

Dan Youra Tours Cancun



Dan Youra, travel writer and publisher of travel guides, was invited by the government of Mexico to visit Cancun to attend the National Forum on Tourism and Communications Media, a 3-day gathering of journalists from North and South America.

The fourth annual conference hosted 140 journalists in meetings and tours to witness the recovery of tourism on Mexico's Caribbean coast since the destruction leveled on it by hurricane Wilma in October 2005.

Principal sponsors for the annual event are Mexico's Secretary of Tourism in Mexico City and the governor's tourism office in Quintana Roo, the state most heavily impacted by the hurricane.

Dan Youra speaks fluent Spanish and is recognized as an influential journalist in the northwest's print media market and on the Internet's world wide web. The author's website www.youra.com reaches readers in North America and Europe seeking information regarding cruise lines and ferry travel.

The Mexican government estimates that 1 million lives were directly affected by the hurricane that pounded the Caribbean coast for 3 days. People were hurt, stranded, displaced, left homeless or otherwise victimized by the storm. Despite the extensive physical damage, no human deaths were attributed to Wilma's pass through Mexico's most popular tourist destination. Cancun receives 36% of the foreign visitors to Mexico.

Cancun's image as a sunny tourist destination was blackened by the worldwide media coverage it received during and after the storm, showing thousands of foreign tourists stranded outside hotels with little food or water and unable to secure air travel out of the country.



Reefs of Cozumel

Organizers of the tourism conference hoped to enlist foreign journalists from television, radio, print and Internet to erase the black marks from the region's sunny image and broadcast a new, enlightened message of recovery and rebirth to the region's major markets.

As the publisher of an online guide to ferry schedules in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Europe, Dan Youra was chosen by conference organizers to help get the message out that Cancun and its surrounding playgrounds are open again to enjoy the fun and the sun.

Dan Youra Studios, located in Port Hadlock, Washington produces multi-media productions to promote travel businesses and destinations. The company is a recognized leader in the application of new technologies to broadcast flash videos via computers, cell phones and iPods. The company's flash video of Cancun is online at www.youra.com/movies/cancun.html.



Youra hosts a Podcast show, Youra Travel Pod, on Apple Computer's iTunes for download to iPods. Youra's Podcast and travel blog are accessible online at www.yourablog.com. Youra consults with clients in business and

government on applications of new electronic media. His 35 year career in media began in the press corps at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

In Mexico, Youra joined press trips to the white beaches of Cancun, the reef-encircled island of Cozumel and the coastline south of Cancun, promoted by Mexican tourism groups as the Riviera Maya. To witness the rehabilitation projects and return to pre-Wilma status, the international press corps inspected onsite beach recovery efforts, new golf course resorts and ecological theme parks.

Cancun's sandy beaches suffered considerable deterioration from Wilma's three days of pounding surf and wind barrage. They have been recovered to their previous beauty through large investments by the federal government and the work of marine and land contractors, who reclaimed countless barge loads of sand to restore the famous beaches.

The mega hotels strung out along Cancun's beaches have mostly recovered. Ninety-five percent are back in operation, a few are still doing some rehab work, such as replacing windows and remodeling interiors, and new structures are rising on the slabs left by those that were razed.

Dan Youra is experienced at assisting foreign hotel owners to promote new and remodeled properties located in Spanish speaking countries to readers in their English speaking markets. In 2004, Youra was invited to Costa Rica by Minotel International, a Swiss hospitality company to help introduce its first three properties into the western hemisphere.



Xel-Ha Marine and Ecological Park

The beaches along the Riviera Maya south of Cancun, recovered quickest after the hurricane, because they are protected by Cozumel, the 28-mile long island that floats 12 miles off the coast. The Caribbean-facing side of Cozumel, which took the blast of the hurricane, is the "wild side" of the island. By absorbing the brunt of the storm it protected the west side, which was spared heavy hurricane damage and where the island's famous reefs and resort destinations are once again dazzling tourists.

Cozumel, the number one cruise port in the world, suffered hurricane damage to its cruise terminal, where large cruise ships dock. To get visitors ashore now they are ferried back and forth by a fleet of shuttle craft, as a temporary solution, until the terminal's piers are operational again, later in 2006. Then cruise ship passengers will be able once again to step from the gangplanks of their floating hotels to promenade the docks and shop in San Miguel, the island's quaint and only town. Along the waterfront floats a flotilla of pleasure craft to take visitors sailing, diving, snorkeling, nature viewing and sight seeing.



A fleet of ferries that shuttle visitors speedily across the 12-mile-wide channel serves Cozumel. Ferries leave regularly from the docks at Playa del Carmen on the Riviera Maya and from San Miguel on the island. Two companies, Barcos Mexico and Ultramar, offer departures hourly on the hour and make the trip in 30 to 45. A car ferry to Cozumel uses the Calica pier just south of Playa del Carmen. Complete schedules are online at www.youra.com/usaferries/

The region's tourism promoters are eager to reacquire the interest and regain the confidence of travelers seeking cruise destinations in the Caribbean. Dan Youra's online guide to cruise lines and ferry schedules is a medium that is targeted to reach the cruise market. Northwest travelers know Youra's publication, Ferry Travel Guide, its printed edition distributed at visitor centers and its online edition with up-to-date, ferry schedules accessible at youra.com.

The Riviera Maya extends 120 miles along a ribbon of white, sandy beaches, facing out to the Great Maya Reef, the world's second-largest coral reef, an eagerly sought after destination for snorkeling and scuba diving. From luxurious mega resorts for international jetsetters to hammock-hung palapas for backpackers the Riviera Maya is recovered from Wilma and open for fun and games.

On January 15, 2006 Mexico's newest golf course, El Camaleon, opened on the Riviera Maya. The 7,000-yard course, the first in Mexico designed by Greg Norman, will be the site of the Mayakoba Classic in 2007, the first official-money event on the PGA Tour to be held in Mexico.

Sun seekers can choose from an inviting bazaar of beach experiences along this stretch of coast. The Barceló Maya Beach Resort with its Mayan architectural style and 1.5 miles of beautiful private beach is a playground for fun lovers and sun worshipers.

For health enthusiasts searching for rejuvenation the Vida Real Spa at Playacar in Playa del Carmen is recognized as the best in Latin America for its extensive selection of treatments, from state-of-the-art, anti-aging technologies to millennia proven therapies, including a Mayan sweat house, smudged with aromatic resins of native copal.

Wanderers seeking the ultimate getaway beyond the end of the electrical grid, can hike down Boca Paila Road south of Tulum to the end of a 30-mile peninsula and a stay in Punta Allen, a sleepy fishing village, where the native fishermen bring in their daily catch of fresh lobster.



Playacar on Riviera Maya



Jungle adventures are easily accessible at ecologically friendly parks up and down the coast. Xcaret and Xel-Ha are each noteworthy for their water activities such as swimming and snorkeling, wildlife viewing, interpretive walks and cultural experiences for the whole family. They are open daily and serve fresh seafood in their thatch-roofed restaurants.

The Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve is a 1.3-million-acre haven that is home to jaguars, pumas, howler monkeys, tapirs, deer, crocodiles, sea turtles and more than 366 species of birds, including parrots, toucans, flamingos, white ibis, spoonbill and too many others to mention. Tours are accessible at local resorts and cabañas.

The culture of the native peoples, the Maya, is celebrated in Cancun and along the Riviera Maya as a pervading spirit of distinctive art and architectural style. Mayan motifs of elaborately head-dressed gods and hieroglyphic symbols float through hotel lobbies in modern incarnations of rain gods and jaguars. Mayan culture, draped in history and magic, is most readily palpable on archeological sites such as Tulum at the southern end of Riviera Maya, where visitors enter a time warp, joining the glories of the Mayan past to the heart beat of the more than 700,000 Mayans who live on the Yucatan peninsula today.

Dan Youra writes articles on native cultures and ecotourism destinations. Youra publishes Washington State's Olympic Peninsula Guide, and documents travel to native villages on the Pacific coast (Ref: www.youra.com/og/lapushstory.pdf) and in the jungles of Costa Rica (Ref: www.youra.com/ftg/magazine/page15.html)

The Forum IV on Tourism is sponsored by Mexico Secretary of Tourism (SECTUR), Office of Tourism of Quintana Roo (SEDETUR), Riviera Maya, Cancun Convention Center, Cozumel Promotion Board, Mexicana Airlines, National Fund for Tourism (FONATUR), Oasis Hotels and Resorts, InterMarine Group (IMC), CCE, Playa Mujeres, Mexico Tourism Board, National Tourism Commission, Xel-Ha Theme Park, Excellence Group of Luxury Resorts, Captain Hook Galleon, Hacienda Sisal, La Dolce Vita, and La Habichuela.

As CEO of the Northwest Attractions Council, Youra is active in Washington State tourism. Youra is a member of the Governor's Task Force on 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, B.C. In 1986 Youra published the Official Guidebook to Washington State EXPO 86 Pavilion in Vancouver, B.C.

For up-to-date information on visiting Cancun, Cozumel and the Riviera Maya, visit these websites:

Cancun: www.cancun.info
 Cozumel: www.islacozumel.com.mx
 Riviera Playa: www.rivieramaya.com

For more information on DanYoura publications on the World Wide Web, check out his Internet websites:

Youra.com: www.youra.com
 Youra Blog: www.yourablog.com
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Meeting and Convention Center in Cancun