

TIPS FOR TRAVELERS TO MEXICO

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General Information

Between 15 and 16 million U.S. citizens visit Mexico each year, while more than 460,000 Americans reside there year round. Although the majority of visitors thoroughly enjoy their stay, a small number experience difficulties and serious inconveniences.

Travel conditions in Mexico can contrast sharply with those in the United States. This brochure offers advice to help you avoid inconveniences and difficulties as you go. The Department of State and its Embassy and consulates in Mexico offer a wide range of services to assist U.S. citizens in distress. U.S. consular officials meet regularly with Mexican authorities to promote the safety of U.S. citizens in Mexico.

Before you go, learn as much as you can about your destination. Your travel agent, local bookstore, public library, the Internet and the embassy of the country or countries you plan to visit are all useful sources of information. Another source is the Department of State's *Background Notes* series, which features a pamphlet regarding each specific country to which you wish to travel. To obtain specific pamphlet prices and information, contact the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402; tel: (202) 512-1800. You may also obtain selected copies by fax by calling the State Department's Bureau of Public Affairs (202) 736-7720 from your fax machine or from the State Department home page at <http://www.state.gov/>.

Important: This pamphlet contains information obtained prior to August 1998 and is subject to change. Please consult the latest Consular Information Sheet for current information.

How To Have a Safe and Healthy Trip

Know Before You Go

As you travel, keep abreast of local news coverage. If you plan a stay in one place for longer than a few weeks, or, if you are in an area where communications are poor, experiencing civil unrest or some natural disaster, you are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Registration takes only a few moments, and it may be invaluable in case of an emergency.

Other useful precautions are:

- Leave a detailed itinerary and the numbers of your passport or other citizenship documents with a friend or relative in the United States.
- Bring either a U.S. passport or a certified copy of a birth certificate and photo identification.
- Carry your photo identification and the name of a person to contact with you in the event of serious illness or other emergency.
- Keep photocopies of your airline or other tickets and your list of travelers checks with you in a separate location from the originals and leave copies with someone at home.
- Leave things like unnecessary credit cards and expensive jewelry at home.
- Bring travelers checks, not cash.
- Use a money belt or concealed pouch for passport, cash and other valuables.
- Do not bring firearms or ammunition into Mexico without written permission from the Mexican government.

Consular Information Program

Before traveling, obtain the [Consular Information Sheet for Mexico](#) and any other countries you plan to visit. You should also check to see if the Department of State has issued a Travel Warning or Public Announcement for the country or countries you will be visiting. **Travel Warnings** are issued when the Department of State decides, based on all relevant information, to recommend that all Americans avoid travel to a certain country. **Public Announcements** are issued as a means to disseminate information quickly about relatively short-term and/or trans-national conditions which would pose significant risks to the security of American travelers. **Consular Information Sheets** are available for every country in the world. They include such information as the location of the U.S. embassy or consulate in the country, unusual immigration practices, health conditions, unusual currency and entry regulations, crime and security information, and drug penalties. A description of political disturbances may be included in the Consular Information Sheet under an optional section entitled "Areas of Instability." On limited occasions, the Department also restates in this section U.S. Embassy advice given to official employees. Consular Information Sheets present information so that travelers can make knowledgeable decisions concerning travel to a particular country. Countries where we suggest that you not travel will have Travel Warnings as well as Consular Information Sheets.

How to Access Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements

By Internet

The most convenient source of information about travel and consular services is available from the Consular Affairs home page on the Internet's World Wide Web. The address is <http://travel.state.gov>. If you do not have access to the Internet at home, work or school, check with your local library to see if it has access to the Internet.

In Person/By Mail

Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements are available at any of the regional passport agencies, field offices of the Department of Commerce, and U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, or, by writing and sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Office of American Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Room 4811, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520-4818.

By Telephone

Consular Information Sheets and Travel Warnings may be heard any time by dialing the office of American Citizens Services at **(202) 647-5225** from a touchtone phone. The recording is updated as new information becomes available.

By Fax

From your fax machine, dial **(202) 647-3000**, using the handset as you would a regular telephone. The system will instruct you on how to proceed.

Entry Requirements

Proof of citizenship and photo identification are required for entry by all U.S. citizens. A passport and visa are not required for a tourist/transit stay of up to 180 days. A tourist card, issued by Mexican consulates and most airlines serving Mexico, is required. Minors require notarized consent from parent(s) if traveling alone, with one parent, or in someone else's custody. Mexican regulations limit the value of goods brought into Mexico by U.S. citizens arriving by air or sea to \$300 per person and by land to \$50 per person. Amounts exceeding the duty-free limit are subject to a 32.8 percent tax. Upon arrival in Mexico, business travelers must complete a form (FM-N 30 days) authorizing the conduct of business, but not employment, for a 30-day period. If the business traveler departs and re-enters, the 30-day period begins again. For further information concerning entry requirements, travelers may contact the Embassy of Mexico at 1911 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006, telephone (202) 736-1000, or any of the Mexican consulates in major U.S. cities. In response to the increased interest in immigration matters in the U.S., Mexican authorities may scrutinize more closely the visa situation of U.S. citizens residing or working in Mexico. U.S. citizens planning on working or living in Mexico should apply for the appropriate Mexican visa (FM-2 or 3).

Visitors intending to participate in humanitarian aid missions, human rights advocacy groups or international observer delegations should contact the nearest Mexican Consulate or Embassy for guidance on how to obtain the appropriate visa before traveling to Mexico. This is particularly relevant in light of the tension and polarization in Chiapas and the international interest the situation there has attracted.

Returning to the United States – Caution! Make certain that you can return to the United States with the proof of citizenship that you take with you. Although some countries may allow you to enter with only a birth certificate, U.S. law requires that you document both your U.S. citizenship and identity when you reenter the United States.

The best document to prove your U.S. **citizenship** is a valid U.S. passport. Other documents that establish U.S. citizenship include an expired U.S. passport, a certified copy of your birth certificate, a Certificate of Naturalization, a Certificate of Citizenship, or a Report of Birth Abroad of a U.S. citizen. To prove your **identity**, either a valid driver's license or a government identification card that includes a photo or physical description is acceptable.

Health

Health problems sometimes affect visitors to Mexico. Information on health precautions can be obtained from local health departments or private doctors. General guidance can also be found in the U.S. Public Health Service book, *Health Information for International Travel*, available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

For the most current information on immunizations and health risks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains an international travelers hotline at 1-888-232-3228, an automated faxback service at 1-888-232-3299 and a home page on the Internet at <http://www.cdc.gov/>.

It is wise to review your health insurance policy before you travel. In some places, particularly at resorts, medical costs can be as high or higher than in the United States. Medicare/Medicaid does not cover you when you are outside the United States. If your insurance policy does not cover you in Mexico, it is strongly recommended that you purchase a policy that does. There are short-term health insurance policies designed specifically to cover travel.

Medical facilities in Mexico differ from those in the United States. Adequate medical care can be found in all major cities. There are some excellent health facilities in Mexico City. Some remote areas or coastal islands may have few or no medical facilities. For these reasons, in addition to medical insurance that you can use in Mexico, consider obtaining insurance or joining a medical assistance program to cover the very high cost of medical evacuation in the event of an accident or serious illness. As part of the coverage, these programs usually offer emergency consultation by telephone. They may refer you to the nearest hospital or call for help on your behalf; they may translate

your instructions to a health care worker on the scene. The cost of medical evacuation coverage can be as low as \$50.00 for a trip of 30 days. Without this insurance, medical evacuation can cost thousands of dollars.

If your travel agent cannot direct you to a medical assistance company, look for information in travel magazines. The names of some companies that provide medical evacuation coverage or services are listed in our publication, [Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad](#), accessible at our Internet site (<http://travel.state.gov>). The U.S. government cannot pay to have you medically evacuated to the United States.

Immunizations are normally recommended against diphtheria, tetanus, polio, typhoid, and hepatitis A for travelers. Generally, these immunizations are administered during childhood. For visitors coming directly from the United States, no immunization certification is required to enter Mexico. If you are traveling from an area known to be infected with yellow fever, a vaccination certificate is required.

Malaria is found in some rural areas of Mexico, particularly those near the southwest coast. Travelers to malarial areas should consult their physician or the U.S. Public Health Service and take the recommended dosage of chloroquine or other anti-malarial medication. Although chloroquine is not considered necessary for travelers to the major resort areas on the Pacific and Gulf coasts, travelers to those areas should use insect repellent and take other personal protection measures to reduce contact with mosquitoes, particularly from dusk to dawn when malaria transmission is most likely.

Air pollution in Mexico City is severe. It is most dangerous during thermal inversions which occur most often from December to May. Air pollution plus Mexico City's high altitude are a particular health risk for the elderly and persons with high blood pressure, anemia, or respiratory or cardiac problems. If this applies to you, consult your doctor before traveling to Mexico City.

In high altitude areas, such as Mexico City, most people need a short adjustment period. Spend the first few days in a leisurely manner, with a light diet and reduced intake of alcohol. Avoid strenuous activity, including everything from sports to rushing up the stairs. Reaction signs to high altitude are lack of energy, a tendency to tire easily, shortness of breath, occasional dizziness, and insomnia.

Drink only bottled water or water that has been boiled for 20 minutes. Beware of ice cubes that may not have been made with purified water. Vegetables and fruits should be peeled or washed in a purifying solution. A good rule to follow is if you can't peel it or cook it, do not eat it. Diarrhea may benefit from antimicrobial treatment which may be prescribed or purchased over the counter. Travelers should consult a physician, rather than attempt self-medication, if the diarrhea is severe or persists several days.

Safety Tips

In an emergency, call [91] (5) 250-0123, the 24-hour hotline of the Mexican Ministry of Tourism. They also have two toll free numbers: if calling within Mexico [91] 800-90-392 and from the U.S. 1-800-482-9832. The hotline is for immediate assistance but it can give you general, nonemergency guidance as well. It is an important number to keep with you. If necessary, in an emergency, you may also call the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate or consular agency. (See telephone numbers at the end of this brochure.)

As a visitor to Mexico, be alert to your new surroundings. Problem situations in Mexico may be different from those you are used to, and safety regulations and their enforcement are generally not equivalent to U.S. standards.

In large cities, take the same precautions against assault, robbery, or pickpockets that you would take in any large U.S. city. Be aware that women and small children, as well as men, can be pickpockets or purse snatchers. Keep your billfold in an inner front pocket; carry your purse tucked securely under your arm; and wear the shoulder strap of your camera or bag across your chest. To guard against thieves on motorcycles, walk away from the curb and carry your purse away from the street.

At the Hotel. Travelers to Mexico should leave valuables and irreplaceable items in a safe place. All visitors are encouraged to make use of hotel safes when available.

On Public Transport. Be vigilant in bus and train stations and on public transport. Watch for pickpockets in these areas.

On Streets and Highways. Be wary of persons representing themselves as Mexican police or other local officials. It is not uncommon for Americans to become victims of harassment, mistreatment and extortion by Mexican law enforcement and other officials. Mexican authorities are concerned about these incidents and have cooperated in investigating such cases. ***You must, however, have the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number to pursue a complaint.*** Make a note of this information if you are ever involved with police or other officials.

Do not be surprised if you encounter several types of police in Mexico. The Preventive Police, the Transit Police and the Federal Highway Police all wear uniforms. The Judicial Police who work for the public prosecutor are not uniformed.

At the Pool or Beach. Do not leave your belongings on the beach while you are swimming. Keep your passport and other valuables in the hotel safe.

Visitors to Mexican resorts should carefully assess the risk potential of recreational activities. Sports and aquatic equipment that you rent may not meet U.S. safety standards nor be covered by any accident insurance. For example, unless you are certain that scuba diving equipment is up to standard, do not use it. Inexperienced scuba divers should beware of dive shops that promise to "certify" you after a few hours instruction. Safe diving requires lengthy training.

Parasailing is offered at many Mexican beach resorts. Be aware that by putting your name on the passenger list, you may be relieving the boat operator and owner of responsibility for your safety. There have been cases in which tourists have been dragged through palm

trees or slammed into hotel walls while participating in this activity.

Be extremely careful when renting jet-skis. Several tourists have been killed or injured in jet-ski accidents, particularly when participating in group tours. Often inexperienced tour guides allow their clients to follow too closely or operate the jet-skis in other unsafe manners. In one case the jet-ski rental company carried liability insurance limited to \$2,500 U.S. dollars. Make sure that the rental company has adequate medical/accident insurance, is staffed with personnel on-site with water rescue training, and properly demonstrates safe operation of the vehicle to you before you rent or operate such equipment.

Do not use pools or beaches without lifeguards, or, if you do, exercise extreme caution. Do not dive into unknown bodies of water because hidden rocks or shallow depths can cause serious injury or death. Some Mexican beaches, such as those in Cancun, have warning signs about undertow; take them seriously. Newer resorts may lack comprehensive medical facilities.

Travel by Car

People are often surprised when inconveniences occur because they were unaware of the laws regarding crossing the border. The government of Mexico strictly regulates the entry of vehicles into Mexico.

It is important for visitors to remember the following steps when crossing the border between the United States and Mexico by automobile. There are no procedures to comply with if you are traveling within the Border Zone or Free Trade Zone (including the Baja California Peninsula and the Sonora Free Trade Zone). If you wish to travel past these zones, you will need to adhere to certain procedures.

The first step to take is to obtain the original and photocopies of the appropriate immigration form, the vehicle state registration certificate or document certifying legal ownership, and leasing contract. If the vehicle is leased or rented then it must be in the name of the person who is driving the car. If the vehicle belongs to a company, proper documentation is necessary to show you work for the company. A valid driver's license and an international credit card (American Express, Diner's Club, Mastercard or Visa) are needed in the name of the owner of the vehicle. If you do not possess an international credit card, you will be asked to post a bond, payable to the Federal Treasury, issued by an authorized bonding company in Mexico. An alternative is to make a cash deposit at Banco del Ejercito in an amount equal to the value of the vehicle according to the tables of vehicle values for bonding companies. This is often a substantial percentage of the vehicle's value.

The second step is to present the documents you have received to the Vehicular Control Module located in Mexican Customs to process the importation permit. Carry this document with you at all times! The permit is valid for periods up to six months. The vehicle may be driven across the border multiple times during the authorized period of the permit. Other persons may drive the car as long as the owner is in the vehicle. Other foreigners with the same "tourist" status as the vehicle owner may drive the vehicle without the owner present in the car. If you wish to authorize another person to drive your car, record the authorization with Mexican officials when you enter Mexico - even if you expect to be a passenger when the other person drives.

Do not, under any circumstances, allow an unauthorized person to drive the vehicle when the owner is not in it. Such a person would have to pay a fine amounting to a substantial percentage of the vehicle's value, and your vehicle would be confiscated. All documents and the credit card must be in the name of the owner, who must be present upon crossing the border. We caution American citizens not to loan their vehicles to Mexican citizens resident in Mexico as those vehicles are subject to seizure by Mexican authorities. If confiscated, they are not returned.

In the third step, your credit card will be charged an amount in national currency equivalent to U.S. \$10 at the Banco del Ejercito. If you do not have a credit card, the bank will accept cash in an amount equal to the value of your vehicle shown in the table of vehicle values for bonding companies. Your deposit plus any interest it may earn will be returned upon departure from Mexico. You may also, instead, obtain a bond through an authorized Mexican bonding company located at all border crossings. The bonding companies require a refundable deposit equal to a substantial percentage of the vehicle's value. The bonding company will also assess taxes and processing costs for this service.

Finally, upon your departure from Mexico, and if the vehicle will not be driven back into Mexico, the permit for temporary importation must be canceled at Customs. If these steps are carefully followed, there should be no problem taking your car to Mexico. Remember, if your car is found in Mexico beyond the authorized time or without the proper documents, it will be immediately confiscated. Also, the sale, abandonment, or use of the vehicle for financial gain will result in its confiscation. Travelers are advised to consult with the nearest Mexican Consulate in the U.S. for additional detailed information prior to departing the U.S.

If you bring spare auto parts to Mexico, declare them when you enter the country. When you leave, be prepared to show that you are taking the unused parts with you or that you have had them installed in Mexico. Save your repair receipts for this purpose.

All vehicular traffic is restricted in the capital city of Mexico City in order to reduce air pollution. The restriction is based on the last digit of the vehicle license plate. (This applies equally to permanent and temporary plates. There is no specific provision regarding plates with letters only.)

Monday: no driving if license plate ends with 5 or 6.
Tuesday: no driving if license plate ends with 7 or 8.
Wednesday: no driving if license plate ends with 3 or 4.
Thursday: no driving if license plate ends with 1 or 2.
Friday: no driving if license plate ends with 9 or 0.
Saturday and Sunday: all vehicles may be driven.

Avoid excessive speed and, if at all possible, do not drive at night. Loose livestock can appear at any time. Construction sites or stranded vehicles are often unmarked by flares or other warning signals. Sometimes cars have only one headlight. Many cars lack brake lights. Bicycles seldom have lights or reflectors. This makes for very dangerous driving conditions at night. Be prepared for a sudden stop at any time. ***Mexican driving conditions are such that, for your safety, you must drive more slowly than you do at home.***

Learn local driving signals. In Mexico, a blinking left turn signal on the vehicle in front of you could mean that it is clear ahead and you may pass, or it could mean the driver is making a left turn. An outstretched left arm may mean an invitation for you to pass. When in doubt, do not pass.

An oncoming vehicle flashing its headlights is a warning for you to slow down or pull over because you are both approaching a narrow bridge or place in the road. The custom is that the first vehicle to flash has the right of way and the other must yield.

When it begins to rain, immediately slow to a crawl. Freshly wet roads are dangerous because oil and road dust mix with water and form a lubricant. Until this mixture washes away, driving is extremely hazardous. Beware of sudden rains. Stop, or go extremely slowly, until conditions improve.

To avoid highway crime, try not to drive at night and never drive alone during this time. Never sleep in vehicles along the road. Do not, under any circumstances, pick up hitchhikers who not only pose a threat to your physical safety, but also put you in danger of being arrested for unwittingly transporting narcotics or narcotics traffickers in your vehicle. Your vehicle can be confiscated if you are transporting marijuana or other narcotics. There are checkpoints and temporary roadblocks where vehicles are checked.

If you plan to drive, learn about your route from an auto club, guide book or a Mexican government tourist office. Some routes have heavy truck and bus traffic, others have poor or nonexistent shoulders and many have animals on the loose. Also, some of the newer roads have very few restaurants, motels, gas stations or auto repair shops. You may not be able to avoid all problems, but at least you will know what to expect if you have done some research. For your safety, have your vehicle serviced and in optimum condition before you leave for Mexico. It is wise to bring an extra fan belt, fuses and other spare parts. Pack a basic first-aid kit and carry an emergency water supply in your vehicle. Unleaded gasoline (magna sin) is generally available throughout Mexico. Bring a flexible funnel to fill your gas tank because some gas stations have nozzles too large to fit unleaded tanks.

If you have an emergency while driving, call the Ministry of Tourism's hotline or (91)(5) 250-8221/8555 et. 130/297 to obtain help from the "Green Angels," a fleet of radio dispatched trucks with bilingual crews that operate daily. Services include protection, medical first aid, mechanical aid for your car, and basic supplies. You will not be charged for services, only for parts, gas, and oil. The Green Angels patrol daily, from dawn until sunset. If you are unable to call them, pull off the road and lift the hood of your car; chances are good they will find you.

Insurance. Mexican auto insurance is sold in most cities and towns on both sides of the border. U.S. automobile liability insurance is not valid in Mexico nor is most collision and comprehensive coverage issued by U.S. companies. Therefore, when you cross the border, purchase auto insurance adequate for your needs in Mexico. A good rule of thumb is to buy coverage equivalent to that which you carry in the United States.

Motor vehicle insurance is invalid in Mexico if the driver is found to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Regardless of whether you have insurance, if you are involved in an accident, you will be taken into police custody until it can be determined who is liable and whether you have the ability to pay any judgment. If you do not have Mexican liability insurance, you are almost certain to spend some time in jail until all parties are satisfied that responsibility has been assigned and adequate financial satisfaction received. There may also be criminal liability assigned if the injuries or damages are serious.

Rental Cars

Renting in the United States. Many car rental companies in the United States have clauses in their contracts prohibiting drivers from traveling out of the country. The Mexican police are aware of these regulations and will sometimes impound rental vehicles driven from the United States. When renting a vehicle in the United States, check with the company to see if your contract allows you to drive it into Mexico.

Renting a Car in Mexico. The standard insurance included with many car rental contracts in Mexico provides only nominal liability coverage, often as little as the equivalent of \$200. Because Mexican law permits the jailing of drivers after an accident until they have met their obligations to third parties and to the rental company, renters should read their contracts carefully and purchase additional liability and comprehensive insurance if necessary.

Yucantan-Campeche and Quintana Roo Borders

The State of Yucatan has agricultural inspection stations on its border to eradicate swine fever and inspectors may confiscate pork products that arrive at these inspection stations. Yucatan health inspectors may hold travelers for possible arrest by Federal authorities if travelers appear in violation of any Mexican laws, such as immigration, fire-arms, narcotics, etc.

Military Checkpoints

Military and law enforcement checkpoints aimed at detecting narcotics, alien smuggling, and firearms traffic are located at various places throughout Mexico. Areas known to possess these checkpoints include the Yucatan peninsula, Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero. Many checkpoints will have a red flag marker and are operated by uniformed officials; however, others will not be marked and are manned by police/military officers not in uniform. These checkpoints have "spiked devices" and are sometimes used to deflate tires of vehicles

attempting to evade these checkpoints.

Travel through Mexico to Central American Countries

Mexican authorities require that all international transit of persons (transmigrantes) and merchandise through Mexico, destined for Central America, from the area from Ciudad Acuna to Matamoros, be handled by the Lucio Transmigrantes. Persons and merchandise entering Mexico from areas other than the Ciudad Acuna-Matamoros zone continue to use their regular ports of entry. Mexican authorities require that a customs broker handle the temporary entry into Mexico of all non-personal property of travelers destined for Central American countries. Fees will be processed through the customs broker. For more detailed information, travelers can contact the nearest Mexican consulate or tourism office, or the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros prior to departing the U.S.

Bringing Your Own Plane or Boat to Mexico

Private aircraft and boats are subject to the same Mexican customs regulations as are motor vehicles. When you arrive at a Mexican port in your private boat, you can obtain a temporary import permit similar to the one given for motor vehicles.

Flying your own plane to Mexico, however, is more complicated. Well before your trip, inquire about private aircraft regulations and procedures from a Mexican consulate or Mexican Government Tourist Office.

Crime

In Mexico City, crime has reached critical levels. Low apprehension and conviction rates of criminals contribute to the high rate of crime. Metropolitan areas other than the capital are considered to have lower but still serious levels of crime activity. Travelers to Mexico should leave valuables and irreplaceable items at home in the U.S. All visitors to Mexico are encouraged to make use of hotel safes when available, avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing and carry only the cash or credit cards that will be needed on each outing. Travelers are discouraged from bringing very large amounts of cash into Mexico, as officials may suspect money laundering or other criminal activity. During 1998, criminal activity in Mexico City continued at a high rate, with a marked increase in violent crime, including sexual assaults committed against women.

The most frequently reported crimes involve taxi robberies, armed robbery, pickpocketing and purse snatching. In several cases, tourists report that uniformed police are the crime perpetrators, stopping vehicles and seeking money or assaulting and robbing tourists walking late at night. The area behind the U.S. Embassy and the Zona Rosa, a restaurant/shopping area near the Embassy, are frequent sites of street crime against foreigners. Caution should be exercised when walking in these areas, especially at night. Any U.S. citizen victims of crime in Mexico are encouraged to report the incident to local police authorities and to the nearest U.S. consular office.

U.S. citizens should be very cautious in using ATM cards and machines in Mexico. If an ATM machine must be used, it should be only during the business day at large protected facilities (preferably inside commercial establishments, rather than at a glass-enclosed, highly visible ATM machine on streets where criminals can observe financial transactions.)

U.S. citizens are advised to be careful when ordering beverages in local nightclubs and bars, especially at night. Some establishments may contaminate or drug the drinks to gain control over the patron. Victims, who are almost always unaccompanied, have been robbed of personal property and abducted and held while their credit cards were used at various businesses and ATM locations around the city.

U.S. citizens should not hitchhike or accept rides from strangers anywhere in Mexico.

Metro (subway) robberies are also becoming more frequent in Mexico City. If riding the Metro, U.S. citizens should hold valuables and belongings tightly. Avoid using Metro during busy commuting hours in the morning or afternoon. Incidents of people boarding long distance buses as passengers and robbing and assaulting all real passengers while underway have also been reported. If someone attempts to rob you, it is generally considered safest to immediately comply by handing over the requested items.

U.S. citizens should avoid providing personal identifying information to individuals not known to them. Information obtained from unaware travelers has been used by individuals in Mexico to extort money from families in the U.S. by contacting them and fraudulently informing them that a family member has been arrested in Mexico or requires urgent medical care. The caller gains their confidence by providing this personal information and requests that funds be sent to assist their family member.

Kidnapping, including the kidnapping of non-Mexicans, is increasing. U.S. businesses with offices in Mexico or concerned U.S. citizens may contact the Embassy to discuss precautions to take. Travelers to Mexico should exercise caution when traveling on all highways in Mexico. Of specific concern are Highway 190 (Tuxtla to Tapachula,) Highway 195 (Tuxtla to Villahermosa,) Highway 186 (Chetumal to Villahermosa,) Highway 15 (Sinaloa) and Express Highway 1 (Sinaloa). These highways have recently seen particularly high levels of criminal assaults and robberies. In addition, the Embassy recommends avoiding the highway from Altamirano to Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo, where a number of serious assaults have recently occurred. The U.S. Embassy advises its personnel to exercise extreme caution and not to travel on Mexican highways after dark for safety reasons.

All bus travel should be done during daylight and on first-class conveyances. These buses travel on toll roads that have a markedly lower rate of incidents than buses (second and third class) that travel the less secure free highways. While many of the assaults have occurred in daylight, the Embassy nevertheless encourages daytime travel to lower the chance of auto accidents.

Tourists should exercise caution by not walking on lightly frequented beaches, off-the-path ruins or trails. Additionally, visitors should not carry excessive cash or valuables, and, should place travel documents in a safe place. In the past two years, several U.S. citizens have been murdered in the vicinity of Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, including a U.S. citizen woman who was raped and murdered in March 1998.

Taxicab Crime: U.S. citizens visiting Mexico City should absolutely avoid taking any taxi not summoned by telephone or on their behalf by a responsible individual or contracted in advance at the airport. Robbery assaults on passengers in taxis have become more frequent and violent, with passengers subjected to beatings, sexual assault and in December 1997, the murder of a U.S. citizen. When in need of a taxi, telephone a radio taxi or "sitio" (pronounced "C-T-O"). Ask the dispatcher for the driver's name and the cab's license plate number. If you walk to a "sitio" taxi stand, use only a driver known to you. Ask the hotel concierge or other responsible individual calling on your behalf to write down the license plate number. Passengers arriving at Mexico City's Benito Juarez International Airport should take only airport taxis (yellow with an airport symbol on the door) after pre-paying the fare at one of the special booths inside the airport. Radio taxis may be called at telephone numbers: 271-9146, 271-9058 and 272-6125. U.S. citizens should avoid taking taxis parked outside the Bellas Artes theater, in front of nightclubs, restaurants or cruising throughout the city.

In Case of Emergency. Call the Mexican Ministry of Tourism's emergency hotline, [91] (5) 250-0123, for immediate assistance. Or, in Mexico City, dial 06 for police assistance.

If You Have Been the Victim of a Crime. Immediately contact the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate or consular agency. For addresses and telephone numbers, see the end of this pamphlet. You should also report the crime to the local police immediately.

Avoiding Legal Problems

While traveling in Mexico, you are subject to Mexican laws and not U.S. laws. Tourists who commit illegal acts have no special privileges and are subject to full prosecution under the Mexican judicial system.

Avoid drug offenses. Mexico rigorously prosecutes drug cases. Under Mexican law, possession of and trafficking in illegal drugs are federal offenses. For drug trafficking, bail does not exist. Convicted offenders can expect lengthy jail sentences and fines. Sentences for possession of drugs in Mexico can be as long as 25 years plus fines. Just as in the U.S., the purchase of controlled medication requires a doctor's prescription. The Mexican list of controlled medication differs from the U.S. list and Mexican public health laws concerning controlled medication are unclear. Possession of excessive amounts of a psychotropic drug such as valium can result in your arrest if the authorities suspect abuse. Mexican law does not differentiate between types of narcotics. Heroin, marijuana, and amphetamines, for example, are treated the same. ***Offenders found guilty of possessing more than a token amount of any narcotic substance are subject to a minimum sentence of 10 years, and it is not uncommon for persons charged with drug offenses to be detained for up to 1 year before a verdict is reached.***

Remember, if narcotics are found in your vehicle, you are subject to arrest and your vehicle can be confiscated.

Avoid public drunkenness. It is against the law to be drunk in public in Mexico. Certain border towns have become impatient with teenage (and older) Americans who cross the border to drink and carouse. This behavior can lead to fights, arrests, traffic accidents and even fatalities.

WARNING ON FIREARMS

The Department of State warns U.S. citizens against taking any type of firearm or ammunition into Mexico without prior written authorization. Entering Mexico with a firearm or a single round of ammunition carries a penalty of up to five years in jail, even if the firearm or ammunition is taken into Mexico unintentionally.

The Mexican Government strictly enforces laws restricting the entry of firearms and ammunition along borders and at air and seaports. This has resulted in arrests, convictions and long prison sentences for U.S. citizens who have unintentionally crossed the border with firearms or ammunition in their possession. Those who are approaching Mexico along the land border who realize they are in possession of unauthorized firearms or ammunition should immediately return to the U.S. and not go through Mexican Customs.

The **only** way to **legally** import firearms and/or ammunition into Mexico is to **secure a permit in advance** from the Mexican Embassy in Washington, D.C. or from a Mexican Consulate.

Remember that, even when you enter Mexican waters on your private boat or airplane, you are subject to the ban on importing firearms and ammunition.

Some cities, such as Nuevo Laredo, have ordinances prohibiting the possession of knives, similar weapons or anything that might be construed as a weapon. Tourists have even been arrested for possessing souvenir knives. Most arrests for knife possession occur in connection with some other infraction, such as drunk and disorderly behavior.

Failure to pay hotel bills or for other services rendered is considered fraud under Mexican law. Those accused of these offenses are subject to arrest and conviction with stiff fines and jail sentences.

Be cautious when purchasing real estate. U.S. citizens who become involved in time-share or other real property purchases should be aware that Mexican laws and practices regarding real estate are markedly different from those in the United States. Foreigners purchasing real estate or time-shares in Mexico have no protection under Mexican law and should be aware of the high risks involved. Foreigners may be granted the right to own real property only under very specific conditions and the purchase of real property in Mexico is far more complicated than in the United States. For example no title insurance is available in Mexico for the purchaser and the builders frequently go bankrupt leaving the investors with little recourse to recoup their funds. The U.S. Embassy strongly recommends the use of competent local legal assistance for any significant real property or business purchase. A list of local attorneys can be obtained from the U.S. Embassy or the nearest consulate in Mexico.

To Avoid Disputes With Merchants, Be a Careful Shopper. Make sure the goods you buy are in good condition and always get a receipt. There is a federal consumer protection office, the Procuraduria Federal del Consumidor, to assist you if you have a major problem with a faulty product or service. However, if the problem is with a service of the tourist industry, you should bring the matter to the Mexican Government Tourist Office (Secretaria de Turismo).

U.S. Assistance in Mexico

Where To Turn If You Have Serious Legal, Medical, or Financial Difficulties

Legal Problems. If you find yourself in serious difficulty while in Mexico, contact a consular officer at the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate for assistance. U.S. consuls cannot serve as attorneys or give legal assistance. They can, however, provide lists of local attorneys and advise you of your rights under Mexican laws.

Worldwide, Mexico has the highest number of arrests of Americans abroad - over 1,000 per year - and the highest prison population of U.S. citizens outside of the United States - about 450 at any one time. If you are arrested, ask permission to notify the U.S. Embassy or nearest U.S. consulate. Under international agreements and practice, you have the right to talk with an American consul. Although U.S. consuls are limited in what they can do to assist you in legal difficulties, they can monitor the status of detained U.S. citizens and make sure they are treated fairly under local laws. They will also notify your relatives or friends upon your request.

An individual is guaranteed certain rights under the Mexican constitution, but those rights differ significantly from U.S. constitutional guarantees. The Mexican judicial system is based on Roman and Napoleonic law and presumes a person accused of a crime to be guilty until proven innocent. There is no trial by jury nor writ of habeas corpus in the Anglo-American sense. Trial under the Mexican system is a prolonged process based largely on documents examined on a fixed date in court by prosecution and defense counsel. Sentencing usually takes 6 to 10 months. Bail can be granted after sentencing if the sentence is less than 5 years. Pre-trial bail exists but is ever granted when the possible sentence upon conviction is greater than 5 years.

Medical or Financial Problems. If you become seriously ill, U.S. consular officers can assist in finding a doctor and in notifying your family and friends about your condition. Consular officers can also help arrange the transfer of emergency funds to you if you become destitute as a result of robbery, accident or other emergency.

Advice on Dual Nationality

U.S. law recognizes that Americans may also be citizens of other countries. As of March 20, 1998, Mexican law recognizes dual nationality for Mexicans by birth, those born in Mexico or born abroad to Mexican parents. U.S. citizens who are also Mexican nationals should be aware that they will be considered Mexican by local authorities and that their dual nationality status could therefore hamper U.S. government efforts to provide consular protection. Dual nationals will not, however, be subject to compulsory military service. It is important to note that travelers possessing both U.S. and Mexican nationalities must carry with them proof of their citizenship of both countries. Under Mexican law, dual nationals entering or departing Mexico must identify themselves as Mexican citizens or face a stiff fine. Under U.S. law, U.S. citizens must enter U.S. territory with documents proving U.S. citizenship.

A Guide to Entry and Exit Regulations

Getting Into Mexico

U.S. citizens visiting Mexico for no more than 72 hours and remaining within 25 kilometers of the border do not need a permit to enter. Those wishing to travel past the 25 kilometer border area of Mexico must be properly documented. Those transiting Mexico to another country need a transit visa which costs a nominal fee and is valid for up to 30 days.

Tourist Cards. All U.S. citizens visiting Mexico for tourism or study for up to 180 days need a document, called a tourist card (in English) or FMT (in Spanish), to enter and leave Mexico. The tourist card is free and may be obtained from Mexican consulates, Mexican tourism offices, Mexican border crossing points and from most airlines serving Mexico. If you fly to Mexico, you must obtain your tourist card before boarding your flight; it cannot be obtained upon arrival at an airport in Mexico.

The tourist card is issued upon presentation of proof of citizenship, such as a U.S. passport or a U.S. birth certificate, plus a photo I.D., such as a driver's license. Tourist cards are issued for up to 90 days with a single entry, or if you present proof of sufficient funds, for 180 days with multiple entries.

Upon entering Mexico, retain and safeguard the pink copy of your tourist card so you may surrender it to Mexican immigration when you depart. You must leave Mexico before your tourist card expires or you are subject to a fine. A tourist card for less than 180 days may be revalidated in Mexico by the Mexican immigration service (Direccion General de Servicios Migratorios.)

Visas. If you wish to stay longer than 180 days, or if you wish to do business or conduct religious work in Mexico, contact the Mexican Embassy or the nearest Mexican consulate to obtain a visa or permit. Persons conducting religious work on a tourist card are subject to arrest and deportation.

Residing or Retiring in Mexico. If you plan to live or retire in Mexico, consult a Mexican consulate on the type of long-term visa you will need. As soon as possible after you arrive in the place you will live, it is a good idea to register with the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate or consular agent. Bring your passport or other identification with you. Registration makes it easier to contact you in an emergency. (Registration information is confidential and will not be released to inquirers without your express authorization.)

Traveling Minors. A child under the age of 18 traveling with only one parent must have written, notarized consent from the other parent to travel, or must carry, if applicable, a decree of sole custody for the accompanying parent or a death certificate for the other parent. Children traveling alone or in someone else's custody must have notarized consent from both parents to travel, or, if applicable, notarized consent from a single parent plus documentation that the parent is the only custodial parent.

Operating Citizens Band (CB) Equipment

American tourists are permitted to operate CB radios in Mexico. You must, however, obtain a 180 day permit for a nominal fee by presenting your U.S. citizen's band radio authorization at a Mexican consulate or Mexican Government Tourist Office. This permit cannot be obtained at the border.

Transmissions on CB equipment are allowed only on channels 9, 10 and 11 and only for personal communication and emergency road assistance. Any device which increases transmission power to over 5 watts is prohibited. CB equipment may not be used near radio installations of the aeronautical and marine services.

What You May Bring Into Mexico

Customs Regulations. Tourists should enter Mexico with only the items needed for their trip. Entering with large quantities of an item a tourist might not normally be expected to have, particularly expensive appliances, such as televisions, stereos or other items, may lead to suspicion of smuggling and possible confiscation of the items and arrest of the individual.

Mexican regulations limit the value of goods brought into Mexico by U.S. citizens arriving by air or sea to \$300 U.S. per person and by land to \$50 U.S. per person. Other travel-related items may also be brought in duty-free. Amounts exceeding the duty-free limit are subject to a 32.8 percent tax.

Unless you prepare ahead, you may have difficulty bringing computers or other expensive electronic equipment into Mexico for your personal use. To prevent being charged an import tax, write a statement about your intention to use the equipment for personal use and to remove it from Mexico when you leave. Have this statement signed and certified at a Mexican consulate in the United States and present it to Mexican customs as you enter Mexico.

Land travelers should verify from Mexican customs at the border that all items in their possession may be legally brought into Mexico. You will be subject to a second immigration and customs inspection south of the Mexican border where unlawful items may be seized and you could be prosecuted regardless of whether or not the items passed through the initial customs inspection. Guns and ammunition cannot be brought into Mexico without a permit from a Mexican Consulate in the United States.

Currency. The Mexican government permits tourists to exchange dollars for pesos at the fluctuating free market rate. There are no restrictions on the import or export of bank notes and none on the export of reasonable quantities of ordinary Mexican coins. However, gold or silver Mexican coins may not be exported.

Take travelers checks with you because personal U.S. checks are rarely accepted by Mexican hotels or banks. Major credit cards are accepted in many hotels, shops and restaurants. An exchange office (casa de cambios) usually gives a better rate of exchange than do stores, hotels or restaurants.

Pets. U.S. visitors to Mexico may bring a dog, cat or up to four canaries by presenting the following certificates at the border:

(1) a pet health certificate signed by a registered veterinarian in the United States and issued not more than 72 hours before the animal enters Mexico; and

(2) a pet vaccination certificate showing that the animal has been treated for rabies, hepatitis, pip and leptospirosis.

Certification by Mexican consular authorities is not required for the health or vaccination certificate. A permit fee is charged at the time of entry into Mexico.

Shopping - Some Things To Beware of Buying

Wildlife and Wildlife Products. Beware of purchasing souvenirs made from endangered wildlife. Mexican markets and stores abound with wildlife, most of it prohibited from international traffic. You risk confiscation and a possible fine by U.S. Customs if you attempt to import virtually any wildlife from Mexico. In particular, watch out for and avoid:

- All products made from sea turtles, including such items as turtle leather boots, tortoise-shell jewelry, and sea turtle oil cosmetics
- Fur from spotted cats
- Mexican birds, stuffed or alive, such as parrots, parakeets, or birds of prey
- Crocodile and caiman leather
- Black coral jewelry
- Wildlife curios, such as stuffed iguanas

When driving across state lines within Mexico, you can expect to be stopped at agricultural livestock inspection stations.

Antiques. Mexico considers all pre-Colombian objects to be the "inalienable property of the Nation" and that the unauthorized export of such objects is theft and is punishable by arrest, detention and judicial prosecution. Under U.S. law, to import pre-Colombian monumental and architectural sculpture and murals, you must present proof that they were legally exported from the country of origin. U.S. law does not prohibit the import of nonmonumental or nonarchitectural artifacts from Mexico.

Glazed Ceramics. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, it is possible to suffer lead poisoning if you consume food or beverages that have been stored or served in improperly glazed ceramic ware. Analysis of many ceramic pieces from Mexico has shown them to contain dangerous levels of lead. Unless you have proof of their safety, use glazed ceramics purchased in Mexico for decorative purposes only.

Returning to the United States

You must present the pink copy of your tourist card at your point of departure from Mexico. If you are returning by motor vehicle, you will need to show your vehicle import permit when you cross the border. At the time of publication, the airport departure tax is \$10 or the equivalent in Mexican currency for those returning by commercial airline.

The U.S. Customs Service currently permits U.S. citizens returning from international travel to bring back \$400 worth of merchandise, including 1 liter of alcohol, duty free. The next \$1,000 worth of items brought back is subject to a duty of 10%.

In addition to U.S. Customs regulations, be aware that some U.S. border states (most notably, Texas) have imposed state restrictions on liquor, wine and beer imports from Mexico. If you are planning to bring back alcoholic beverages, inquire about these restrictions from the liquor control office of the state through which you plan to return.

Useful Addresses & Telephone Numbers

[American Embassy](#)

Paseo de la Reforma 305
Colonia Cuauhtemoc
Mexico 06500, D.F.
Tel [52] (5) 209-9100

U.S. Export Development Office/U.S. Trade Center

31 Liverpool
Mexico 06600, D.F.
Tel [52] (5) 591-0155

U.S. Consulates General

[American Consulate General](#)

Avenue Lopez Mateos 924-N
Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua
Tel: [52] (16) 11-3000

American Consulate General

Progreso 175
Guadalajara, Jalisco
Tel [52] (3) 825-2998/2700

American Consulate General

Avenida Constitucion 411 Poniente
Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, 64000
Tel [52] (8) 345-2120

American Consulate General

Tapachula 96
Tijuana, Baja California
Tel [52] (66) 81-7400

U.S. Consulates

American Consulate
Ave. Monterrey 141 Pte.
Hermosillo, Sonora
Tel [52] (62) 17-2375

American Consulate

Ave. Primera 2002
Matamoros, Tamaulipas

Tel [52] (88) 12-44-02

American Consulate

Paseo Montejo 453

Merida, Yucatan

Tel [52] (99) 25-5011

American Consulate

Calle Allende 3330, Col. Jardin

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas

Tel [52] (87) 14-0512

U.S. Consular Agents

Resident consular agents have been designated in other locations in Mexico to assist U.S. citizens in serious emergencies. Each consular agent is supervised by one of the above-listed offices and may be contacted through it or by calling the consular agent's direct number.

Acapulco, Hotel Acapulco Continental Costera M. Alema 121-Local 14

[52] (748)40-300 or 52-74-690-556

Cabo San Lucas, Blvd. Marina y Perdregal #1, Local 3 Zona Cento, [52] (114) 3-35-66

Cancun, Plaza Caracol two, third level, no. 320-323, Boulevard Kukulcan, km. 8.5, Zona Hotelera, [52] (988) 3-02-72

Mazatlan, Hotel Playa Mazatlan, Rodolfo T. Loaiza 202 Zona Dorada, 82110,

[52] (69) 134-444 Ext. 285

Oaxaca, Alcala 201 Deps. 206, [52] (951) 4-3054

Puerto Vallarta, Edif. Vallarta, Plaza Zaragoza 160-Piso 2 Int-18, [52](322) 2-0069

San Luis Potosi, Francisco de P. Moriel 103-10, [52] (481) 2-1528

San Miguel de Allende, Dr. Hernandez Marcias 72, [52] (465) 2-2357

Planning Another Trip?

*For general travel information, the following pamphlets published by Consular Affairs may be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; tel: 202-512-1800; fax: 202-512-2250. The price of each publication is **\$1.00 to \$1.50**.

[*Your Trip Abroad*](#)

[*A Safe Trip Abroad*](#)

[*Tips for Americans Residing Abroad*](#)

[*Travel Tips for Older Americans*](#)

Country specific information can be found in the following publications:

[*Tips for Travelers to Canada*](#)

[*Tips for Travelers to the Caribbean*](#)

[*Tips for Travelers to Central and South America*](#)

[*Tips for Travelers to the Peoples Republic of China*](#)

[*Tips for Travelers to South Asia*](#)

[*Tips for Travelers to the Middle East and North Africa*](#)

[*Tips for Travelers to Russia and the Newly Independent States*](#)

[*Tips for Travelers to Sub-Saharan Africa*](#)

*Prices and availability are subject to change without notice. Please check with the Government Printing Office for more information.

The following publications may be ordered for **50 cents each** from the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009; tel: 719-948-4000.

General entry and visa information for these and other countries are available in [*Foreign Entry Requirements*](#).

Information on how, when and where to apply for your U.S. passport is available in *Passports: Applying for Them the Easy Way*.