

AIRLINES

Mexicana launches service to Calgary

New departures to Mexico City begin in June

GINA TEEL
CALGARY HERALD

Say hola to Mexico City, Calgary. **Mexicana Airlines**, one of Mexico's largest airlines, will offer a new non-stop service between Calgary and Mexico City beginning June 1, 2008.

The new, year-round scheduled service will offer departures from Calgary four times a week on a 120-passenger Airbus 319 aircraft which features 12 business-class seats and 108 economy seats.

A year in the making, the new service to Calgary will provide a great opportunity to increase business between the two regions, said Jorge Goytortua Bores, Mexicana's regional vice-president, sales and service, West Coast U.S. and Canada.

"The quality of service of Mexicana has been recognized for many, many years, so all the people from Calgary will be very delighted to have Mexicana here. We're coming to stay," he said at the official launch of the airline's new Calgary route.

Calgary is Mexicana's second Western Canadian gateway, behind Vancouver. The airline has operated out of Toronto and Montreal for more than a decade.

The new service to Calgary will provide direct access to Mexico City, one of the most important economic hubs in Latin America, as well as well-known beach destinations and colonial cities throughout Mexico, and access to Central and South America, the airline said.



Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

Mexicana Airlines' Jorge Goytortua Bores announces non-stop service from Calgary to Mexico City on Tuesday.

Bruce Graham, Calgary Economic Development president and chief executive, said he's excited about the business-to-business opportunities that the new route will facilitate.

"We've already been talking to Mexican-based business, particularly in the energy sector, about procurement opportunities and relationships up here in Calgary," he said.

Garth Atkinson, president and chief executive of the Calgary Airport Authority — which approached Mexicana a year ago — is also pleased with the new non-stop service.

"Our 12 million passengers now have another quality option for both busi-

ness and leisure travel, and I'm very confident this new scheduled service is going to be very well received by Calgaryans," he said.

Also on hand for the launch, Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier white-hatted Goytortua Bores and made him an official honorary Calgaryan.

The new service will benefit Alberta too, said Julie Canning, president and chief executive of Banff and Lake Louise Tourism.

Mexicans are huge skiers, she said, so the new route is a fabulous opportunity to draw tourists from the Mexican market to Alberta's slopes.

Derek Coke-Kerr, managing director

of Travel Alberta, said Mexicans also love shopping, which Calgary and Edmonton offer; they enjoy show jumping and horsemanship, so having Spruce Meadows is a draw; and are very family-oriented, so attractions like the Badlands are huge.

"Alberta has a lot of really unique offerings for a Mexican market," he said.

Goytortua Bores said Mexicans love to travel. "And they are looking to new destinations, so I am positive this is going to bring a lot of business here," he said.

There's no word yet on airfares.

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Alberta leads in home ownership growth

Higher incomes, economic stability cited as factors

MARIO TONEGUZZI
CALGARY HERALD

Increasing household income and confidence in the provincial economy have pushed Alberta to the forefront of residential real estate trends in the country as the province led Canada in the past decade in the growth rate of homeowners.

A report released Tuesday by Century 21 Canada said the rate of home ownership in the province is continuing to increase year after year. The number of Alberta homes owned has increased 38 per cent over 10 years (1996 to 2006) to 918,000 from 664,000, while the population of the province has increased 22 per cent to 3.3 million from 2.7 million.

The increase in home ownership in the province is due to a number of factors, said Richard Corriveau, regional economist for the Prairies and Territories region for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

"Albertans have among the highest household incomes in the country," he said. "Another factor to consider is the overall confidence in the economy and the fact that what we buy as an asset will appreciate over time."

"We've had a tremendous track record of price growth previously and



Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

Home ownership in Alberta rose 38 per cent in the past 10 years compared to 24 per cent across Canada overall.

that's really boosting confidence from buyers that whatever they purchase currently will increase in value on a move forward basis."

He also said migrants to Alberta tend to be younger and moving into their career path, and they look to home ownership as they begin their career and build their income stream.

Corriveau said the average resale price in Alberta in October was \$355,435, up 17.6 per cent from the \$302,211 in October 2006.

Century 21 conducted a national house price survey of typical first-time homes in 128 neighbourhoods within 55 cities and towns across Canada, including 18 neighbourhoods within six cities and towns in Alberta.

The most expensive centres for first-time Alberta buyers based on price per square foot are Fort McMurray, where a 1,120-square-foot bungalow is \$565,500 or \$505 per square foot, and Canmore, where a 1,100-square-

foot townhouse is \$445,000 or \$405 per square foot.

In Canada overall, the number of homeowners increased from 6.8 million to 8.5 million, or 24 per cent, over the 10-year period, while the population of the country increased 10 per cent to 31.6 million from 28.8 million.

The Century 21 report said there is also a trend toward the purchase of condos, townhouses and other multi-family dwellings and away from detached single-family homes.

In Alberta, the proportion of homeowners in single-family houses declined from 84 per cent in 1996 to 78 per cent in 2006. In Calgary, the proportion of homeowners in single-family houses declined from 79 per cent to 75 per cent since 2001. Nationally, 80 per cent of Canadian homeowners owned detached single-family houses in 1996 compared with 74 per cent in 2006.

Corriveau said the growing condo-

minium market is due to the price escalation in the single-family home market as well as the increased acceptance of condos.

"We're seeing a lot of our migration come from larger centres where condominiums were certainly considered the norm — those being from Toronto, Vancouver. Once they land in Calgary, it's a no-brainer to move to a condominium home ownership here," he said.

The Century 21 report said despite yearly escalating house prices across Alberta, first-time homebuyers are successfully financing and buying homes that meet their needs.

Don Lawby, president of Century 21 Canada, said first-time buyers have maintained their large and growing presence in today's housing market by combining innovative buying and financing strategies with practical compromises.

MTONEGUZZI@THEHERALD.CANWEST.COM

IN BRIEF

From Herald News Services

Alberta's finances rank the highest

GOVERNMENTS • Alberta in fiscal 2005-06 produced the best finances of any Canadian province, with a positive net asset-liability balance of more than \$27 billion or more than \$8,200 per person, Statistics Canada reported Tuesday.

In fact, Alberta was the only province with a positive balance in the year ended March 31, 2006, although the Yukon and Northwest Territories were also in the black.

The Statscan report noted that overall provincial and territorial net financial debt sank to a 15-year low in the 2005-06 fiscal year of 17.7 per cent, down from 19.4 per cent a year before and far lower than the 28.8 per cent record in the 1995-96 fiscal year. Overall per capita net debt sank to its lowest level in 11 years, at \$7,776 per person.

Overall, the governments of Canada's provinces and territories saw their assets rise 7.5 per cent to \$334 billion, while liabilities increased three per cent to \$587 billion, for net financial debt of \$253 billion. That was down \$6 billion or 2.3 per cent from a year earlier.

Rogers unveils new messaging service

TELECOMMUNICATIONS • Since the days of switchboards and secretaries, voice mail has evolved to become an integral part of communicating, even if you have to punch in a combination of buttons to listen to your messages.

Now, **Rogers Wireless** is looking to make returning calls slightly faster and easier, with a new voice-to-text messaging service the company unveiled Tuesday. For \$15 a month, Rogers will be able to take any English or French phone messages you might have missed and process it using automated software that transcribes it to a text message and will send it to your cellphone.

Rogers plans to launch the service in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba early next year.

ArcelorMittal shifts Canadian operations

STEEL • **ArcelorMittal**, the world's biggest steelmaker, said Tuesday it will phase out production of flat carbon steel at its Contrecoeur, Que., plant near Montreal, and will build a \$380-million steel-beam mill there.

Mittal said it is restructuring all its steel-making activities in Canada following this autumn's acquisition of **Dofasco Inc.** in Hamilton, Ont. Output of flat carbon steel, used in car-body panels and appliances, will be consolidated in Hamilton and long carbon steel production at Contrecoeur.

This means Contrecoeur's hot mill will be closed on Jan. 31 and its cold mill on Feb. 29. The beam mill will employ 200 and could start production in 2010.

Tax affluent higher, says think-tank

REPORT • The federal government should bring its taxes on upper-income Canadians more into line with those in the United States, and raise them, a left-leaning economic think-tank says in a report released Tuesday.

The report, by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, calls for an increase in Canada's top federal personal income tax rate and the taxation of all capital gains to help narrow what other studies, including by Statistics Canada, have found to be a widening gap between rich and poor in Canada.

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