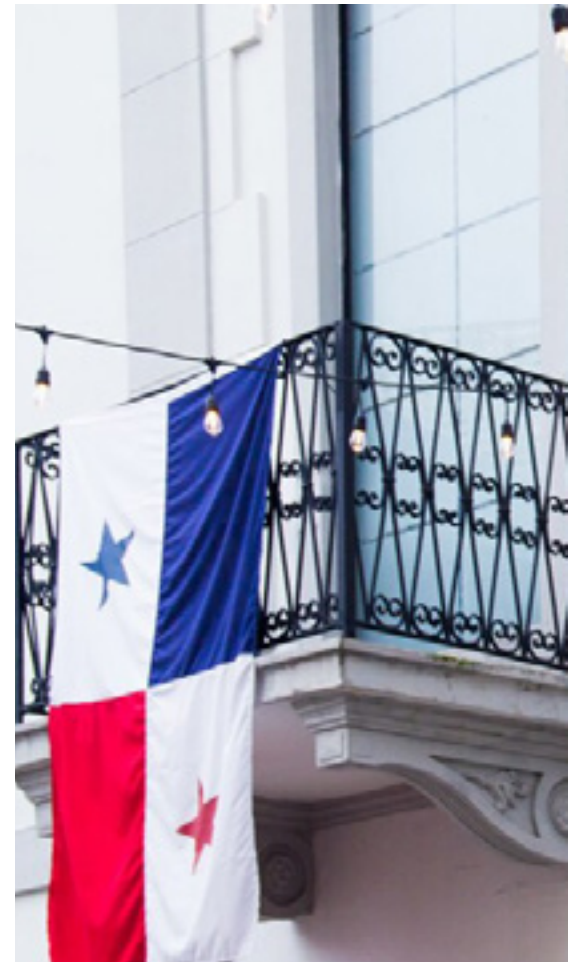
Beyond the urban areas, Panama also boasts paradisiacal beaches and dreamy islands. To the northwest of the country, on the Caribbean coast, lies the archipelago of Bocas del Toro, consisting of nine islands and thousands of islets. The clarity of its waters allows you to observe a great diversity of marine life, such as the orange starfish found on Starfish Beach

To the northwest of the country, on the Caribbean coast, is the Bocas del Toro archipelago made up of nine islands and thousands of islets

on Isla Colón. This island is one of the main ones in the archipelago, along with Isla Bastimentos and Isla Carenero, where you can catch the best waves for a day of surfing.

Panama also offers a complete cultural experience. The streets and the bay of Portobelo still bear the marks of the Spanish conquerors' arrival. Visitors arriving by sea are greeted by the impressive Fuerte de Santiago de la Gloria, which houses the cannons that defended Portobelo from pirate attacks.

Within the city, colors fill the streets with brightly painted houses and a wide variety of street art on facades and walls. In the area, the Congo culture thrives, declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Its origins in the 16th century can be traced back to the arrival of African slaves who developed their own songs, dances, and way of speaking, mixing languages and reversing words to avoid being understood by their owners.



Even before the arrival of Spanish colonizers, there were various indigenous cultures and tribes in Panamanian territory. Some of them persist to this day, such as the Emberá Querá, who gather in a village of the same name on the banks of the Gatún River. Members of the indigenous community welcome tourists and take them on a canoe ride to reach the village.

The Emberá offer various tours to visit their village, with prices for adults ranging from \$110 to \$150 per person. This allows you to get to know their culture, traditional dances, fishing techniques, and typical cuisine. They even offer tours that include a night's stay in one of their traditional houses, made of wood with palm roofs, known as "tambo."

Another way to connect with Panamanian nature is by visiting places like the Boquete district, located to the west of Panama, along the Caldera River in the Chiriquí province. This area boasts a great diversity of fauna, such as the royal sunangel and the emerald



glass frog, and flora, including lilies, hibiscus, and yellow trumpet flowers. Moreover, there are several areas dedicated to coffee cultivation.

In addition to its natural riches, Boquete is the Panamanian capital of adventure sports. It offers long mountain trails for hiking, such as the Sendero de los Quetzales, as well as ziplines for a complete view of its natural beauty and several whitewater rivers for rafting.

Indigenous cultures, history, nature, adventure, sun, and beach – you can experience all of this in Panama, where tourism thrives in major cities but extends across the entire national geography.

In Panama Viejo there are the remains of the original city founded in 1519 by Pedro Arias Dávila, where he settled along with 100 other inhabitants.



Tourism in the **NEW GASTRONOMY**

BY DR. RAFAEL ANSÓN, HONORARY PRESIDENT OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF GASTRONOMY AND PRESIDENT OF
THE IBERO-AMERICAN ACADEMY OF GASTRONOMY (AIBG)

PHOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES



Galicia offers as much diversity and quality in seafood and mollusks as anywhere in the world.

The evolution in the tourism industry in recent years has increasingly emphasized the gastronomic aspect as a fundamental part of the cultural and leisure offerings of a particular destination.

Today, gastronomy represents one of the primary motivations for travel and one of the most valued aspects for tourists. Whether as the primary reason for travel or as a complement to the journey, because one can travel for many reasons, in the end, tourists have to have breakfast, lunch, and dinner, perhaps even have a snack, a drink, or some tapas.

QUALITY GASTRONOMIC OFFER

When there is a quality gastronomic offer, many travelers first choose their destination based on whether they will eat well, explore the local culinary culture, sample the region's typical foods and recipes, or visit noteworthy

TODAY, GASTRONOMY ACCOUNTS FOR ONE OF THE TOP MOTIVATIONS FOR TRAVEL AND ONE OF THE MOST VALUED ASPECTS FOR TOURISTS

restaurants. Afterward, they decide on the rest of their activities.

Even if the primary reason is attending an event, fair, conference, a cultural event, a football match, or leisure by the sea, the variety, quality, and uniqueness of the gastronomic offerings, along with the price-quality ratio, always play a significant role in choosing a destination.

There are other aspects that tourists value more than ever, aspects that have become a priority in many parts of the modern world and also influence the overall perception of gastronomy.

Today's consumers want to get to know the hotels, restaurants, eateries, bars, or taverns in the places they travel to. They want to experience new things

and enjoy a satisfying gastronomic offer. However, they also demand a New Gastronomy that respects basic principles of health, solidarity, and sustainability.





Ceviche is perhaps one of the most recognized dishes in Peru.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOOD CHAIN IN TOURISM

Furthermore, the concept of gastronomy has evolved over the years. It is no longer limited to high-end restaurants with Michelin stars or creative dishes but encompasses all four links in the food chain: production, industry, distribution, and hospitality.

Therefore, tourists seek a more comprehensive experience, aiming to support all these links that together contribute to promoting the values of the New Gastronomy.

Tourists seek a more comprehensive experience, aiming to support all these links that together contribute to promoting the values of the New Gastronomy

At the same time, there is a growing interest in learning about activities and products related to agriculture, fishing, and livestock, as well as the production of foods and beverages such as wine, olive oil, canned goods, cheese, and cold cuts. This explains the positive development of specialized tourism types, such as wine tourism, and the emergence of more sectors in the realm of gastro-tourism.

FOOD PRODUCTION AND INDUSTRY: THE SPANISH INSTANCE

The origin of gastronomic offerings lies in food production and the food industry, and in this regard, Spain has a significant advantage.

With five seas, Spain boasts a tremendous variety of seafood and fish like nowhere else. Only Galicia offers such diversity and quality of seafood and mollusks as can be found in the rest of the world.

The fish from the North Atlantic (Galicia and Cantabria) are entirely different from those in the South Atlantic (Cádiz and Huelva), and those from the North Mediterranean (Catalonia and Valencia) differ from those in the South Mediterranean (Andalusia). And there are still fish from the open waters of the Canary Islands.

The same applies to other products and regional cuisines, which vary greatly depending on the different regions and climates of Spain. One cannot speak of Spanish cuisine but rather of seventeen Spanish cuisines (one for each autonomous community).

THE SPANISH MODEL IN IBERO-AMERICA

All of this can be applied to different Ibero-American countries. All of them, to varying degrees, offer a rich gastronomic variety that depends on the land, seas, and rivers. With these products, our mothers, grandmothers,



Mendoza is considered the Capital of Wine Harmony.

and great-grandmothers created unique dishes that deserve recognition among the great contributions to world haute cuisine.

What is needed is to make these riches known while protecting and promoting their sustainable development. The Ibero-American Academy of Gastronomy (AIBG) designates different Capitals each year to highlight the most remarkable aspects of gastronomy in each country.

Examples include Puebla, designated as the Ibero-American Capital of Gastronomic Culture; Asunción, Capital of Missions; Mendoza, Capital of Wine Harmony; Querétaro, Capital of Culinary Encounters. And there are other potential Capitals, such as the Potato in Peru, Cacao in Ecuador, Coffee in Colombia, and Gastronomic Diversity in Brazil.

OTHER FACTORS THAT BOOST QUALITY TRAVEL

To encourage quality tourism, it is necessary to ensure connectivity, which means that travelers can reach their destination by land, sea, or air. It is also crucial to have digital platforms dedicated to showcasing all the gastronomic offerings and opportunities for tourists to explore foods, drinks, dishes, restaurants, culinary culture, and regional gastronomic traditions.

The digital world allows this information to be known and valued by travelers in a short amount of time before they decide on their next destination.

Thanks to this, Spain and some other Ibero-American countries have already become destinations of excellence. Let's now turn all of Ibero-America into a privileged, preferred, and magical destination for 21st-century tourists.



The Ibero-American Academy of Gastronomy (AIBG) designates different Capitals each year to highlight the most remarkable aspects of gastronomy in each country

Puebla has been designated as the Ibero-American Capital of Gastronomic Culture.



25 Years Later

Google Continues to Transform Travel and Tourism

SINCE ITS LAUNCH IN 1998, THE COMPANY HAS BEEN CRUCIAL IN THE EVOLUTION OF HOW WE PLAN, EXPERIENCE AND REMEMBER OUR JOURNEYS

BY JORGE COROMINA
PHOTOS: EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

Over the course of the last two and a half decades, Google has evolved from a simple search engine into a transformative force in various aspects of our lives.

One of the fields where its impact has been most significant is that of travel and tourism. Since Google's launch in 1998, the company has played a crucial role in shaping how we plan, experience, and remember our travels.

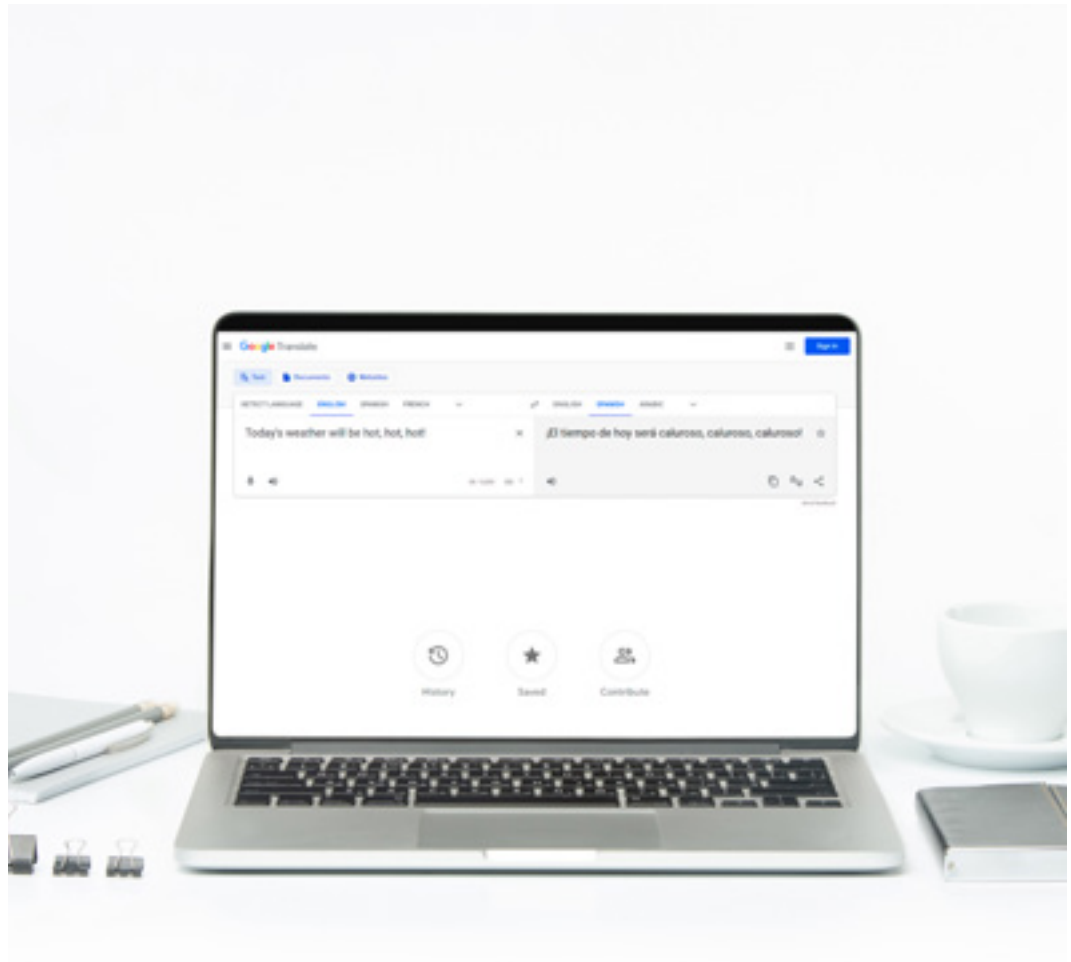
In the course of this quarter of a century, it has proven to be a key player, capable of providing experiences ranging from the implementation of navigation tools to streamlining the search and planning of journeys, contributing to the transformation of an industry fundamental to the global economy.

As we move into the future, it is likely to continue leading innovation tailored to the sector, offering increasingly personalized and connected solutions to meet the needs of global mobility.

Here are six of the great experiences from Google that make life easier for 21st-century travelers.

GOOGLE MAPS: THE CARTOGRAPHY OF THE FUTURE

The launch of Google Maps in 2005 marked a milestone in the tourism industry. The ability to virtually explore any place in the world, get precise directions, and discover points of interest in real-time changed how travelers moved around the world. From the tourists' perspective, Google Maps has removed uncertainty and provided a reliable and accessible navigation tool, becoming an essential part of any adventure.



Google is recognized for the development that involves artificial intelligence.

GOOGLE FLIGHTS: STREAMLINING FLIGHT SEARCH

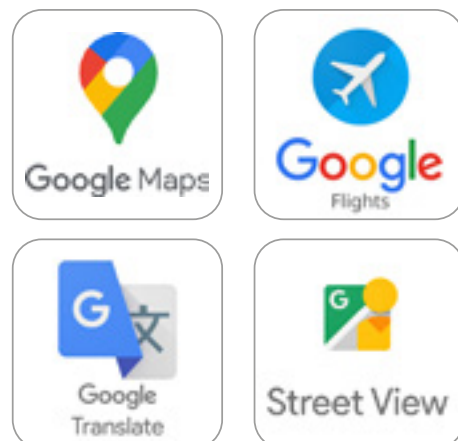
With the launch of Google Flights in 2011, the company entered directly into the travel planning market. This revolutionary tool allowed users to compare flight prices in real-time, explore flexible options, and receive alerts about fare changes. The resulting transparency and efficiency have empowered travelers, giving them control and the ability to make informed decisions.

GOOGLE TRANSLATE: OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS:

Traveling to a country where your language is not spoken can be a challenge, but Google Translate has made communication more accessible. From translating menus to interacting with locals, this tool has eliminated language barriers and fostered a deeper understanding between cultures. Now it's possible to immerse more fully in the local experience without worrying about communication gaps.

GOOGLE STREET VIEW: VIRTUALLY TRAVELING ANYWHERE

Google Street View, launched in 2007, took virtual exploration to a whole new level. Now, before embarking on a trip, users can virtually walk through streets and neighborhoods, explore landmarks, and preview their destination. This has transformed how we plan our itineraries, allowing us to visualize and customize our experiences even before arriving.



Experiences range from implementing navigation tools to streamlining the search and planning of journeys

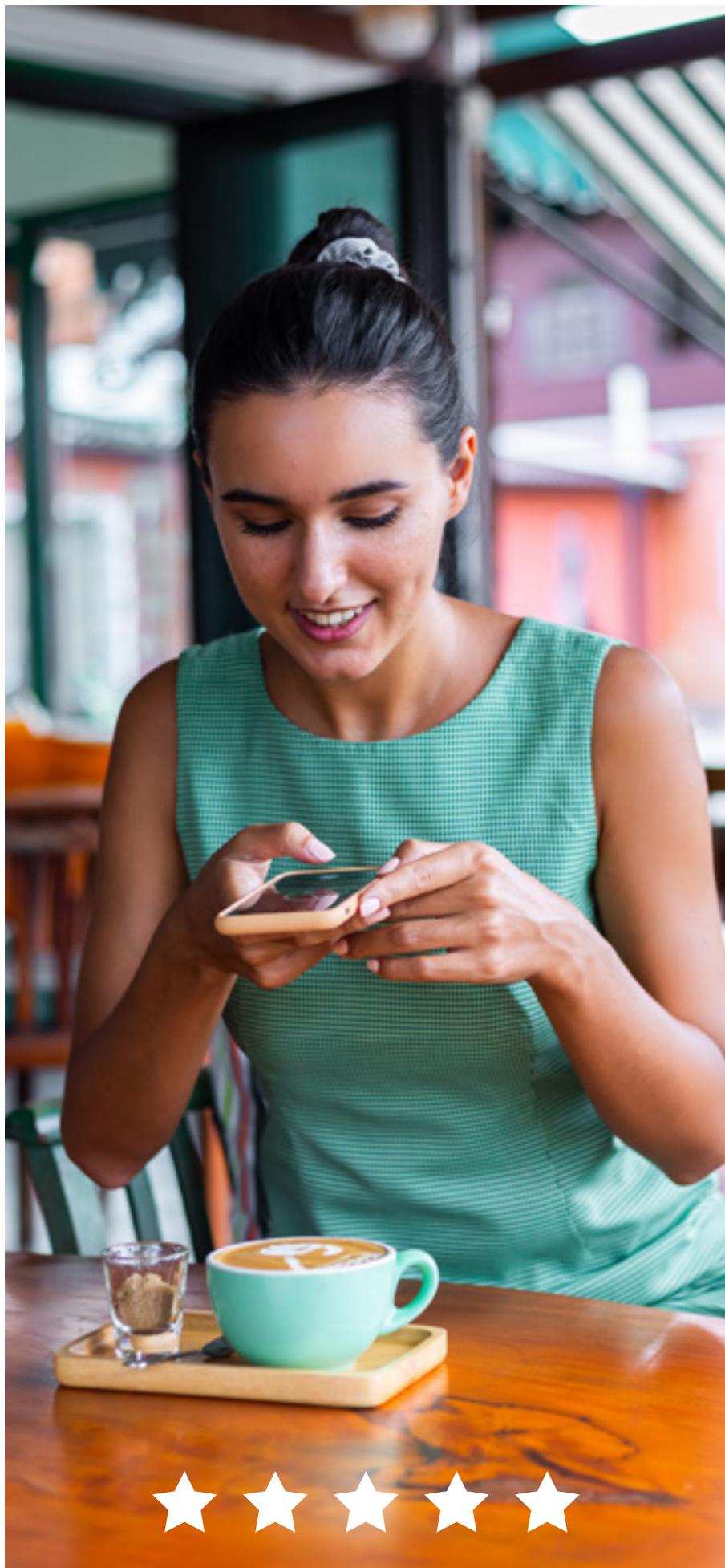
GOOGLE REVIEWS:

Shared Experiences, Informed Decisions: The review feature on Google has transformed how we choose accommodations, restaurants, and activities. Direct feedback from other travelers provides an authentic and valuable perspective, allowing tourists to make informed decisions based on shared experiences. This democratization of information has empowered consumers and incentivized quality and excellence in the tourism industry.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

The Best and Most Useful Companion: Google is recognized for developing various artificial intelligence applications related to tourism, including personalizing search results and tourism-related ads (Google Ads). This provides users with more relevant information about hotels, flights, restaurants, and activities based on their previous searches and preferences. Among the Google services available with this technology are its search engine, Google Assistant, Google Photos with the ability to automatically tag and organize images, recommendations on YouTube and Google News, the "Smart Compose" feature in Gmail, and the possibilities offered by Google Cloud AI in the cloud for businesses interested in using machine learning tools and advanced data analysis.

The reviews feature on Google has transformed the way we choose products.





TikTok

as a Tool for Travel Promotion

The rise of social media has compelled many industries and brands to venture into these new platforms with the goal of introducing themselves to a larger audience to attract potential customers. One such platform is TikTok, the current social media sensation, with over 1 billion active users. Although it initially seemed destined for a younger audience, it has now diversified its user base.

Beyond the typical dance and humor videos, you can also find cultural content, product reviews, culinary recommendations, tutorials, and even audiovisual reports on current topics. This is the case for the tourism industry. Hotels, airlines, municipalities, and

**AS A GLOBALLY-REACHING
PLATFORM, WITH A PRESENCE
IN OVER 150 COUNTRIES,
TOURISM BRANDS ARE
REACHING A BROAD AND
DIVERSE AUDIENCE**





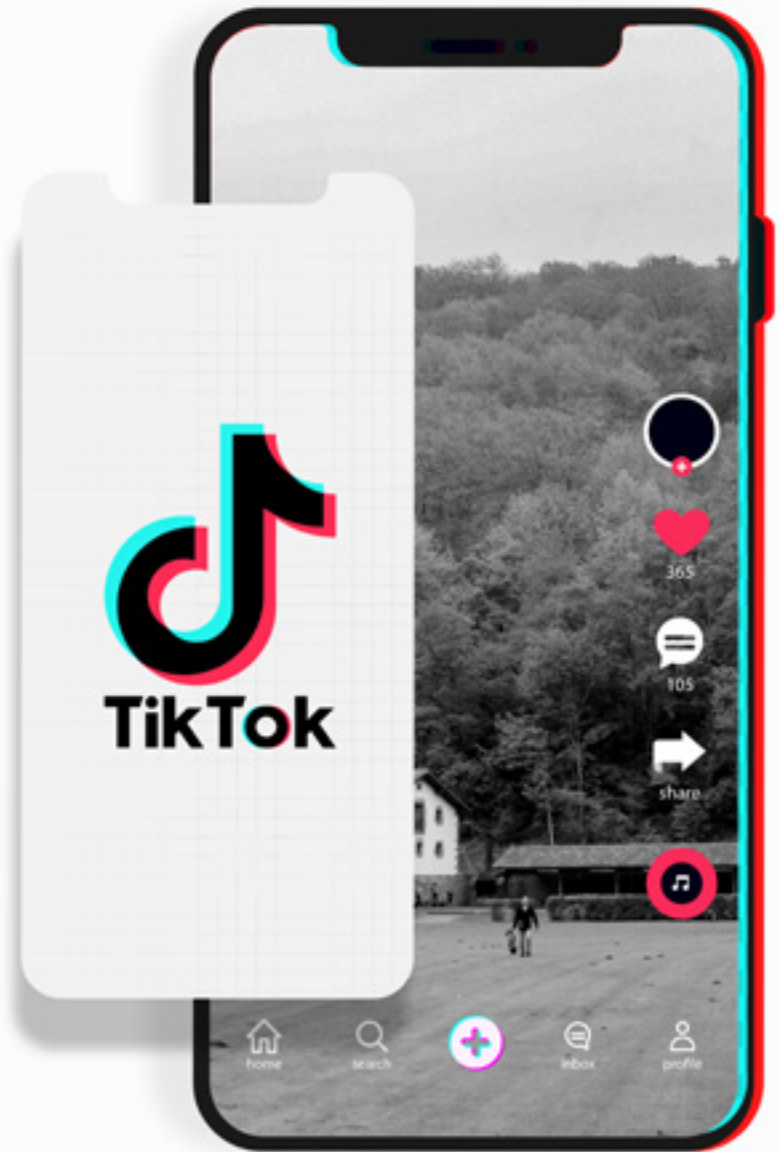
There are accounts dedicated to hunting down the best travel deals and packages for you

travel agencies have joined the TikTok boom, reinventing the traditional use of this platform for advertising their businesses.

Given its global reach, with a presence in over 150 countries, tourism brands can reach a very wide and varied audience, especially through the use of hashtags. For example, #Travel accumulates over 211.3 billion views.

Major hotel chains like Hyatt (@hyatt), Marriott (@marriottbonvoy), and Meliá (@meliahotels) have TikTok profiles. In their videos, they showcase the facilities of the various hotels within their respective companies, attracting guests to their accommodations. The duration of these videos varies from 15 seconds for the shortest ones to a maximum of 10 minutes, according to the platform's latest updates.

To gain more views on their videos, brands join the latest trends or collaborate with influencers and public



Hotels, airlines, municipalities, and travel agencies have joined the TikTok craze

figures. Hilton Hotels & Resorts (@hilton) is one of the examples, featuring videos with the celebrity and great-granddaughter of the company's founder, Paris Hilton, or Formula 1 driver Lando Norris. Another example is Marriott, which, capitalizing on the popularity of Barbie's pink world, posted several videos showcasing The Vinoy Resort & Golf Club in St. Petersburg, Florida, a hotel resembling the dream house of the doll.

Interaction with other users is essential for building and retaining your followers. Ryanair (@ryanair), the airline, understands this well. Their content primarily focuses on humor about travelers'

complaints and videos participating in the so-called 'trends.' Their content has captivated over 2.1 million followers, with videos exceeding 16 million views. On the other hand, the Spanish airline Iberia (@iberia) opts for more conservative content, showing the interior of their planes, such as the A320 NEO, their crew, and videos of how pilots experience takeoff maneuvers.

UNEXPLORED TOWNS AND CITIES

In addition to traditional destinations, TikTok showcases different towns and cities with great tourism potential to introduce them to the platform's users. This includes



You can also find accounts focused on offering travel advice and crafting itineraries of varying durations

Island in Australia, itineraries for countries or cities with lodging and restaurant recommendations, cheap flight deals, and their personal travel experiences. A similar approach is taken by Maz Green (@wheretofindme), a British TikTok user who shares information about her travels through videos, including the local cuisine she tries, the places she stays at, the planes she takes to destinations, the activities she engages in, and the sites she visits.

Without a doubt, TikTok is a platform with great potential to help companies reach potential customers. Hotels, airlines, the best deals, and unique destinations for entertaining and visually appealing exploration all contribute to maximizing this tool for tourism promotion.

Aliseda (@turismoaliseda), a municipality in the province of Cáceres, Spain, which informs from its profile about photography exhibitions, children's workshops, and hiking routes to attract visitors to their town. Another example is the content from the Peruvian city of Ayabaca (@oficinadeturismoayabaca), where their videos highlight the city's typical cuisine, its people, traditions, culture, and the surrounding natural beauty.

Even public institutions in some countries have joined the TikTok community, such as the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador (@ministeriodeturismoec). They post videos about the campaigns they conduct, their

participation in international tourism fairs, or anniversary celebrations.

THE BEST DEALS

One of the obstacles travelers face when booking a trip is the price. However, on TikTok, there are accounts dedicated to finding the best travel offers and packages, including hotels and flights, similar to traditional travel agencies. One of the profiles that focus on these offers is Viajeros Piratas (@viajerospiratas), who publish videos with prices for getaways to European cities like Vienna, London, or Bucharest. Their videos include dates and prices for both flights and hotels.

Once travelers have purchased their tickets and

reserved their hotel rooms, the next step is to find interesting places to visit at the destination. TikTok features accounts that provide travel advice and create itineraries of varying durations for many cities worldwide.

This is the case for Alfonso and Gonzalo, known as Gemelos Viajeros (@gemelosviajeros), who upload videos to their account about places to visit and their interesting aspects, like Fraser

To garner more views on their videos, brands jump on current trends and collaborate with influencers and public figures



More Reality for travelers

IT'S NOT AN EXPERT'S
OVERSTATEMENT TO SAY THAT
EVERY SELF-RESPECTING TOURIST
DESTINATION IS ALREADY IN
AUGMENTED REALITY AND EVERY
CITY THAT ASPIRES TO BE INTELLIGENT
INCLUDES IT IN ITS PROJECT



Since 2018, the Science Park of Granada allows you to travel to the port of Palos de la Frontera, from which Christopher Columbus set sail for America in 1492.

TEXT: ANDREA VEGA **PHOTOS:** EXCELENCIAS ARCHIVES

Augmented Reality (AR) is an enhanced, interactive version of a real-world environment, achieved through digital visuals, sounds and other sensory stimuli using holographic technology.

AR incorporates three features: a combination of digital and physical worlds, interactions performed in real time, and accurate 3D identification of virtual and real objects.

The constant increase in the use of AR applications in tourist destinations and sites can be explained by their advantages, as they provide additional instructions and information around the clock, through photos, animations, text, graphics, and GPS data; they complement the physical experience; and, therefore, offer a more complete and real view of the sites.

They can also provide personalized content and services, tailored to the tastes of each tourist.

JUST WITH A SMARTPHONE

Concepts such as smart city, smart destination and augmented reality are interrelated. In the end, the idea is that both travelers and other citizens can interact with the environment through technology and, as a result, perceive a different experience. They will also be able to share their impressions in real time.

According to the article Augmented Reality and smart tourism, published in Touristear Travel Blog, "one of the ways of developing smart destinations is through augmented reality, where tourists can, using their smartphone or tablet, interact with the environment, integrating themselves into it.

Although Google has already presented its smart glasses project, they are still far from being a popular accessory. Most tourists only rely on their phones to get additional information about the places around them or to find others.

The most common way to access AR is to open an application (LAYAR is the leader) that uses GPS positioning and the cell phone camera. Just "point" to the location and that's it: the uploaded data will appear on the screen.

In LAYAR the information appears in the form of layers, there are free and paid, professional and amateur. Anyone can add a layer, just choose the ones that are of interest to you.

In addition to this application, there are many others, general applications such as Wikitude, or created by companies for specific experiences.

Experts on the subject are categorical in stating that every self-respecting tourist destination is already in augmented

Augmented reality is an enhanced, interactive version of a real-world environment, achieved through digital visuals, sounds and other sensory stimuli using holographic technology



Joaquín Sorolla through mobile phones.

reality. Likewise, every city that aspires to be intelligent includes this aspect in its development project.

Some of the uses of AR are, in addition to the interaction in museums that we saw at the beginning of this paper, access to special events (shows, conventions, etc.), and the acquisition of information about the tourist destination.

Also, outdoor games, reenactment of historical events and life in the past, transportation guides, and translation of posters, signs and menus.

EXPANDING THE EXPERIENCES

It is unquestionable that the use of AR will increase as interactive glasses and mobile technology develop, and as the communications infrastructure expands.

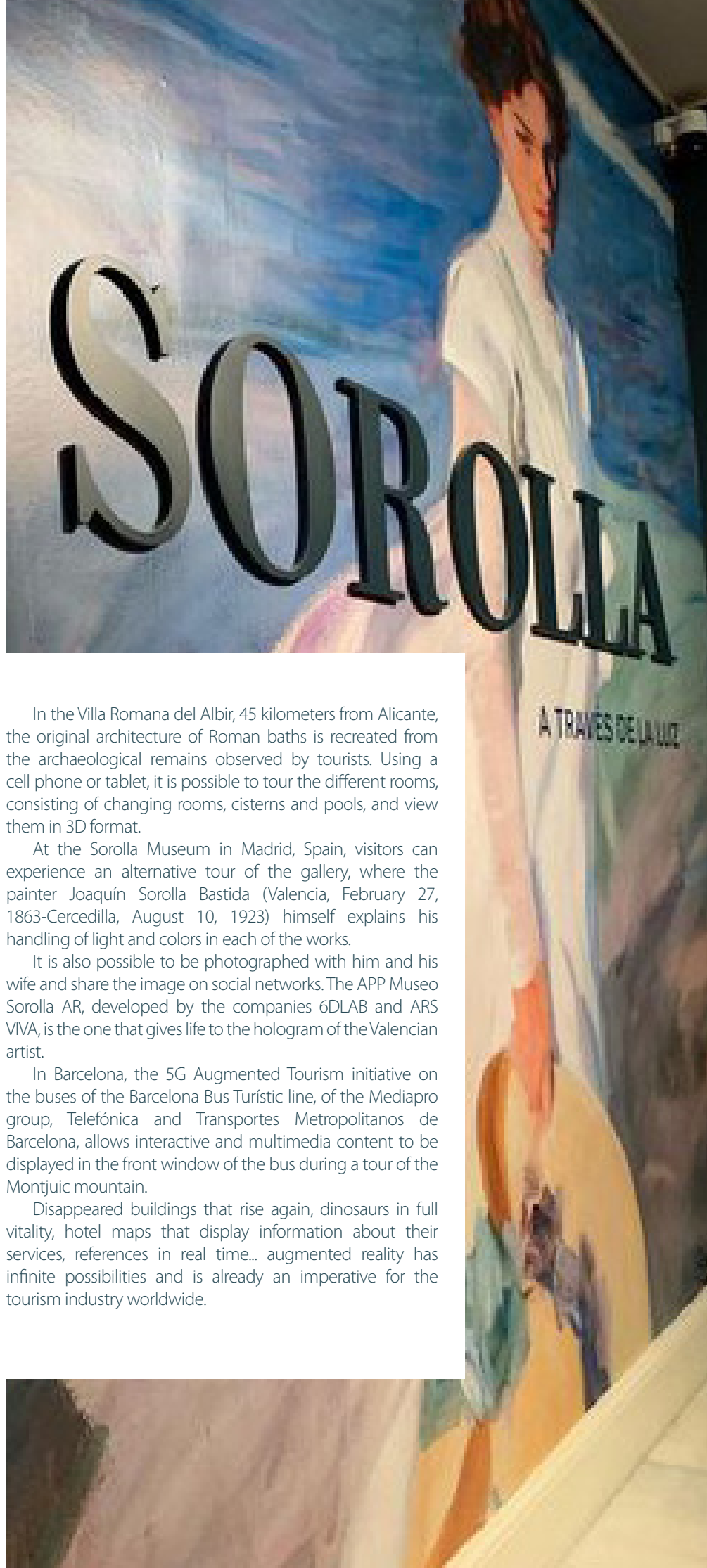
Therefore, cities and destinations that want to keep up with the times should focus their development along these lines.

The Ifema Madrid website compiled some of the outstanding experiences in this regard.

For example, the Tuscany+ AR APP functions as a digital tourist guide to this Southern Italian region, with information on places of interest, restaurants and hotels taken from Wikipedia, Google Places and the region's official portal.

In London, the APP StreetMuseum, allows users to visualize how emblematic places of some neighborhoods were at different times in their history, through digitized photographs from the Museum of London's historical collection.

In the Sorolla Museum, the painter himself explains his handling of light and colors in each of the works.



In the Villa Romana del Albir, 45 kilometers from Alicante, the original architecture of Roman baths is recreated from the archaeological remains observed by tourists. Using a cell phone or tablet, it is possible to tour the different rooms, consisting of changing rooms, cisterns and pools, and view them in 3D format.

At the Sorolla Museum in Madrid, Spain, visitors can experience an alternative tour of the gallery, where the painter Joaquín Sorolla Bastida (Valencia, February 27, 1863-Cercedilla, August 10, 1923) himself explains his handling of light and colors in each of the works.

It is also possible to be photographed with him and his wife and share the image on social networks. The APP Museo Sorolla AR, developed by the companies 6DLAB and ARS VIVA, is the one that gives life to the hologram of the Valencian artist.

In Barcelona, the 5G Augmented Tourism initiative on the buses of the Barcelona Bus Turístic line, of the Mediapro group, Telefónica and Transportes Metropolitanos de Barcelona, allows interactive and multimedia content to be displayed in the front window of the bus during a tour of the Montjuic mountain.

Disappeared buildings that rise again, dinosaurs in full vitality, hotel maps that display information about their services, references in real time... augmented reality has infinite possibilities and is already an imperative for the tourism industry worldwide.



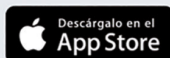
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EXCELENCIAS

from the Caribbean & the Americas

No. 206 / 2023

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EDITORIAL COLLABORATION: Tourism and Society Think Tank (TSST), Secretariat of

Tourism of Mexico, Secretariat of Tourism of Guanajuato, World Travel and Tourism

Council (WTTTC), Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), Central American Tourism

Promotion Agency (CATA), Ciudad Mitad del Mundo Public Tourism Company,

Ministry of Tourism of Cuba, and Ibero-American Academy of Gastronomy (AIBG).

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LEGAL DEPOSIT: M -17340- 1997

Edita: ELA. C/ Capitán Haya, 16, 28020 Madrid (Spain).

ISSN 1138-1841

PHOTOMECHANICS AND PRINTING:

The New Graphic Creations:

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