

RUMOR CONTROL

# Despite what you hear, it's safe: Mexican governor visits Texas, calls for more tourist activity

BY [MELISSA GASKILL](#)

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I love to travel to Mexico and do so fairly often.

Yes, there's all that scary (and true) news about warring drug cartels. But Mexico is a big country, as is the U.S. There are places I wouldn't go in the United States, and places I wouldn't go in Mexico. But those are few and far between.

Roberto Borge, governor of [Quintana Roo](#), the Mexican state that includes [Cancun](#), visited Austin May 16 to encourage Texans to head south.

"Mexico has 112 million citizens," he said. "Are there more good Mexicans than bad? Yes. There are more than 2,500 municipalities in Mexico, and the majority of violence is in 12 of them. Has one tourist been involved in that violence? Not one."

The state of Quintana Roo, he added, is bigger than the entire country of Belize. It is situated 1,000 miles from the state of Nuevo Leon, which the Department of State [advises](#) U.S. citizens to avoid, and 1,800 miles from Tijuana, where travel warnings say to "exercise caution."

Travel warnings advising U.S. citizens against traveling to Mexico are, not surprisingly, a huge problem for the travel industry — in Mexico *and* in Texas. Sixty percent of tourists to Cancun come from the U.S. and Canada, and Texas generally ranks first or second on the list.

"This hurts Mexico, where tourism is the third largest sector of the economy, but it also hurts people working in Texas in the tourism industry," Borge said.

The governor doesn't expect the U.S. to stop issuing these warnings. The problem, he said, is that those warnings are too general.

Earlier this year, Mexican authorities asked Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to make warnings specific to certain towns, highways and areas. That gave visitors information they could use to make choices, Borge said. Then, as the spring break season neared, the Texas Department of Public Safety issued a [warning](#) against travel to Mexico. That caused a significant drop in travel to popular destinations such as Acapulco, Mazatlan, Los Cabos and Cancun.

“Texas has the right to issue travel advisories,” said Borge, who also met with Governor Rick Perry while in Austin. “We just ask that they do it in the right way — by including specifics.”

According to Borge, FBI figures on violent offenses show that in 2010, there were 227 in New York City, 184 in Chicago, 90 in Houston; that’s compared to 80 in Cancun and three in Cozumel.

At the same time, Borge acknowledged that illegal drugs are a problem in Mexico. “But,” he asked, “which country is the largest consumer of those drugs? The U.S.”

Good point. Perhaps if we took some of the billions being spent on our “war on drugs” and made quality drug rehabilitation cheap (or even free) and easily available to anyone, any time, we might change that fact.

Why not try something new — reducing demand — instead of constantly escalating the same efforts at stemming the supply? And how about taking a serious look at legalizing marijuana, which would likely have the same effect on related illegal activity as ending Prohibition did on illegal alcohol activity? As long as marijuana is illegal, it will continue to generate obscene amounts of money for drug cartels, and tie up incredible amounts of law enforcement and legal resources in our country.

In early May, I spent a week traveling alone on the East Cape of Baja California. I felt as safe as I do in my Central Austin neighborhood. In the summers of 2004 and 2005, I took my kids to spend a month in Baja, the second time driving from Austin to the tip of the peninsula. I admit I wouldn’t drive through Tijuana today, but I would otherwise repeat the entire trip.

Our family also spent a week at an all-inclusive resort in Playa del Carmen in 2002, enjoying long walks alone on the beach and bike rides through nearby towns. I traveled alone to Cancun in 2009, and hope to do so again soon. After all, you can catch a 9 a.m. flight from Austin and be on the beach shortly after lunch.

In short, Borge’s visit reiterates that most of Mexico remains safe, just as does much of the U.S. In my experience, the Mexican people are friendly and welcoming — and have never once laughed at my Spanish.

The food is great, the culture rich, the landscape absolutely beautiful. Simply crossing it off our travel list is a loss for everyone.