



Introducing SIIA Members to Monterrey, Mexico

Vibrant and Welcoming City to Host SIIA's 2018 Latin America International Conference

By Michael W. Ferguson

Some business trips are more interesting than others. Such was my recent visit to Monterrey, Mexico to scout hotel options for SIIA's 2018 International Conference.

I have had the good fortune to be relatively well-traveled but had never been to Monterrey before. Candidly, I didn't need even know much about this city until it came onto our radar screen as a possible location for next year's International conference. It soon became clear why smart people were telling me we should take a look.

First impressions are always important and Monterrey did not disappoint. It was very easy to get there (about a three-hour direct flight from many major U.S. cities), and upon arrival it was easy to quickly navigate through the city's international airport and access ground transportation.

While I have been working on my Spanish speaking skills, fluency is not within reach at this point so I wasn't sure how challenging the language barrier would be during my trip. But this turned out not be an issue as there was enough English spoken at my itinerary locations to make communications functional, if not completely conversational. Actually, it was the perfect "Spanglish" mix for my preference.

Shortly upon arrival in the city I had a lunch meeting with some leading Monterrey-based hospital executives who provided me an overview of the truly world-class medical facilities that have been developed there and the amazing difference in procedure costs compared to most U.S.-based facilities.

This meeting was followed by a tour of one the local hospitals, which was designed to look and feel like an upscale hotel – and they succeeded! Not that I want to be hospitalized, but if I had to be, this was clearly a much better environment than any medical facility I had seen before. As they say, you really have to see it to believe it.

Next year's conference will showcase Monterrey as a preferred location for medical travel options incorporated as part of self-insured health plans. Before the skeptics pounce, let me say that I understand that traveling outside the United States will never be practical for the majority of self-insured health plan participants for a variety of reasons. But for a certain segment of this population, my view is that it is worth a close look by self-insured health care payers and associated service providers, and SIIA's conference – scheduled for April 17-19, 2018 – will provide the perfect opportunity.

I should note that the conference will also feature additional topics beyond the medical travel angle, including captive insurance trends in Latin America, as well as how certain countries in the region are opening their markets to self-insured health plan arrangements.

Now back to my impressions about the city. It was a nice combination of new and old where visitors see modern office buildings and hotels in the city, with picturesque historical areas just a short distance away. And if that was not enough, the entire metropolitan area is surrounded by a beautiful mountain range.

My friendly local hosts told me that they were going to make sure I ate well during my visit and that much of the food I would eat was not like "Mexican

food" in the United States. They were right on both counts. While there were some commonalities, I tried several unique dishes in Monterrey and everything was great. Knowing that SIIA members enjoy great eating experiences, Monterrey will not disappoint.

While I felt very safe during my entire visit, even at night, I did directly ask my hosts about any drug violence issues in the area -- even though I suspected this may be overblown by the U.S. media – in anticipation of concerns of prospective conference attendees.





My hosts assured me that while violence is an issue in some areas of Mexico, Monterrey is a relatively safe city, with the caveat that visitors should take common sense precautions just like in any big city in the United States. Made sense to me.

I look forward to returning to Monterrey in April for the SIIA conference and hope to see many association members there. ■

Mr. Ferguson is president & CEO of the Self-Insurance Institute of America, Inc. Detailed conference information will be available on-line at www.siaa.org after November 1.