

## Our readers say this Mexican beach destination offers top support

BY KERRY MEDINA

The Cancun Visitors and Convention Bureau created the Cancun Tourism Institute (CTI) with the belief that knowledgeable and motivated travel agents are the destination's most effective sales ambassadors. The educational course—a study and loyalty program—helps agents position the new Cancun to a broad range of clients. The multifaceted course, which teaches travel planners how to create well-planned trips, is one of the reasons why our readers selected Cancun as the top foreign destination offering support to at-home agents.

In the first half of the program, the CTI 101 Study Course, travel professionals can choose to study a 116-page study guide or take the course online at the interactive e-Learning Center, available at <http://cti.coursehost.com>. Both methods provide knowledge and resources to convert consumer interest in travel to Cancun into real bookings. Both the guide and the online course come complete with color photographs and details on selling the newly revitalized Cancun, as well as maps and comprehensive lists of hotels, tour operators and sights and attractions found throughout the destination.

The study course is divided into four required modules: Helping You Sell, Cancun Accommodations, Seeing & Selling the Sights, and Niche Knowledge. Helping You Sell, which the Cancun CVB recommends participants begin with and which must be completed within 21 days of enrollment in the program, covers key sales points, targeted audiences, geographic details, transportation options, sales support tools and a directory of U.S. and Cancun tour operators. Cancun Accommodations, which must be completed within 14 days of enrollment, features information on the more than 140 properties in Cancun and Puerto Morelos, from high-end hideaways and all-inclu-

sive resorts to family resorts and private villas. Agents also learn about lodging locations, amenities and services, and various add-on and upselling opportunities. Seeing & Selling the Sights, which also must be completed within 14 days of course enrollment, boasts details on Cancun's archaeological sites, Mayan culture, nearby islands, eco-adventure parks, dining and entertainment, shopping and sports. Finally, Niche Knowledge teaches participants about specialized activities and products.

Agents also must elect to study three of the 10 "product club" themes and successfully complete the quiz that follows each themed section. Each of the four modules features a communications section where agents can access a bulletin board, a calendar, message postings and a chat corner.

To enroll in the online version of the course, travel professionals can register directly on the website. The online study guide is available through the site's digital library, which requires Acrobat 6.0. A Help and Support link, found in the lower right corner of each screen, provides navigation tips and technical requirements for a successful e-Learning experience.

The second half of the course is called CTI 102 Field Trip. This section combines classroom-style education with hands-on exposure to Cancun's varied vacation products. Open to graduates of the CTI 101 Study Course, the trips are built around themes, allowing agents to select specialized topics such as golf, weddings and Mayan culture.

Onsite seminars are followed by three days of field trips. This second part of the educational program concludes in Cancun with a graduation ceremony awarding Official Cancun Counselor status and benefits to agents who suc-



*The Cancun Tourism Institute teaches agents about the destination's many facets, including archaeological sites such as the Mayan ruins in Tulum (pictured).*

cessfully complete this phase.

CTI 101 graduates are eligible to participate in the Loyalty Program, which delivers ongoing support, rewards and incentives that extend beyond course completion and the inspection visit. Graduates of the field trip program receive bonus Loyalty Program points as well.

As CTI 101 graduates, agents post vacation package details on CTI's online system. Once stays are posted and confirmed, CTI will allocate points based on the total value of the package. Agents are then able to view rewards online and redeem points for complete Cancun vacation stays. Travel professionals have the option to use, transfer or sell rewards for additional cash. The program is approved by The Travel Institute and, as such, Certified Travel Associates or Certified Travel Counselors who complete the course earn five continuing education units.

*For more information, visit <http://cti.coursehost.com>.*

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# CHOICE

runner up

## Jamaica

The Jamaica Tourist Board, selected by our readers as first runner up for its at-home agent support, wants to learn how it can increase its sales even more from agents. To that end, JTB is planning a campaign to get the word out that agents can sell island as a family destination, a luxury getaway, a low-budget dive weekend, or a destination for specific events, such as corporate meetings.

JTB will soon reveal the details of a

new Breakfast in Bed promotion, an interactive marketing campaign. It says this campaign is designed to add at-home agents to its selling pool. To entice agents to join, it will offer an all-expenses paid trip to the island to the agent who leads the industry in bookings in 2007. The agent will have the opportunity to choose his or her itinerary and accommodations and will meet with tourism representatives to learn more about Jamaica.

The tourist board also wants to help agents sell specific types of trips and it has various packages ready to sell. For example, Jamaica has quietly become one of the best golf destinations in the world. In fact, Montego Bay is home

to four courses. Agents also can learn about the various diving opportunities in Negril at the Negril Scuba Center.

Jamaica also is promoting specific events to boost tourism. For example, it will host the opening ceremonies of the ICC Cricket World Cup on March 11, 2007, at the Trelawny multipurpose stadium outside of Montego Bay. In addition, six first-round group matches will take place in Kingston March 13-23.

For more information, call 800-233-4582 or visit [www.visitjamaica.com](http://www.visitjamaica.com).

— Jennifer Michels

runner up

## Mexico

The Mexico Tourism Board, selected as the second runner up for agent support by our readers, reestablished its Mexico travel-industry training program in October. Travel agents can now access an interactive, content-rich, online training campus at [www.magicofmexico.com](http://www.magicofmexico.com). Courses featuring areas from Acapulco to Zihuatanejo come complete with text, maps, photos, charts, active links, sales tips and a full-resource digital library.

Agents' newly acquired knowledge of Mexico is progressively tested with quizzes and exams throughout the free program. The course also offers detailed information on trip planning and tour-

ism attractions throughout Mexico. Participants must complete three required courses, including Before You Go, which focuses on selling more Mexico travel to more clients, covering the country's climate, geography and history, as well as marketing tips, trip planning resources, entry/inspection and holidays; After You Arrive, which teaches agents how to maximize clients' visits to Mexico; and Specialty and Niche Activities, which includes information on specializing in Mexico's leading profit opportunities, such as cuisine tours, weddings and honeymoons, and eco-adventure. Once they fulfill these obligations, agents can select destination-specific elective courses.

The program takes six to eight hours to complete, upon which agents receive continuing education credits from The Travel Institute. Those agents also receive a diploma via mail to certify their expertise and an agency window decal endorsing them as Mexico specialists. Graduates also are eligible for exclusive benefits and a fully updated "Magic of Mexico" sales guide.

For more information, call 800-44-MEXICO (800-446-3942) or visit [www.mexico-seminars.com](http://www.mexico-seminars.com) or [www.visitmexico.com](http://www.visitmexico.com).

— Kerry Medina

runner up

## The Bahamas

The Islands of the Bahamas, tied for second runner up in foreign destinations by our readers, are well known to U.S. tourists and agents alike. But now, agents who have not had the opportunity to visit the islands can get a first-hand look at them through a new Bahamas Destination Specialist Program.

The six-seminar course is available online from Performance Media Group's Travel Agent Academy. The program covers all of the major destinations in the Bahamas. It also suggests which clients to target and how best to market to them.

Agents who complete the course receive a Bahamas Specialist diploma and are eligible for various discounts and upgrades. Other perks include use of the Bahamas logo for marketing purposes and use of a database of vendors. In addition, the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism will invite specialists to visit some of the 700 islands that make up this chain. Agents can access the program from [www.travelagentacademy.com](http://www.travelagentacademy.com).

Bahamas tourism officials want to invite as many agents as possible to visit the islands and typically offer fam trips that last three days and cost about \$33 per day. The East Coast and Florida are

the Bahamas' primary markets because of the short distance and low-fare air service available. The islands depend on agents for a large portion of their sales, specifically from the mega-agencies such as Liberty Travel, Carlson-Wagonlit and AAA affiliates. But tourism officials want to expand that reach to even the smallest businesses willing to discover the islands.

For more information, call 800-BAHAMAS (800-224-2627) or visit [www.bahamas.com](http://www.bahamas.com).

— Jennifer Michels