

TRAVEL

Mazatlan offers its version of Mardi Gras

MAZATLAN, Mexico, Jan. 7 (PRNewswire) - New Orleans has its Mardi Gras. Rio de Janeiro has its lively Carnival. And, the Pacific Coastal resort city of Mazatlan has its own Carnival - the third largest in the world - where conflict is the favorite accessory of the day and dancing on the beach is a tradition.

The celebration will be even bigger this year as this seaside destination celebrates the 100th anniversary of Carnival. From Feb. 19-24, more than 350,000 residents and visitors are expected to fill the streets and beaches of the city to celebrate the centennial of this unique Mexican Mardi Gras.

Elaborate parades with dozens of glittery floats, outdoor concerts featuring popular performers from Europe and Latin America, royal coronations, special children's activities, more than 150 food and beverage vendors, fire-breathing street entertainment, endless dancing and all-night parties will highlight the merrymaking.

Mazatlan's Carnival will feature various one-of-a-kind events not found anywhere else. Unique highlights include a mammoth fireworks battle at sea in Mazatlan Bay, which symbolizes the various battles between Mexico and other nations over the centuries; and

Bad Humor Saturday, where a small parade files down the beachwalk and an effigy of the most hated person in Mazatlan is burned.

Unlike its sister celebrations in New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro, Carnival is a family affair. While excessive revelry and bad behavior are the hallmarks of other pre-Lenten celebrations, Mazatlan incorporates activities such as a children's coronation and keeps a family appeal in all of its events.

Also unique to Carnival are the cultural touches that Mazatlan embraces. Carnival's "Flower Games" highlight Mexican literary and cultural events with

art and poetry contests and the presentation of the country's most respected literary award.

During the Flower Games, Mazatlan also will showcase its music. World-class Mexican tenor, Fernando de la Mora, together with the Symphony Orchestra of Jalisco, will salute the music of the state with a special centennial concert.

Other centennial festivities include a special laser and fireworks spectacular in honor of Mazatlan's first century of Carnival; two open-air food festivals showcasing some of the culinary treats of the city and state; three major pageants with star entertainment surrounding the

crowning of the Centennial Queen, the first runner-up and the child queen; and a special tribute to 65 former Carnival queens, who will take their places of honor in special parade floats.

Mazatlan has celebrated Carnival in one form or another since the 1830s. The first Carnivals in Mazatlan were rowdy affairs, staging mock wars between waterfront workers and those who worked at the downtown market.

The two sides would bomb each other with cascarones (flour-filled egg shells). Poets from opposite sides shouted insulting rhymes at each other.

At times, passions escalated until bricks, rocks and fists were flying.

In 1898, more upstanding Mazatlan citizens tried to think of a way to prevent February's annual fight-fest. They decided to create a less violent competition by organizing a parade, with prizes to go to the best decorated carriages, cars, bicycles and costumed figures. When the parade was a success, the Carnival, as it's known today, was born.

For more information about Carnival or Mazatlan, call the state's tourism office at 69-16-51-60 or 69-16-51-65 or the Mazatlan Tourism Trust at 69-16-57-82 or 69-16-51-81.

Las Vegas' neighbors have their own attractions

LAS VEGAS, Dec. 11 (PRNewswire) - For many thousands of people living in cold climates, sunny days filled with golf and swimming are distant dreams that don't come true until the snow melts and the temperature inches upward. However, there is a place where those dreams are reality all year long: the Southern Nevada resort communities of Laughlin, Mesquite and Primm.

Located within easy driving distance of Las Vegas, these communities on the fringes of Nevada's Clark County offer many of the same amenities as the "Entertainment Capital of the World," but on a smaller, far more intimate scale. And they're warm winter get-aways for those people who'd rather soak up some sun beside a shimmering pool than shovel snow from their driveways.

Laughlin

While Las Vegas is known for its manmade wonders - sleek glass pyramids, replicas of city skylines, pirate battles and natural gas-powered volcanoes - Laughlin's own natural wonder sets the gaming resort town apart.

Nestled on the banks of the Colorado River about 90 miles south of Las Vegas, Laughlin has earned a well-deserved reputation for water recreation as well as gaming excitement. Visitors can jet ski, water ski, swim, fish, boat or simply relax in the sun on the many "beaches" on various casino properties lining a 2-1/2-mile stretch of the river, or travel about a mile upriver behind Davis Dam to Lake Mohave, part of the enormous Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Laughlin's answer to the gondolas of Venice - water taxis - ply the river, taking passengers from Arizona to Nevada and back, as well as to the casinos along the river's edge. The popular craft also provide spectacular sunset and nighttime views of the casino lights and neon reflected in the gently rippling waters.

Last year, Laughlin was the third-largest gaming center in Nevada, second only to Las Vegas and Reno and surpassing Lake Tahoe in the number of visitors. In fact, 11 casinos with a combined 11,000 rooms call Laughlin home and come in a variety of themes, from The Riverside's Gyn Nineties look and the southwestern elegance of the Edgewater Hotel, to the early American railroad motif of the Ramada Express and the romantic Mexican village atmosphere of Harrah's Laughlin Casino & Hotel.

Golfers can play their favorite game at the Emerald River public golf course, located on a bluff high above the Colorado River. Designed by noted golf course architect Tom Clark, the challenging Emerald River course has Nevada's highest slope rating at 144.

"Laughlin is an RV heaven, particularly from fall to spring. When senior citizens from all over the United States converge to enjoy the warm weather, relaxed atmosphere, affordable dining and entertainment, and RV-friendly amenities. For more information, call the Laughlin Visitors Bureau at (702) 298-3022 or toll-free at 1-800-4-LAUGHLIN.

Mesquite

"Nevada's 'Diamond in the Desert,' Mesquite welcomes visitors with a friendly, small-town atmosphere and a multifaceted array of big-city attractions

including from 24-hour gaming and fine dining to celebrity entertainment and championship golf.

Located 80 miles northeast of Las Vegas on the Nevada/Arizona border, Mesquite is set in a lush, tranquil valley framed by the picturesque Virgin Mountain and bordered by the Virgin River. This resort community offers visitors breathtaking scenic panoramas, a relaxed pace of life and plenty to see and do.

Mesquite's rugged desert setting will certainly appeal to

those who want to explore the vast open spaces of the American Southwest. The awesome Virgin River Gorge is just minutes north of Mesquite, while visitors can marvel at the red-tinged Indian petroglyphs of the Valley of Fire State Park, about 45 minutes south.

For golfers, Mesquite is home of the magnificent Arnold Palmer-designed Oak Golf Club (voted one of the 10 best new public golf courses in the United States by the editors of Golf Magazine). Palmer also chose

Mesquite as the site of his prestigious golf academy; additionally, Mesquite boasts three other outstanding golf courses: The Palms, The Vistas and Casa Blanca Golf Course.

Mesquite's five premier resorts - Casa Blanca Resort & Casino, Si Redd's Oasis, the Budget Inn and Suites, the Rancho Mesquite Holiday Inn and the Virgin River Hotel Casino - offer visitors more than 2,700 rooms and suites, 13 restaurants, showrooms and lounges, tropical pools, health spas, complete RV facilities, tennis courts and other

first-class amenities.

For more information, call the Mesquite Visitors Center at (702) 348-2702.

Primm

Once known by the unofficial name of State Line, the resort community of Primm has blossomed into a destination in its own right. Located on the California/Nevada border, roughly 40 miles southwest of Las Vegas, Primm not only is home to "The Desperado," the world's tallest and fastest roller coaster, but also to a wide variety of enter-

tainment, dining and gaming options.

Smaller than Las Vegas' other outlying resort communities, Primm is home to three spectacular resorts - Buffalo Bill's Resort & Casino, Primadonna Resort & Casino and Whiskey Pete's Hotel and Casino.

For more information, call Primadonna Casino Resorts at (800) 386-7867.

To "Discover Both Sides of Nevada," call 800-NEVADA-8, or visit the Nevada Commission on Tourism's Web site at www.travelnevada.com

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