

U.S. Department of State
95/06 Tips for Travelers to Mexico
Bureau of Consular Affairs

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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. 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.

The Department of State seeks to encourage international travel. Conditions in Mexico, however, can contrast sharply with those to which you are accustomed. This pamphlet contains advice to help you avoid inconveniences and difficulties as you go. Take our advice seriously but do not let it keep you at home. To keep you among the majority who do not experience difficulties, this brochure will offer some precautions you may take.

Before you go, learn as much as you can about your destination. Your travel agent, local bookstore, public library 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 includes a pamphlet regarding the 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 select issues by fax by calling the State Department's Bureau of Public Affairs (202) 736-7720 from your fax machine.

Important: This pamphlet was prepared from information obtained prior to June 1995. This information 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 long stay in one place 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. Remember to leave a detailed itinerary and the numbers of your passport or other citizenship documents with a friend or relative in the United States. You should bring either a U.S. passport or a certified copy of a birth certificate with photo identification. For specific information on Mexico see page 17. Carry your photo

any other countries you plan to visit. You should also check to see if the Department of State has issued a Travel Warning for the country or countries you will be visiting. 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. 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, minor political disturbances, unusual currency and entry regulations, crime and security information, and drug penalties. If an unstable condition exists in a country that is not severe enough to warrant a Warning, a description of the condition(s) 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 generally do not include advice, but present information on factual matters so that travelers can make knowledgeable decisions concerning travel to a particular country. Countries where avoidance of travel is recommended will have Travel Warnings as well as Consular Information Sheets.

How to Access Consular Information Sheets and Travel Warnings

Consular Information Sheets and Travel Warnings may be heard any time by dialing the office of Overseas Citizens Services at (202) 647-5225 from a touchtone phone. The recording is updated as new information becomes available. They are also available at any of the 13 regional passport agencies, field offices of the Department of Commerce, and U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, or, by writing or sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Room 4811, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520-4818.

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.

Consular Affairs Bulletin Board - CABB

If you have a personal computer, modem and communication software, you can access the Consular Affairs Bulletin Board (CABB). This service is free of charge. To view or download the documents from a computer and modem, dial the CABB on (202) 647-9225, setting your software to N-8-1.

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,

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 exorbitant 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 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. 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, this includes 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. Be aware 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

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 out for pickpockets in these areas.

On Streets and Highways. Be aware 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 be aware 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

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. Be aware that the 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. 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 person's name who is importing the car. If the vehicle belongs to a company, proper documentation is necessary to show the individual works 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 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 vehicles'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

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. For more information, contact your nearest office of the Mexican Consulate or call 1-800-446-8277.

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. (There is no specific provision regarding plates with letters only.) Driving of vehicles with temporary license plates or any other plate not conforming with the above is not permitted.

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 down 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 slow, 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,

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 ext. 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

Crime

Street crime is common, especially in urban areas. Persons driving on some Mexican roads, particularly in isolated regions, have been targeted by bandits who operate primarily after dark. Criminals, particularly in Sinaloa, sometimes represent themselves as Mexican police or other local officials. The U.S. Embassy advises its personnel not to travel on Mexican highways after dark. Highway 15 and Express Highway 1 (limited access) in the state of Sinaloa are particularly dangerous areas where criminal assaults and murders have occurred, during the day and night.

If You Are in Danger. 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 teenaged (and older) Americans who cross the border to drink and carouse. This behavior can lead to fights, arrests, traffic accidents, and even fatalities.

that might be construed as a weapon.

Be aware that, even when you enter Mexican waters on your private boat, you are subject to the ban on importing firearms.

Some cities, such as Nuevo Laredo, have ordinances prohibiting the possession of knives and similar weapons. 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-

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 never 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.

Under Mexican law, an individual born in Mexico of an American parent or parents may acquire both nationalities at birth. Also, a U.S. citizen born in the United States of a Mexican father--or after December 26, 1969, of a Mexican mother--may have dual nationality.

If you are a U.S.-Mexican dual national, you must have evidence of your U.S. citizenship with you when you travel between the United States and Mexico. Such evidence can be a U.S. passport, naturalization certificate, consular report of birth abroad, certificate of citizenship, or a certified copy of your U.S. birth certificate.

If you are a dual national, be aware that you will not lose your U.S. nationality if you obtain a Certificate of Mexican Nationality. Loss of U.S. citizenship would only occur if you sign a statement relinquishing U.S. citizenship. The Mexican government recognizes a child's dual nationality from birth to age 18 without requiring an oath of allegiance. Starting at age 18, in order to obtain a Mexican passport or to obtain other benefits, such as the right to own property in a restricted zone, to pay a favorable resident tuition rate at a Mexican university, or to vote in a Mexican election, a dual national is required by Mexican law to obtain a Certificate of Mexican Nationality (CMN). If you are contemplating obtaining a CMN, it is recommended that you first consult the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate or the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at the Department of State.

A Guide to Entry and Exit Regulations

Getting Into Mexico

U.S. citizens visiting Mexico for no more than 72 hours and remaining

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 (Dirección 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.

Operation of Citizen's 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

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.

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

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 and Telephone Numbers

American Embassy
Paseo de la Reforma 305
Colonia Cuauhtemoc
Mexico 06500, D.F.
Tel [52] (5) 211-0042

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

Tapachula 96
Tijuana, Baja California
Tel [52] (66) 81-7400
American Consulate
Calle Monterrey 141, Poniente

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 10 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 Club del Sol
[52] (748) 5-7207
Cabo San Lucas, Blvd. Marina y Perdregeal, Local 3,
Zona Central
[52] (114) 3-35-66
Cancun, Avenida Nader 40, Edificio Marruecos
3rd Floor, Office 31
[52] (988) 4-24-11
Mazatlan, Hotel Playa Mazatlan, Rodolfo T. Loaiza 202
Zona Dorada, 82110
[52] (69) 134-444 Ext. 285
Oaxaca, Alcala 201
[52] (951) 4-3054
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