

TRAVELAGE WEST



MARK CHESNUT
Contributing Writer

SHARE



Mexico's Latest Aviation Developments Could Mean More Choices for Travelers

Jan 03, 2024

[Airlines](#) [Mexico](#) [Travel News](#)



The relaunch of Mexicana Airlines will provide some competition for Aeromexico.
Credit: 2023 [DepartureLevel.com](#)

The winds of change are sweeping through the skies over Mexico, as three new airports, a relaunched airline and revised FAA safety ratings promise to bring new options for travelers and travel advisors.

In some cases, increased competition could be especially good news for travelers, according to some observers.

<https://www.travelagewest.com/Travel/Mexico/airlift-in-mexico>

Here are some of the biggest changes in Mexico's air travel landscape.

Mexico's FAA Air Safety Rating Upgrade

In September 2023, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) upgraded Mexico's air safety rating, which opens the door for Mexican airlines to increase service to the United States. Mexico had been downgraded in May 2021 when the FAA claimed the nation didn't meet the administration's safety standards.

This upgrade is "very good for Mexico's aviation industry," according to Richard Zarkin, a public relations specialist who's worked with multiple airlines and tourism organizations around Mexico. "[Delta](#) and [Aeromexico](#) can have more codeshare flights, and [Viva Aerobus](#) and [Volaris](#) will continue to grow, too."

Ray Kanevsky, founder and CEO of [TwoTravel](#), a luxury concierge agency specializing in group travel in Mexico and Colombia, says the improved rating can also have a positive effect on traveler perceptions about Mexico. "This will help any wary travelers from the U.S. feel more comfortable with Mexico travel in 2024 and beyond," he said, noting the results from his company's 2024 group travel survey report. "Aside from proximity of the destination, safety concerns also topped the list of destination group travel worries among TwoTravel survey respondents."

Mexico's Three New Airports

Air connectivity is increasing in some parts of Mexico, thanks to the development of three new airports: [Felipe Angeles International Airport](#), which opened outside of Mexico City in 2022; [Felipe Carrillo Puerto International Airport](#), which opened in Tulum in December 2023; and Chalacatepec International Airport, which is scheduled to debut in the Costalegre region, south of Puerto Vallarta, in mid-2024.

“It was necessary because Cancun was already a very saturated airport. And if you fly into Cancun and you're staying in Tulum or the Riviera Maya, it's really far away.”

Kanevsky said that the opening of the new airport in Tulum is especially good news.

“Respondents to our 2024 TwoTravel group travel survey report cite travel distance and ease of travel as their top concerns in planning international group travel, so being able to fly directly into Tulum and cutting down on travel time will certainly make it a more appealing option for groups like bachelor/bachelorette parties, destination weddings, corporate retreats and incentive trips,” he said.

Zarkin called the new Tulum airport a much-needed investment. “It was necessary because Cancun was already a very saturated airport,” he said. “And if you fly into Cancun and you're staying in Tulum or the Riviera Maya, it's really far away.”



Chalacatepec Airport will debut in mid-2024 in the Costalegre region.
Credit: 2023 State of Jalisco

Karen Wild, CEO of [Lagniappe Travel Services](#), a Travelsavers affiliate in New Orleans, predicts that more of her clients will be interested in Tulum as a result of the new airport.

“The opening of the Tulum International Airport is very exciting news,” she said. “It will open that market further as a destination location. Tulum is still less discovered ... but growing as a destination.”

The new airport serving Costalegre, meanwhile, will make it easier to visit an increasingly popular Pacific coast region, according to Vanessa Perez Lamas, Minister of Tourism for the State of Jalisco.

“The Chalacatepec International Airport is set to become a complementary hub to the international airports in Puerto Vallarta and Guadalajara, allowing for greater accessibility to the diverse tourism offerings in the [State of Jalisco](#),” she said. “However, the Costalegre region is globally recognized as a leader in sustainable tourism, and we will not lose sight of that mission. While it is our goal to reach one million annual passengers within ten years, we also want the airport to operate at a manageable level.”

The reaction to the new airport serving Mexico City, however, is decidedly mixed. Felipe Angeles International Airport (often referred to as AIFA, based on its initials in Spanish, and sometimes as Santa Lucia, because of the military base where it was built), is about 30 miles outside the Mexico's capital and was championed by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, after he discontinued the construction of another, much closer new airport that had been started by his predecessor and was about one-third of the way complete.

"I don't agree with the AIFA airport," Zarkin said. "I am on the team that believed that the new airport that was being built with the past president should have been finished. It would have been a very good airport."

Wild reports that her clients aren't enthusiastic about the new, military-run AIFA facility, either. "The airport is further away from the city and harder to get to town," she said. "This is the feedback from my clients that fly to Mexico regularly.

They are definitely not feeling the new location in Mexico City. The new airport has potential to be a great addition ... depending on the growth of services in the area, [but it] will need to offer fast, economical transit to downtown Mexico City for it to be used by travelers."

“Aeromexico needs a little competition. New competition will definitely open up more flights in Mexico, which is desperately needed.”

The Relaunch of Mexicana Airlines

Originally founded in 1921, [Mexicana Airlines](#) was one of the world's oldest carriers when it shut down in 2010. Now, the Mexican government — under the leadership of President Lopez Obrador — has purchased the brand name and, as of press time, was about to relaunch Mexicana as a government-owned, military-run airline with a domestic route network served by a fleet of Boeing 737 aircraft.

Zarkin welcomes the competition but is taking a “wait and see” attitude about the rebirth. “I hope the president does accomplish what he promised, because it will bring another choice for travelers at a low cost,” he said.

Wild is hopeful about another carrier taking flight. “I love that Mexicana may return to the marketplace,” she said. “Aeromexico needs a little competition. New competition will definitely open up more flights in Mexico, which is desperately needed.”

Providing her Mexico-bound clients with more options, in fact, is crucial for Wild.

“The biggest challenge in the Mexico air travel market is the overwhelming monopoly of one airline that adds and subtracts service with no rhyme or reason,” she said. “This causes travelers difficulties in getting to destinations on time because of the unusual cutbacks. I would love to see more competition, to be able to give better service to clients traveling in Mexico.”