

American tourists swamping Mexico

United Press International
MEXICO CITY—A horde of American tourists, drawn by reports of bargain-basement prices, is pouring into Mexico, crowding Mexican vacationers out of many resorts and swamping hotels.

The wave is particularly dramatic considering many tourists were scared away last year, fearing Mexico's economic crisis was a social one and that it would mean body searches in airports. "People were afraid of a coup or revolution here," said Mario Araboto, head of public relations at Aeromexico Airlines. "But now they have been reassured Mexico is a tranquil place."

It is to all, except for tourists who have confirmed, pre-paid reservations that are not honored when they arrive.

At the Sheraton Hotel at the Pacific resort of Puerto Vallarta recently a harassed clerk turned away arriving tourists with reservations, all of them Americans.

Tourism officials say the lifting of exchange controls in December and a promotional media blitz in the United States have paid off, and potential visitors have been convinced that Mexico has become a tourist's paradise.

In the first four months of 1983, some 1.5 million foreigners visited Mexico, a 20 per-

cent increase over the corresponding period last year, Tourism Minister Antonio Enriquez Savignac said in a recent television interview.

The great majority of those tourists flew to border spots or sought refuge in resorts like Cancun, Acapulco and Puerto Vallarta, airline sources said.

Further helping the country gain ground over other choice vacation spots like Hawaii and Europe was Mexico's devaluation of its peso three times last year—from 27 per dollar to 150 per dollar.

"We've always had everything to offer—girls in bikinis, beautiful beaches, folklore, deluxe hotels," said Juan Manuel Buen-

dia, head of Group Travel and Conventions at Mexico's Tourism Council. "But now it is all so cheap."

A steak in a top restaurant in Mexico City's fashionable Zona Rosa area now costs \$5, while the

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bill for a double room in a five-star hotel overlooking Acapul-

co's white beaches totals only \$65.

The price in pesos, however, has zoomed to three or four times the cost a year ago, putting the resorts out of reach of many Mexicans.

Tourists also are drawn by reports of cheap merchandise, said Alba Denzer, an editor of Mexicana Airlines' promotional magazine, Caminos del Aire.

"Acapulco still means magic in the States," she said. "But now many gringos are coming to Mexico just to shop, buying not handicrafts but three-piece Pierre Cardin suits for \$120 and brand-label ties and boots."

Many hotel men and restaurant managers say their

establishments are booked to capacity during prime holiday weeks. Tourism officials, remembering last year's losses, are doing all they can to keep it that way.

The Tourism Ministry has slapped price ceilings on hotels rates to be honored through mid-December, and local newspapers report that half-finished hotels in vacation spots are now hurriedly being completed thanks to loans from the National Tourism Fund.

Moreover, Aeromexico, which axed several domestic flights last year because of diminished demand, is throwing in a free stop-over in Mexican

city on many of its flights to U.S. destinations.

Tourism officials say the industry is helping the country back on its financial feet, bringing foreign revenue essential now that Mexico is to lose about \$1.5 billion of slashed petroleum proceeds.

Enriquez Savignac says 4.35 million foreign visitors bring Mexico a tourism income of \$1.2 billion, or double last year's sum, and a record amount for Mexico.

He also said the country is generating about 3.5 million jobs, necessary to offset unemployment, together with more than 40 percent.

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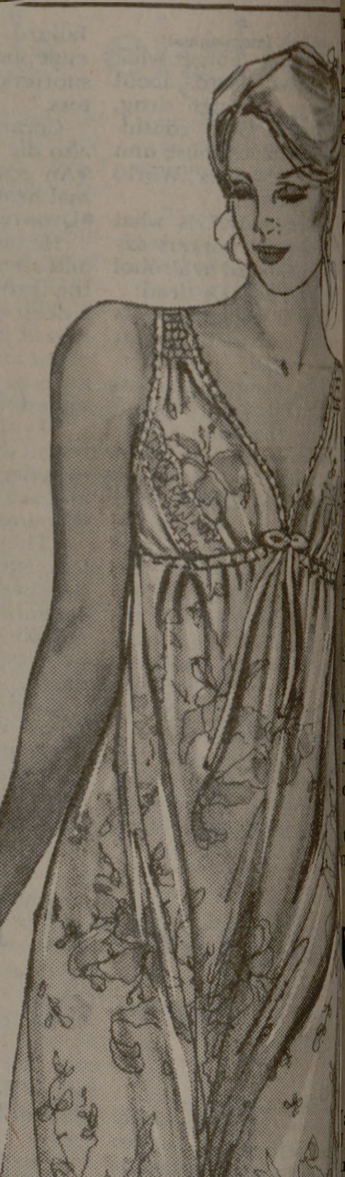
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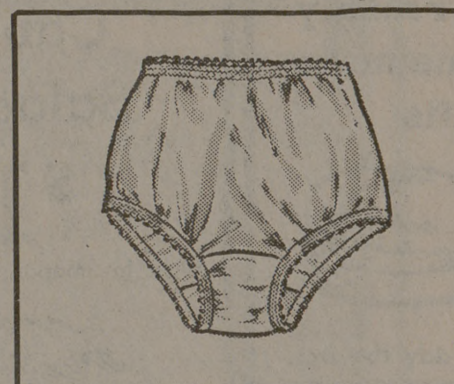
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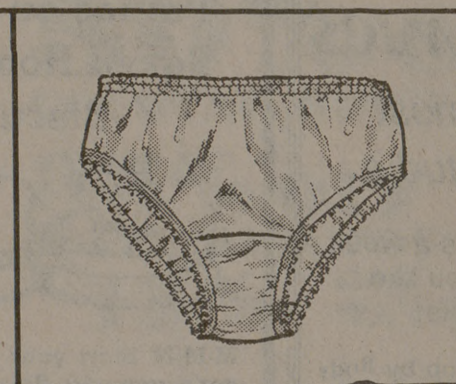
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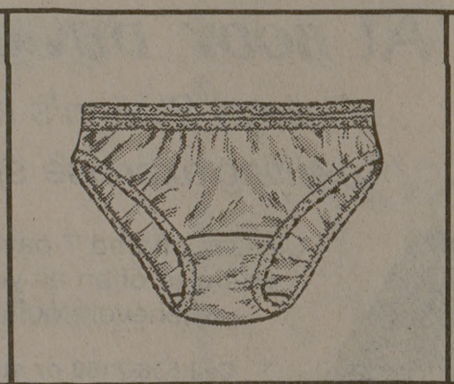
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