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Mexico: Three cruise lines returning to Mazatlán

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The 1,350-passenger cruise ship Veendam will return to Mazatlán, Mexico, in November, the first major cruise ship in the last two years to stop at the Pacific Coast port. And others will follow. Mariachis will play, the governor will speak and a grand fiesta will take place as passengers disembark from the Veendam, a Holland-America Line vessel.

In 2010-11 industry giants Carnival Cruise Lines, Princess Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line, Disney Cruise Line and Holland-America stopped calling at the port. Most of the lines listed crime in the port as a major concern. City officials have tried to counter that with new security precautions. Their efforts seem to be paying off.

The Veendam, sailing out of San Diego on a seven-day Mexican Riviera cruise, will be the first of three cruise lines returning to the port in the next few months. It will be followed by Norwegian, with its first ship, the Star, arriving in December, and Azamara Club Cruises' ship Quest arriving in February. City officials hope the three cruise lines will signal to other lines that Mazatlan is a safe, enjoyable port where the margaritas are large and luscious, the shrimp tasty and the scenery grand.

Frank Cordova, secretary of tourism for Sinaloa state, has worked hard to persuade the lines they should return. When they departed, tourism declined sharply.

"We didn't just sit around hoping they would return," Cordova said. "We made a lot of changes to upgrade security and improve the visitor experience."

Among the improvements:

- A new \$3-million tourism corridor between the Port of Mazatlan and the city's historic center; the cobblestone promenade will make it easier and safer for cruise visitors to reach the heart of Mazatlán, Cordova said.
- A crime crackdown that includes coordination between local police, state police and army, plus a \$50-million investment in security cameras in the city.

Cordova, who visited Los Angeles during the weekend to participate in Mexican Independence Day events, hopes Carnival Cruise Line can be persuaded to return to his city. "They were the biggest [cruise passenger] feeder into Mazatlán, and we hope when they see their sister ships doing well in our port, they'll see what a good thing they're missing," he said. As for the Holland America line, "We're looking forward to sharing the beauty of Mazatlan with our guests as a part of their Mexico cruise vacation," said Richard Meadows, executive vice president, marketing, sales and guest programs for Holland America Line.

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