

# Directory

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## ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations on the Pacific coast range from hammocks, palm-thatched huts and camping grounds to hostels, *casas de huéspedes* (guesthouses) and budget hotels, to world-class luxury resorts. This book divides accommodations into three price ranges: budget (where a typical room for two people costs under US\$35), midrange (US\$35 to US\$85) and top end (above US\$85).

The normal tourist high season is November to April, when many North Americans and Europeans travel to Mexico for the winter. Reservations are advisable for popular places during this time. Tourism peaks

during the Christmas–New Year holidays, *Semana Santa* (the week before Easter and up to a week after it) and the July/August summer holidays. During these periods, reservations are a must. The low season lasts from May to October, with the exception of the holiday jolt in July and August.

Prices quoted throughout this book, unless specified, are for the November to April winter high season. Rates for peak season – which usually runs from December 20 through January 2 and also the week of *Semana Santa* – may rise 10% to 20% above the high season rate. Low-season rates are

## PRACTICALITIES

- Mexicans use the metric system for weights and measures.
- Most prerecorded videotapes on sale in Mexico (like the rest of the Americas and Japan) use the NTSC image registration system, incompatible with the PAL system common to most of Western Europe and Australia.
- If buying DVDs, look for the numbered globe motif indicating which regions of the world it can be played back in. Region 1 is the US and Canada; Europe and Japan are in region 2; and Australia and New Zealand join Mexico in region 4.
- Electrical current is 110V, 60Hz, and most plugs have two flat prongs, as in the US and Canada.
- Mexico's only English-language daily newspaper is *The Herald*, which is the *Miami Herald* with an eight-page Mexico insert, available in Mexico City and some other cities.
- For the online editions of about 300 Mexican newspapers and magazines, and links to hundreds of Mexican radio and TV stations and other media sites, visit [www.zonalatina.com](http://www.zonalatina.com).
- Free-to-air TV is dominated by Televisa, which runs four of the six main national channels; TV Azteca has two (Azteca 7 and Azteca 13).

often 10% to 40% lower than those we quote. Rates at budget accommodations tend to fluctuate the least.

Accommodation prices are subject to two taxes: IVA (value-added tax; 15%) and ISH (lodging tax; 2% in most states). Generally IVA and ISH are included in quoted prices. In top-end hotels a price may often be given as, say, 'US\$100 *más impuestos*' (US\$100 plus taxes), in which case you must add 17% to the figure. When in doubt, you can ask '¿Están incluidos los impuestos?' ('Are taxes included?'). Prices given in this book are those you are most likely to be charged at each place, with or without the taxes according to the establishment's policy.

### Camping Grounds & Trailer Parks

Camping grounds are common on Mexico's Pacific coast. Most organized camping grounds are trailer parks set up for RVs (camper vans) and trailers (caravans), but they accept tent campers at lower rates. Expect to pay about US\$5 to pitch a tent for two, and US\$10 to US\$20 for two people with a vehicle, using full facilities. Some restaurants and guesthouses in beach spots or country areas will let you pitch a tent on their patch for a couple of dollars per person.

All Mexican beaches are public property. You can camp for nothing on most of them, but always assess the safety of the beach before spending the night on it.

### Casas de Huéspedes & Posadas

Inexpensive and congenial accommodations are often to be found at a *casa de huéspedes*, a home converted into simple guest lodgings. Good *casas de huéspedes* are usually family-run, with a relaxed, friendly atmosphere.

A double typically costs US\$15 to US\$20, though a few places are more comfy and more expensive. Some *posadas* (inns) are like *casas de huéspedes*; others are small hotels.

### Hammocks & Cabañas

You'll find hammocks and *cabañas* available mainly in low-key beach spots. A hammock can be a very comfortable place to sleep (but mosquito repellent often comes in handy). You can rent one and a place to hang it – usually under a palm roof outside a small guesthouse or beach restaurant – for US\$3 or US\$4 in some places. With your own hammock, the cost comes down a bit.

It's easy enough to buy hammocks in Pacific Mexico, especially in Oaxaca.

*Cabañas* are usually huts with a palm-thatched roof. Some have dirt floors and nothing inside but a bed; others are deluxe, with electric light, mosquito nets, fans, fridge, bar and decor. Prices for simple *cabañas* range from US\$10 to US\$35; luxury *cabañas* can set you back as much as US\$100.

### Hotels

Mexico specializes in good midrange hotels where two people can get a comfortable room with private bathroom, TV and often air-conditioning for US\$35 to US\$60. Often there's a restaurant and bar.

Among the most charming lodgings, in both the midrange and the top end, are the many old mansions, inns, and even convents, turned into hotels. These can be wonderfully atmospheric, with fountains gurgling in flower-bedecked stone courtyards. Some are a bit Spartan (but relatively low in price); others have modern comforts and are more expensive. These are probably the lodgings you will remember most fondly after your trip.

Every Mexican town also has its cheap hotels. There are clean, friendly, secure ones, and there are dark, dirty, smelly ones where you may not feel your belongings are safe. Decent rooms with private hot shower are available for under US\$25 a double in most of the country.

Mexico has plenty of large, modern luxury hotels too, particularly in the coastal resorts and largest cities. They offer the expected levels of luxury – with pools, gyms, bars, restaurants and so on – at prices that are sometimes agreeably modest (and sometimes not!).

Fortunately for families and small groups of travelers, many hotels in all price ranges have rooms for three, four or five people that cost not much more than a double.

### Rental Accommodations

Those planning to stick around for a while in one spot have a lot to gain by moving into an apartment, condominium or villa vacation rental. Prices fluctuate according to amenities, season and proximity to a beach, from as little as US\$400 per month for a simple bungalow to many times that for a lavish villa.

**BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE**

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com). You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

The Internet is your friend in finding listings; start your search at sites like **Choice1** ([www.choice1.com/mexico](http://www.choice1.com/mexico)) or on the rentals page maintained by **MexOnline** ([www.mexonline.com/rentals.htm](http://www.mexonline.com/rentals.htm)).

**Resorts**

An abundance of sea, sun and sand usually means resort hotels, and Mexico's Pacific coast is no exception. These properties offer deluxe amenities, manicured grounds and often private beaches, and they offer a full range of activities, excursions, multiple pools and sports facilities. All-inclusive meal, activity and beverage plans are increasingly the norm.

Rates for all-inclusive resorts presented in this book are guidelines based on each resort's unpublicized 'rack' or 'standard' rate. This is to say that you will likely spend considerably less depending on the source of booking, season and current specials. Most resorts perpetually publicize special rates, and further discounts can be found either on their websites or on booking sites like **Expedia** ([www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com)) and **Travelocity** ([www.travelocity.com](http://www.travelocity.com)).

**ACTIVITIES**

Mexico's Pacific coast has a panoply of sports and special-interest activities for those to whom bumming out on the beach spells eventual boredom. Diving and snorkeling (p47) devotees are spoiled for choice with loads of dazzling sites up and down the coast and plenty of operators waiting to take you to them. These are also world-class waters for deep-sea fishing (p48), with opportunities ranging from deluxe guided charters leaving from the resort towns to pared-down excursions in a *panga* (motorized skiff) with local fishermen. Surfing (p48) is also celebrated in a big way, with several famous spots including the country's

most famous surfing beach – Puerto Escondido's 'Mexican Pipeline.' The coastal lagoons and sheltered bays of the Pacific coast are magnificent waters for kayaking (p51) and also provide superlative spots for wildlife and bird-watching (p51). If all this makes you feel a bit seasick, then stretch your legs with some splendid hiking (p53) along scenic beaches or through a tropical forest to a waterfall. Mountain biking (p53) and horseback riding (p53) offer a different pace and perspective, and everything you need to enjoy these activities is available in the major tourist towns.

**BUSINESS HOURS**

On the coast, shops are generally open from 9am or 10am to around 9pm Monday to Saturday. They close for siesta between 2pm and 4pm. Inland, shops will generally skip the siesta and close around 7pm. Shops in malls and tourist resorts often open on Sunday.

Offices have similar Monday to Friday hours, often with the 2pm to 4pm lunch break. Those with tourist-related business might open for a few hours on Saturday.

Typical restaurant hours are from 7am to between 10pm and midnight. Cafés typically open from 8am to 10pm daily. Bars, too, are normally open daily, but each seems to have its own special pattern of hours.

Museums are usually closed on Monday; on Sunday nearly all museums are free.

In this book we only spell out opening hours where they do not fit these parameters. See inside the front cover for further typical opening hours.

**CHILDREN**

Mexicans love children, and children are welcome at all kinds of hotels and in virtually every café and restaurant. The sights, sounds and colors of Mexico excite and stimulate most children, but few kids like traveling all the time; they're happier if they can settle into a place for a while and make friends. Try to give them time to get on with some of what they like doing back home. Children are also more easily affected than adults by heat, disrupted sleeping patterns and strange food. They need time to acclimatize and you should take extra care to avoid sunburn. Ensure you replace fluids if a child gets diarrhea (p307).

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* has lots of practical advice on the subject, drawn from firsthand experience.

**Practicalities**

Cots for hotel rooms and high chairs for restaurants are available mainly in mid-range and top-end establishments. If you want a rental car with a child safety seat, the major international rental firms are the most reliable providers. You will probably have to pay a few dollars extra per day.

It's usually easy to find a cheap baby-sitter if parents want to go out on their own – ask at your hotel. Diapers are widely available, but if you depend on some particular cream, lotion, baby food or medicine, bring it with you. Public breast-feeding is not common and, when done, is done discreetly.

**DOCUMENTS FOR UNDER-18 TRAVELERS**

To conform with regulations aimed at preventing international child abduction, minors (under 18s) traveling to Mexico without one or both of their parents may need to carry a notarized consent form signed by the absent parent or parents, giving permission for the young traveler to make the international journey. Mexico does not specifically require this documentation, but airlines flying to Mexico may refuse to board passengers without it. In the case of divorced parents, a custody document may be required. If one or both parents are dead, or the traveler has only one legal parent, a death certificate or notarized statement may be required.

These rules are aimed primarily at visitors from the USA and Canada but may also apply to people from elsewhere. Procedures vary from country to country; contact your country's foreign affairs department and/or a Mexican consulate to find out exactly what you need to do. The required forms are usually available from these authorities.

**Sights & Activities**

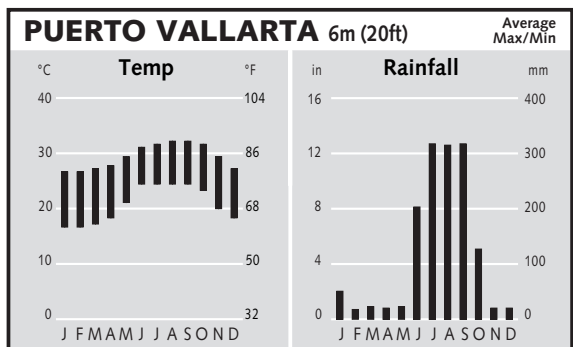
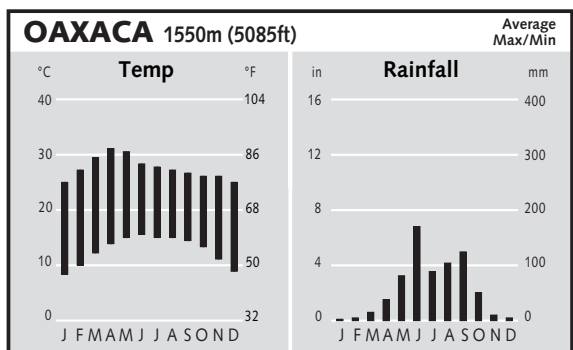
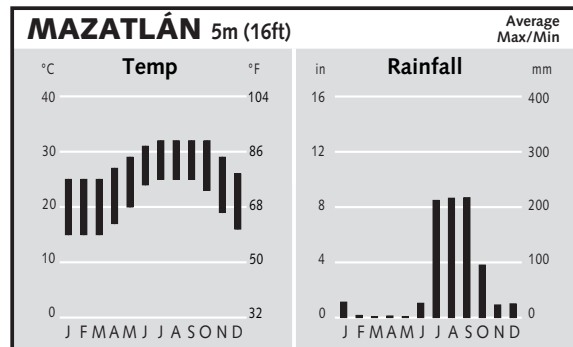
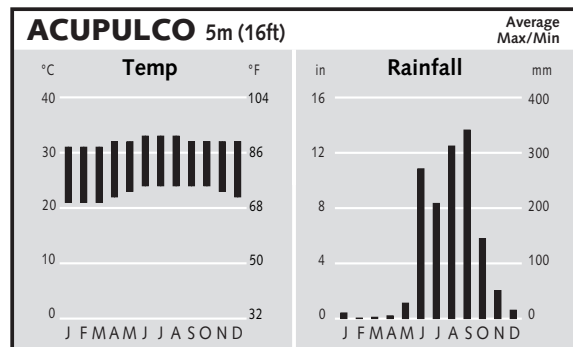
In larger resort towns, apart from the obvious beaches and swimming pools, you'll find excellent attractions such as water parks, including **Parque Papagayo** (p211) in Acapulco, **Splash Parque Acuático** (p77) in Puerto Vallarta and **MazAgua** (p116) in Mazatlán.

Kids don't have to be very old to enjoy activities such as snorkeling, boating, riding bicycles and horses, watching wildlife (p279),

and even – for some! – shopping and visiting markets. Many kids will stay happy for under US\$1 an hour at Mexico's myriad Internet cafés, and archaeological sites (eg Monte Albán, p240) can be fun if the kids are into climbing pyramids and exploring tunnels.

**CLIMATE CHARTS**

June to October are the hottest and wettest months across most of Mexico. For tips on the best seasons to travel, see p17.



## COURSES

Taking classes in Mexico can be a great way to meet people and get an inside angle on local life as well as study the language or culture. The country specializes in short courses in the Spanish language. In addition, Mexican universities and colleges often offer tuition to complement college courses you may be taking back home. For long-term study in Mexico you'll need a student visa; contact a Mexican consulate.

Hit the Internet to learn about study possibilities in Mexico from sites such as the **Council on International Educational Exchange** (CIEE; [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org)), the **National Registration Center for Study Abroad** ([www.nrca.com](http://www.nrca.com)) and **AmeriSpan** ([www.amerispan.com](http://www.amerispan.com)).

### Cooking Courses

See p230 for two of Mexico's great little cooking schools for foreigners, and see p60 for other general information about cooking courses.

### Language Courses

Mexico's best, most popular language schools are inland. Oaxaca (p229) is an excellent place to study Spanish and get an inside angle on local life and culture. Multiweek courses can also be taken in Puerto Vallarta (p76), Mazatlán (p116) and La Manzanilla (p154).

Course lengths range from a few days to a year. In many places you can enroll on the spot and start any Monday. You may be offered accommodations with a local family as part of the deal – which can help your language skills as much as the formal tuition. In a growing number of schools, extra or alternative courses in art, crafts, dance, indigenous languages or in-depth study of Mexico are also available.

Costs per week, with accommodations and meals included, can range from around US\$180 to over US\$400, depending on the city, the school and how intensively you study.

## CUSTOMS

Things that visitors are allowed to bring into Mexico duty-free include items for personal use such as clothing; a camera and video camera; up to 12 rolls of film or videotapes; a cellular phone; a laptop computer; a portable radio or CD player; medicine for

personal use, with prescription in the case of psychotropic drugs; 3L of wine, beer or liquor (adults only); 400 cigarettes (adults); and US\$300 worth of other goods (US\$50 if arriving by land).

The normal routine when you enter Mexico is to complete a customs declaration form (which lists duty-free allowances), and then place it in a machine. If the machine shows a green light, you pass without inspection. If a red light shows, your baggage will be searched.

On leaving Mexico, you may be subjected to an exit inspection. Certain cultural and religious artifacts require exit permits, and most pre-Hispanic objects cannot legally be removed from the country.

Returnees to the US are allowed a fixed value of duty-free goods, including no more than 1L of alcoholic spirits, 200 cigarettes and 100 cigars. At the time of research, the allowance was US\$400 per person.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Official information can make Mexico sound more alarming than it really is, but for a variety of useful information on travel to Mexico consult your country's foreign-affairs department:

**Australia** (☎ 1300-139-281; [www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au))

**Canada** (☎ 800-267-6788; [www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca))

**UK** (☎ 0845-850-2829; [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk))

**USA** (☎ 888-407-4747; [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov))

If you're already in Mexico, you can contact your embassy (p283). Keep an ear to the ground as you travel.

### Theft & Robbery

Tourism on the Pacific coast is a *major* source of income, both locally and nationally, and Mexico has a vested interest in keeping it safe for visitors. Major coastal resorts have a large and visible police presence, so violent crimes are rare. Remote beach spots and dark streets are the places where muggings are most likely to occur.

Purse- or bag-snatching and pickpocketing can occur in crowded buses, bus stops, bus stations, airports, markets, thronged streets and plazas.

### HIGHWAY ROBBERY

Bandits occasionally hold up buses, cars and other vehicles on intercity routes,

especially at night, taking luggage or valuables. Sometimes buses are robbed by people who board as passengers. The best ways to avoid highway robbery are to travel by day and to travel on toll highways as much as possible. Deluxe and 1st-class buses use toll highways, where they exist; 2nd-class buses do not.

Hwy 200 along the Pacific coast through Michoacán and Guerrero states and as far south as Pochutla in Oaxaca has been the scene of many highway robberies over the years but is now mostly safe for travel. Hwys 134 and 51 between Ixtapa and Iguala and Hwy 175 between Oaxaca city and Pochutla are also known to be robbery-prone.

### IN THE CITY

To avoid being robbed in cities, steer clear of lonely places like empty streets or little-used pedestrian underpasses where there are few other people. Use ATMs only in secure locations and not those that open to the street.

Pickpockets often work in teams; the operative principle is to distract you and get you off balance. If your valuables are *underneath* your clothing (in a money belt, a shoulder wallet or a pouch on a string around your neck), the chances of losing them are greatly reduced. Visible round-the-waist money belts are an invitation to thieves. Carry a small amount of ready-money in a pocket.

### DISABLED TRAVELERS

Mexico is not yet very disabled-friendly, though some hotels and restaurants (mostly towards the top end of the market) and some public buildings and archaeological sites now provide wheelchair access. Mobility is easiest in the major tourist resorts and the more expensive hotels. Bus transportation can be difficult; flying or taking a taxi is easier.

**Mobility International USA** (☎ 541-343-1284; www.miusa.org) advises disabled travelers on mobility issues and runs exchange programs (including in Mexico). Its website includes international databases of exchange programs and disability organizations, with several Mexican organizations listed.

In the UK, **Radar** (☎ 020-7250-3222; www.radar.org.uk) is run by and for disabled people. Its excellent website has links to good travel and holiday sites.

### DISCOUNT CARDS

The ISIC student card, the IYTC card for travelers under 26 and the ITIC card for teachers can help you obtain reduced-price air tickets to or from Mexico at student- and youth-oriented travel agencies. Reduced prices on Mexican buses and at museums, archaeological sites and so on are usually only for those with Mexican education credentials, but the ISIC, IYTC and ITIC will sometimes get you a reduction. The ISIC card is the most recognized.

All these cards can be obtained in Mexico. One outlet is the youth/student travel agency **Mundo Joven** (www.mundojoven.com in Spanish), with six offices in Mexico City and others in Guadalajara, Puebla, Toluca and León. You need proof of your student/teacher/youth status to obtain the ISIC/ITIC/IYTC card.

### EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

#### Mexican Embassies & Consulates

The following are embassies unless otherwise noted. Updated details can be found at www.sre.gob.mx. Some Mexican embassy and consulate websites are very useful information sources on visas and similar matters.

**Australia** (☎ 02-6273-3963; www.mexico.org.au; 14 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

**Canada** Ottawa (☎ 613-233-8988; www.embamexcan.com; 45 O'Connor St, Suite 1000, ON K1P 1A4); consulate in Montreal (☎ 514-288-2502; www.consulmex.qc.ca; 2055 rue Peel, Bureau 1000, QC H3A 1V4); consulate in Toronto (☎ 416-368-2875; www.consulmex.com; 199 Bay St, Suite 4440 Commerce Court West, ON M5L 1E9); consulate in Vancouver (☎ 604-684-3547; www.consulmexvan.com; 710-1177 West Hastings St, BC V6E 2K3)

**France** Paris (☎ 01-53-70-27-70; www.sre.gob.mx/francia; 9 rue de Longchamp, 75116); consulate in Paris (☎ 01 42 86 56 20; 4 rue Notre Dame des Victoires, 75002)

**Germany** Berlin (☎ 030-269-323; www.embamex.de in Spanish & German; Klingelhöferstrasse 3, 10785); consulate in Frankfurt-am-Main (☎ 069-299-8750; www.consulmexfrankfurt.org in Spanish & German; Taunusanlage 21, 60325)

**Ireland** (☎ 01-260-0699; www.sre.gob.mx/irlanda; 43 Ailesbury Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

**Netherlands** (☎ 070-360-2900; www.embamex-nl.com; Nassauplein 28, The Hague 2585EC)

**New Zealand** (☎ 04-472-0555; Level 8, 111 Custom-house Quay, Wellington)

**UK** (☎ 020-7235-6393; www.embamex.co.uk; 8 Halkin St, London SW1X 7DW)

**USA** (☎ 202-728-1600; www.sre.gob.mx/eua; 1911 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington, DC 20006)

## Embassies & Consulates in Mexico

Mexico City entries in the following selective list are for embassies or their consular sections; other entries are consulates. Embassy websites are often useful sources of information about Mexico.

**Australia** Guadalajara (☎ 33-3615-7418; López Cotilla 2018, Colonia Arcos Vallarta); Mexico City (☎ 55-1101-2200; www.mexico.embassy.gov.au; Rubén Darío 55, Polanco)

**Canada** Acapulco (☎ 744-484-13-05; Centro Comercial Marbella, Local 23); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3615-6215; Hotel Fiesta Americana, Local 31, Aceves 225, Colonia Vallarta Poniente); Mazatlán (☎ 669-913-73-20; Hotel Playa Mazatlán, Av Las Gaviotas 202, Zona Dorada); Mexico City (☎ 55-5724-7900; www.canada.org.mx; Schiller 529, Polanco); Oaxaca (☎ 951-513-37-77; Pino Suárez 700, Local 11B); Puerto Vallarta (☎ 322-293-00-98; Edificio Obelisco Local 108, Av Francisco Medina Ascencio 1951, Zona Hotelera Las Glorias)

**France** Acapulco (☎ 744-484-45-80; Local 205, La Costera 91, Fraccionamiento Club Deportiva); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3616-5516; López Mateos Nte 484); Mazatlán (☎ 669-985-12-28; Belisario Domínguez 1008 Sur, Colonia Centro); Mexico City (☎ 55-9171-9700; www.francia.org.mx in Spanish & French; Campos Elíseos 339, Polanco); consulate in Mexico City (☎ 55-9171-9840; Lafontaine 32, Polanco)

**Germany** Acapulco (☎ 744-484-18-60; Alaminos 26, Casa Tres Fuentes, Colonia Costa Azul); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3613-9623; Casa Wagner de Guadalajara, Madero 215); Mazatlán (☎ 669-914-93-10; Av Playa Gaviotas 212, Zona Dorada); Mexico City (☎ 55-5283-2200; www.mexiko.diplo.de in Spanish & German; Lord Byron 737, Polanco)

**Ireland** (☎ 55-5520-5803; embajada@irlanda.org.mx; Cerrada Blvd Ávila Camacho 76, piso 3, Lomas de Chapultepec, Mexico City)

**Netherlands** Acapulco (☎ 486-83-59; Hotel Ritz, La Costera 159); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3673-2211; 2nd fl, Av Vallarta 5500, Colonia Lomas Universidad, Zapopan); Mexico City (☎ 55-5258-9921; www.paisesbajos.com.mx in Spanish & Dutch; Edificio Calakmul, Av Vasco de Quiroga 3000, 7th fl, Santa Fe)

**New Zealand** (☎ 55-5283-9460; kiwimexico@compuserve.com.mx; Balmes 8, Level 4, Los Morales, Mexico City)

**UK** Acapulco (☎ 744-484-17-35; Casa Consular, Centro Internacional Acapulco, La Costera); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3343-2296; Jesús de Rojas 20, Colonia Los Pinos, Zapopan); Mexico City (☎ 55-5242-8500; www.embajadabritanica.com.mx; Río Lerma 71, Colonia Cuauhtémoc); consulate in Mexico City (☎ 55-5242-8500; Río Usumacinta 26)

**USA** Acapulco (☎ 744-469-05-56; Hotel Continental Plaza, La Costera 121, Local 14); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3268-2100; Progreso 175); Mazatlán (☎ 669-916-58-89; Hotel Playa Mazatlán, Av Las Gaviotas 202, Zona Dorada); Mexico City (☎ 55-5080-2000; mexico.usembassy.gov; Paseo de

la Reforma 305); Oaxaca (☎ 951-514-30-54; Plaza Santo Domingo, Alcalá 407, Interior 20); Puerto Vallarta (☎ 322-222-00-69; Zaragoza 160)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Mexico's many fiestas are full-blooded, highly colorful affairs that often go on for several days. In addition to the major national festivals listed below, each town has many local saint's days, regional fairs, arts festivals and so on (see destination chapters for information on these). There's also a national public holiday just about every month (see p284), often the occasion for further partying.

### January

**Día de los Reyes Magos** (Three Kings' Day or Epiphany; Jan 6) This is the day when Mexican children traditionally receive gifts, rather than at Christmas.

### February/March

**Día de la Candelaria** (Candlemas; Feb 2) Commemorates the presentation of Jesus in the temple 40 days after his birth; celebrated with processions, bullfights and dancing in many towns.

**Carnaval** (late Feb/early Mar) A big bash preceding the 40-day penance of Lent, Carnaval takes place during the week or so before Ash Wednesday (which falls 46 days before Easter Sunday). It's celebrated wildly in Mazatlán with parades and masses of music, food, drink, dancing, fireworks and fun.

### March/April

**Semana Santa** Holy Week starts on Palm Sunday (Domingo de Ramos); most of Mexico seems to be on the move at this time.

### September

**Día de la Independencia** (Independence Day; Sep 16) The anniversary of the 1810 start of Mexico's independence war provokes an upsurge of patriotic feeling every year: on the evening of the 15th, the words of Padre Miguel Hidalgo's famous call to rebellion, the Grito de Dolores, are repeated from the balcony of every town hall in the land, usually followed by fireworks. The biggest celebrations are in Mexico City, where the Grito is issued by the national president from the Palacio Nacional.

### November

**Día de Todos los Santos** (All Saints' Day; Nov 1) The souls of dead children (*angelitos*, little angels) are celebrated on All Saints' Day.

**Día de Muertos** (Day of the Dead; Nov 2) Every cemetery in the country comes alive as families visit graveyards to commune with their dead on the night of November 1 and

the day of November 2, when the souls of the dead are believed to return to earth.

### December

**Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe** (Dec 12) A week or more of celebrations throughout Mexico leads up to the Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Virgin who appeared to an indigenous Mexican, Juan Diego, in 1531, and has since become Mexico's religious patron. The biggest festivities are at the *Basílica de Guadalupe* in Mexico City.

**Día de Navidad** (Dec 25) Christmas is traditionally celebrated with a feast in the early hours of December 25, after midnight mass.

### FOOD

Some Eating sections in chapters of this book are divided into budget, midrange and top-end categories. We define a midrange restaurant as one where a main dish at lunch or dinner costs between US\$6 and US\$11. Budget and top-end places are, respectively, less than US\$6 and over US\$11. If a restaurant has a closing day, it's usually Sunday, Monday or Tuesday. For a full introduction to Mexico's fabulously piquant cuisine, see the Food & Drink chapter (p55).

### GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Mexico is more broad-minded about sexuality than you might expect. Gays and lesbians don't generally maintain a high profile, but rarely attract open discrimination or violence. There are large, lively gay communities and/or gay tourism scenes in Puerto Vallarta and Guadalajara (especially), and also in Mexico City, Mazatlán, and Acapulco. Gay men have a more public profile than lesbians, however. Discrimination based on sexual orientation has been illegal since 1999, and can be punished with up to three years in prison.

The **International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association** ([www.iglta.org](http://www.iglta.org)) provides information on the major travel providers in the gay sector. San Diego-based **Arco Iris Tours** (☎ 800-765-4370; [www.arcoiristours.com](http://www.arcoiristours.com)) specializes in gay travel to Mexico and organizes an annual International Gay Festival in Cancún.

The **Out&About** ([www.gay.com/travel/outandabout](http://www.gay.com/travel/outandabout)) website has a detailed Mexico gay-travel guide and articles. Another good source of information is the **Gay Mexico Network** ([www.gaymexico.net](http://www.gaymexico.net)). It offers information on gay-friendly hotels and tours in Mexico, and publishes a newsletter offering discounted rooms in gay-friendly accommodations.

### HOLIDAYS

The chief holiday periods are Christmas to New Year, *Semana Santa* (the week leading up to Easter and a couple of days afterwards), and mid-July to mid-August. Transportation and tourist accommodations are heavily booked at these times. Banks, post offices, government offices and many shops throughout Mexico are closed on the following national holidays:

**Año Nuevo (New Year's Day)** January 1

**Día de la Constitución (Constitution Day)** February 5

**Día de la Bandera (Day of the National Flag)** February 24

**Día de Nacimiento de Benito Juárez (anniversary of Benito Juárez' birth)** March 21

**Día del Trabajo (Labor Day)** May 1

**Cinco de Mayo (anniversary of Mexico's victory over the French at Puebla)** May 5

**Día de la Independencia (Independence Day)** September 16

**Día de la Raza (commemoration of Columbus' discovery of the New World)** October 12

**Día de la Revolución (Revolution Day)** November 20

**Día de Navidad (Christmas Day)** December 25

At Easter, businesses usually close from Good Friday (*Viernes Santo*) to Easter Sunday (*Domingo de Resurrección*). Many offices and businesses close during major national festivals (see p283).

### INSURANCE

A travel-insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. Some policies specifically exclude dangerous activities such as scuba diving, motorcycling and even trekking.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, ensure you keep all documentation. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home. For further information on medical insurance, see p302.

Worldwide cover to travelers from over 44 countries is available online at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\\_services](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services).


For information on motor insurance see p295.

### INTERNET ACCESS

Most travelers make constant use of Internet cafés (which cost US\$0.50 to US\$2



per hour) and free Web-based email such as Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) and Hotmail (www.hotmail.com). A number of Mexican Internet cafés are equipped with CD burners, webcams, headphones and so on. But a lot don't have card readers, so bring your own or the camera-to-USB cable if you plan on burning photos to CD along the way.

Quite a few accommodations provide Internet access of some kind (they receive an  icon in this book). Facilities vary from a couple of computers in the lobby, for which you may or may not have to pay, to well-equipped business centers or wi-fi access (*internet inalámbrico*) in rooms. You may also be able to connect your own laptop or handheld to the Internet through the telephone socket in your room. Be aware that your modem may not work once you leave your home country. The safest option is to buy a reputable 'global' modem before you leave home. A second issue is the plug: Mexico uses 110V plugs with two flat prongs, like those found in the US.

See p20 for some useful websites.

## LEGAL MATTERS

### Mexican Law

Mexican law is based on the Roman and Napoleonic codes, presuming an accused person is guilty until proven innocent.

The minimum jail sentence for possession of more than a token amount of any narcotic, including marijuana and amphetamines, is 10 months. As in most other countries, the purchase of controlled medication requires a doctor's prescription.

Road travelers should expect occasional police or military checkpoints. They are normally looking for drugs, weapons or illegal migrants. Drivers found with drugs or weapons on board may have their vehicle confiscated and may be detained for months while their cases are investigated.

See p295 for information on road rules and the legal aspects of road accidents.

Useful warnings on Mexican law are found in website of the **US Department of State** (www.travel.state.gov).


### Getting Legal Help

If arrested, you have the right to contact your embassy or consulate. Consular officials can tell you your rights, provide lists of local lawyers, monitor your case, make sure you are

### LEGAL AGE

- Voting: 18
- Drinking: 18
- Driving: 18
- Sex: Illegal with someone under 18 if their consent was obtained by deception, such as a false promise of marriage
- Marriage: 12

treated humanely, and notify your relatives or friends – but they can't get you out of jail. More Americans are in jail in Mexico than in any other country except the USA – about 800 at any one time. By Mexican law the longest a person can be detained by police without a specific accusation is 72 hours.

Tourist offices in Mexico, especially those run by state governments, can often help you with legal problems such as complaints or reporting crimes or lost articles. The national tourism ministry, **Sectur** ( 55-5250-0123, 800-903-92-00), offers 24-hour telephone advice.

If you are the victim of a crime, your embassy or consulate, or Sectur or state tourist offices, can give advice. In some cases, you may feel there is little to gain by going to the police, unless you need a statement to present to your insurance company. If you go to the police and your Spanish is poor, take a more fluent speaker. Also take your passport and tourist card, if you still have them. If you just want to report a theft for the purposes of an insurance claim, say you want to '*poner una acta de un robo*' (make a record of a robbery). This should make it clear that you merely want a piece of paper and you should get it without too much trouble.

If Mexican police wrongfully accuse you of an infraction, you can ask for the officer's identification, to speak to a superior or to be shown documentation about the law you have supposedly broken. You can also note the officer's name, badge number, vehicle number and department (federal, state or municipal). Pay any traffic fines at a police station and get a receipt, then make your complaint at Sectur or a state tourist office.

### MAPS

GeoCenter, Nelles, ITM and the AAA (American Automobile Association) all

produce good country maps of Mexico, available internationally for between US\$6 and US\$15. The map scales vary between 1:2,500,000 (1cm:25km) and 1:3,700,000 (1cm:37km). ITM also publishes good 1:1 million (1cm:10km) maps of some Mexican regions including the Pacific coast).

City, town and regional maps of varying quality are often available free from local tourist offices in Mexico, or for about US\$3 at bookstores, newsstands and department stores like Sanborn's.

**Inegi** (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática; ☎ 800-490-42-00; www.inegi.gob.mx in Spanish) publishes a large-scale map series covering all of Mexico at 1:50,000 (1cm:500m) and 1:250,000 (1cm:2.5km), plus state maps at 1:700,000 (1cm:7km).

US-based **Maplink** (www.maplink.com) is an excellent source for mail-order maps; it stocks nearly all the above maps, including Inegi topo maps. Another good source is **Maps of Mexico** (www.maps-of-mexico.com), with detailed maps of all the states and of 90 cities.

## MONEY

Mexico's currency is the peso, usually denoted by the '\$' sign. Any prices quoted in US dollars will normally be written 'US\$5' or '5 USD' to avoid misunderstanding. The peso is divided into 100 centavos. Coins come in denominations of five, 10, 20 and 50 centavos and one, two, five, 10, 20 and 100 pesos. There are notes of 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1000 pesos.

Since the peso's exchange value is sometimes unstable, in this book we give prices in US dollar equivalents. For exchange rates, see inside the front cover. For information on costs, see p19.

The most convenient form of money in Mexico is a major international credit card or debit card. Visa, MasterCard and American Express cards can be used to obtain cash easily from ATMs in Mexico. Making a purchase by credit card normally gives you a more favorable exchange rate than exchanging money at a bank, and isn't subject to commission, but you'll normally have to pay your card issuer a 'foreign exchange' transaction fee of around 2.5%. Note that Visa, Amex or MasterCard stickers on a door or window in Mexico do *not* necessarily mean that these cards will be accepted for payment there.

US dollars are by far the most easily exchangeable foreign currency in Mexico. In tourist areas you can even pay for some things in US dollars, though the exchange rate used will probably not be in your favor. Euros, British pounds and Canadian dollars, in cash or as traveler's checks, are accepted by most banks and some *casas de cambio* (exchange houses).

For tips on keeping your money safe, see p281.

## ATMs

ATMs (*caja permanente* or *cajero automático* in Spanish) are plentiful in Mexico, and are the easiest source of cash. You can use major credit cards and some bank cards, such as those on the Cirrus and Plus systems, to withdraw pesos from ATMs. The exchange rate that banks use for ATM withdrawals is normally more in your favor than the 'tourist rate' for currency exchange.

## Banks & Casas de Cambio

You can exchange cash and traveler's checks in banks or at *casas de cambio*. Banks are more time-consuming than *casas de cambio*, and usually have shorter exchange hours (typically 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 1pm Saturday). *Casas de cambio* can be found easily in just about every large or medium-size town and in many smaller ones. These places are quick and often open evenings or weekends, but some don't accept traveler's checks, whereas banks usually do.

Exchange rates vary a little from one bank or *cambio* to another. There is often a better rate for *efectivo* (cash) than for *documento* (traveler's checks).

If you have trouble finding a place to change money, particularly on a weekend, try a hotel, though the exchange rate won't be the best.

## International Transfers

Should you need money wired to you in Mexico, an easy and quick method is the 'Dinero en Minutos' (Money in Minutes) service of **Western Union** (☎ in the US 800-325-6000; www.westernunion.com). It's offered by thousands of bank branches and other businesses around Mexico, identified by black-and-yellow signs proclaiming 'Western Union Dinero en Minutos.'

**US post offices** (☎ 888-368-4669; www.usps.com) offer reasonably cheap money transfers to branches of Bancomer bank in Mexico. The service is called Dinero Seguro.

### Taxes

Mexico's *impuesto de valor agregado* (IVA, value-added tax) is levied at 15%. By law the tax must be included in virtually any price quoted to you and should not be added afterward. Signs in stores and notices on restaurant menus often state '*IVA incluido.*' Occasionally they state instead that IVA must be added to the quoted prices.

Hotel rooms are also subject to the *Impuesto sobre hospedaje* (ISH, lodging tax). Each Mexican state sets its own rate, but in most it's 2%. See p277 for further information on taxes on hotel rooms.

### Tipping

In general, workers in small, cheap restaurants don't expect much in the way of tips, while those in expensive resorts expect you to be lavish in your largesse. Workers in the tourism and hospitality industries often depend on tips to supplement miserable basic wages. In resorts frequented by foreigners (such as Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlán) tipping is up to US levels of 15%; elsewhere 10% is usually plenty. If you stay a few days in one place, you should leave up to 10% of your room costs for the people who have kept your room clean (assuming they have). A porter in a midrange hotel will be happy with US\$1 a bag. Taxi drivers don't generally expect tips unless they provide some special service. Car-parking attendants expect a tip of US\$0.20 to US\$0.50, and the same is standard for gas-station attendants.

### Traveler's Checks

Whether or not you have a credit card or bank card, you should also take some traveler's checks (denominated in US dollars) and a little US cash. Traveler's checks should be a major brand such as American Express or Visa. American Express traveler's checks are recognized everywhere, and are a good choice. The **AmEx 24-hour hotline** (☎ 800-828-0366, collect to US 801-964-6665) in Mexico City can help if you have lost traveler's checks or cards.

### POST

Post offices (*oficinas de correos*) are typically open along the Pacific coast from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1pm Saturday. An airmail letter or postcard weighing up to 20g costs US\$1 to the US or Canada, US\$1.25 to Europe or South America, and US\$1.40 to the rest of the world. Mark airmail items '*Vía Aérea.*' Delivery times (outbound and inbound) are elastic. An airmail letter from Mexico to the USA or Canada (or vice versa) should take somewhere between four and 14 days to arrive. Mail to or from Europe may take between one and two weeks; for Australasia, two to three weeks.

If you are sending a package internationally from Mexico, be prepared to open it for customs inspection at the post office. In light of this, it is better to take packing materials with you, or not seal it until you get there. For assured and speedy delivery, you can always use one of the more expensive international courier services, such as **UPS** (☎ 800-902-92-00; www.ups.com), **Federal Express** (☎ 800-900-11-00; www.fedex.com) or Mexico's **Estafeta** (☎ 800-903-35-00; www.estafeta.com).

### SHOPPING

Mexico is so richly endowed with appealing *artesanías* (handicrafts) that few visitors can make it home without at least one pair of earrings or a little wooden animal. Because the Pacific coast is a popular tourist destination, you'll find all sorts of shops and *mercados de artesanías* (artisans' markets) selling handicrafts from all over the country, often at very reasonable prices. If you buy crafts from individual vendors on the streets, then a greater proportion of the profit will go to the (usually poor) people who make them, instead of to entrepreneurs. If you're traveling throughout the states of Guerrero, Michoacán, Nayarit and Oaxaca – which produce some of the country's finest handicrafts – you can even purchase *artesanías* in the villages where they are made, often directly from the artisans themselves. Always inspect for quality.

Don't be afraid to bargain. In markets bargaining is the rule, and you may pay much more than the going rate if you accept the first price quoted.

**SERENDIPITOUS TREASURES**

From around Mexico, here are just a few of the many crafts to keep an eye out for:

- **Animalitos & Alebrijes** *Animalitos* are tiny, light-brown and rust-colored ceramic animals from Chiapas. *Alebrijes* are little multicolored figurines from Oaxaca.
- **Baskets & Hats** Colorful, homemade baskets of multifarious sizes are great for carrying other souvenirs home. The Mexican straw sombrero (literally 'shade maker') is a classic souvenir.
- **Ceramics** The Guadalajara suburbs of Tonalá and Tlaquepaque are renowned pottery centers. Watch for the distinctive black pottery from San Bartolo Coyototec, Oaxaca.
- **Hammocks** The best are the tightly woven, cotton, thin-string ones from the Yucatán and Oaxaca.
- **Huaraches** Sandals! Can't spend any time on the coast without a pair of these. Guadalajara is known for good *huaraches*.
- **Huipiles** Sleeveless tunics for women, mostly made in the southern states. They're often embroidered and wonderfully colorful. Coastal Mixtec and Amuzgos of Oaxaca are famous for them.
- **Jewelry** Silverwork from the central Mexican town of Taxco is sold everywhere.
- **Masks** Guerrero is famous for its masks, as are the villages of San Juan Colorado and Huazolotitlán, Oaxaca.
- **Rug weavings** Those from Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca, are most famous.
- **Serapes** An indigenous men's garment worn over the shoulders – essentially a blanket with an opening for the head.
- **Skulls & Skeletons** These crafty creations come in all shapes, sizes and materials, and have their origin in the November 2 Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) festival.

**SOLO TRAVELERS**

Lone travelers don't generally need to remain alone when traveling in Mexico unless they choose to. It's very easy to pair up with others, as there's a steady stream of people following similar routes around the country. In well-touristed places, notice boards advertise for traveling companions, flatmates, volunteer workers and so on. Local tours are a good way to meet people and get more out of a place.

Solo travelers should be especially watchful of their luggage when on the road and should stay in places with good security for their valuables, so that they don't have to be burdened with them when out and about.

Traveling alone can be a very good way of getting into the local culture and it definitely improves your Spanish skills. You can also get a kick out of doing what you want, when you want. Eating by yourself night after night can get a bit tiresome, but you'll only be left alone if you want it that way, as Mexicans are very sociable.

See p291 for information regarding women traveling solo.

**TELEPHONE**

Local calls are cheap; international calls can be expensive, but needn't be if you call from the right place at the right time. Mexico is well provided with fairly easy-to-use public card phones. *Casetas de teléfono* (call offices where an on-the-spot operator connects the call for you) are quite widespread and can be cheaper than the card phones. A third option is to call from your hotel, but hotels charge what they like for this service. It's nearly always cheaper to go elsewhere.

**Calling Cards**

Some calling cards from other countries can be used for calls from Mexico by dialing special access numbers:

**AT&T** (☎ 01-800-288-2872, 01-80-462-4240)

**Bell Canada** (☎ 01-800-123-0200, 01-800-021-1994)

**BT Chargecard** (☎ 01-800-123-02-44, 01-800-021-6644)

**MCI** (☎ 01-800-674-7000)

**Sprint** (☎ 01-800-877-8000)

Warning: if you get an operator who asks for your credit card instead of your calling-

card number, or says the service is unavailable, hang up. There have been scams in which calls are rerouted to super-expensive credit-card phone services.

### Cell Phones

If you want to use a cell phone in Mexico, one option for short visits is to get an international plan for your own phone, which will enable you to call home. You can also buy a Mexican cell phone for as little as US\$30 to US\$60 including some air time. The most widespread cellular phone system in Mexico is **Telcel** (www.telcel.com in Spanish), which has coverage almost everywhere that has a significant population, and roaming partnerships with systems from many other countries. Amigo cards, for recharging Telcel phones, are widely available from newsstands and minimarts.

### Collect Calls

If you need to make a *llamada por cobrar* (collect call), you can do so from card phones without a card. Call an operator on ☎ 020 for domestic calls, or ☎ 090 for international calls, or use a 'home country direct' service, through which you make an international collect call via an operator in the country you're calling. The Mexican term for 'home country direct' is *país directo*; be prepared to provide the access numbers for the country you're trying to call.

Some telephone *casetas* and hotels will make collect calls for you, but they usually charge for the service.

### Casetas de Teléfono

Costs in *casetas* are often lower than those for Telmex card phones (see right), and their advantages are that they eliminate street noise and you don't need a phone card to use them. They often have a telephone symbol outside, or signs saying '*teléfono*,' '*Lada*' or '*Larga Distancia*.'

### Dialing Codes

If you're calling a number in the town or city you're in, simply dial the local number (eight digits in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey; seven digits everywhere else).

To call another town or city in Mexico, you need to dial the long-distance prefix ☎ 01, followed by the area code (two digits for Mexico City, Guadalajara and

Monterrey; three digits for everywhere else) and then the local number. You'll find area codes listed under city and town headings through this book.

To make international calls, you need to dial the international prefix ☎ 00, followed by the country code, area code and local number.

To call a number in Mexico from another country, dial your international access code, then the Mexico country code ☎ 52, then the area code and number.

### Phone Cards

These are common in towns and cities: you'll usually find some at airports, bus stations and around the main plaza. Easily the most common, and most consistent on costs, are those marked with the name of the country's biggest phone company, Telmex. To use a Telmex card phone you need a phone card known as a *tarjeta Ladatel*. These are sold at kiosks and shops everywhere – look for the blue-and-yellow signs that read '*De venta aquí Ladatel*.' The cards come in denominations of 30 pesos (about US\$3), 50 pesos (US\$5) and 100 pesos (US\$10).

Calls from Telmex card phones cost US\$0.10 per minute for local calls; US\$0.40 per minute long-distance within Mexico; US\$0.50 per minute to the USA or Canada; US\$1 per minute to Central America; US\$2 per minute to Europe, Alaska or South America; and US\$2.50 per minute to Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand or Asia.

In some parts of Mexico frequented by foreign tourists, you may notice a variety of phones advertising that they accept credit cards, or that you can make easy collect calls to the USA on them. While some of these phones may be of fair value, there are others on which very high rates are charged.

### TIME

Most of the country, including Jalisco, Michoacan, Guerrero and Oaxaca, are on Hora del Centro, the same as US Central Time (GMT minus six hours in winter, and GMT minus five hours during daylight saving). Five western states, including Nayarit and Sinaloa, are on Hora de las Montañas, the same as US Mountain Time (GMT minus seven hours in winter, GMT minus six hours during daylight saving). *Horario*

*de verano* (daylight saving time) runs from the first Sunday in April to the last Sunday in October.

## TOILETS

Public toilets are rare, so take advantage of facilities in places such as hotels, restaurants, bus stations and museums. When out and about, carry some toilet paper with you if you think you're going to need it because it often won't be provided. If there's a bin beside the toilet, put paper in it because the drains can't cope otherwise.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

For general information about travel in Mexico consult the **Mexico Tourism Board** (USA & Canada ☎ 800-446-3942, 800-44-MEXICO; Europe ☎ 00-800-11-11-22-66; www.visitmexico.com). Alternatively, you can call the Mexico City office of the national tourism ministry **Sectur** (☎ 55-5250-0123/51, 800-903-92-00; in the US & Canada 800-446-3942, 800-482-9832; in Europe 00-800-1111-2266) at any time – 24 hours a day, seven days a week – for information or help in English or Spanish.

Just about every town of touristic interest in Mexico has a state or municipal tourist office. They are generally helpful with maps, brochures and questions, and usually some staff members speak English. Here are the contact details for the head tourism offices for the states covered in this book:

**Colima** (☎ 312-316-20-21; www.visitacolima.com.mx)

**Guerrero** (☎ 744-484-24-23; www.sectur.guerrero.gob.mx)

**Jalisco** (☎ 33-3668-1600, 800-363-22-00; visita.jalisco.gob.mx in Spanish)

**Michoacán** (☎ 443-312-80-81, 800-450-23-00; www.turismomichoacan.gob.mx in Spanish)

**Nayarit** (☎ 311-216-56-61; www.turismonayarit.gob.mx)

**Oaxaca** (☎ 951-576-48-28; www.aoaxaca.com in Spanish)

## TOURS

For travelers seeking an activity-based holiday – and particularly for those who are short on time – organized tours are a good way to get to the most popular places and partake in hassle-free outdoor activities such as mountain biking, diving or horseback riding. More and more providers are adding cultural excursions to hard-to-get-to places to attract travelers who might not otherwise consider an organized tour. The biggest and best-regarded operator in the region is Vallarta Adventures (p77).

## VISAS

Every tourist must have an easily obtainable Mexican government tourist card. Some nationalities must also have visas. Because the regulations sometimes change, it's wise to confirm them with a Mexican embassy or consulate before you go (see p282).

Citizens of the USA, Canada, EU countries, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Norway and Switzerland are among those who do not require visas to enter Mexico as tourists. Again, check with your local Mexican embassy or consulate well ahead of travel in case the list has changed. Visa procedures, for those who need them, can take weeks and you may be required to apply in your country of residence or citizenship.

For information on passport requirements, see p292). Non-US citizens passing (even in transit) through the USA on the way to or from Mexico, or visiting Mexico from the USA, should also check the passport and visa requirements for the USA.

## Tourist Card & Tourist Fee

The Mexican tourist card – the *forma migratoria para turista* (FMT) – is a document that you must fill out and get stamped by Mexican immigration when you enter Mexico and keep till you leave. It's available at official border crossings, international airports and ports, and often at airlines, travel agencies and Mexican consulates. At the US–Mexico border you won't usually be given one automatically – you have to ask for it.

At many US–Mexico border crossings you don't have to get the card stamped at the border itself, as Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM, National Immigration Institute) has control points on the highways into the interior where it's also possible to do it. But it's better to get it done at the border in case there are complications elsewhere.

One section of the card deals with the length of your stay in Mexico, and this section is filled out by the immigration officer. The maximum possible stay is 180 days for most nationalities (90 days for Australians, Austrians, Israelis and Italians, among others), but immigration officers will often put a much lower number (as little as 15 or 30 days) unless you tell them otherwise. It's advisable to ask for more days than you think you'll need in case you are delayed or change your plans.

Though the tourist card is free, it brings with it the obligation to pay the tourist fee of about US\$20, called the *derecho para no inmigrante* (DNI, nonimmigrant fee). If you enter Mexico by air, the fee is included in your airfare. If you enter by land, you must pay the fee at a bank in Mexico before you reenter the frontier zone on your way out of Mexico (or before you check in at an airport to fly out of Mexico). The frontier zone is the territory between the border and the INM's control points on the highways leading into the Mexican interior (usually 20km to 30km from the border). Most Mexican border posts have on-the-spot bank offices where you can pay the DNI fee immediately. When you pay at a bank, your tourist card will be stamped to prove that you have paid.

Look after your tourist card because it may be checked when you leave the country. You can be fined US\$42 for not having it.

#### EXTENSIONS & LOST CARDS

If the number of days given on your tourist card is less than the maximum for your nationality (90 or 180 days in most cases), its validity may be extended one or more times, up to the maximum. To get a card extended, apply to the INM, which has offices in many towns and cities: they're listed on the **INM website** ([www.inm.gob.mx](http://www.inm.gob.mx)), under 'Servicios Migratorios.' The procedure costs about US\$20 and should take between half an hour and three hours, depending on the office. You'll need your passport, tourist card, photocopies of the important pages of these documents and, at some offices, evidence of 'sufficient funds.' Most INM offices will not extend a card until a few days before it expires.

If you lose your card or need further information, contact a tourist office, the **Sectur tourist office** (☎ 55-5250-0123, 800-903-92-00) in Mexico City, or your embassy or consulate. Any of these should be able to give you an official note to take to an INM office, which will issue a duplicate for US\$42.

See right for information on the documentation required to work in Mexico.

#### WOMEN TRAVELERS

Women can have a great time in Mexico, traveling with companions or solo, but in this land that invented machismo, some concessions have to be made to local custom. Gender equalization has come a long way in

a few decades, and Mexicans are generally a very polite people, but they remain, by and large, great believers in the difference (rather than the equality) between the sexes.

Lone women must expect a few catcalls and attempts to chat them up. Often these men only want to talk to you, but you can discourage unwanted attention by avoiding eye contact (wear sunglasses), dressing modestly, moving confidently and speaking coolly but politely if you are addressed and must respond. Wearing a wedding ring can prove helpful. Don't put yourself in peril by doing things that Mexican women would not do, such as challenging a man's masculinity, drinking alone in a cantina, hitchhiking or going alone to remote places.

On local transportation it's best to don long or mid-calf-length trousers and a top that meets the top of your pants, with sleeves of some sort. That way you can keep your valuables out of sight with ease.

Most of all, appear self-assured.

#### WORK

Mexicans need jobs, so people who enter Mexico as tourists aren't legally allowed to take employment. The many expats working in Mexico have usually been posted there by their companies or organizations with all the necessary papers. Permits are issued to people sponsored by companies in Mexico (or foreign companies with Mexican operations/subsidiaries), or to people with specific skills required in Mexico. English-speakers (and a few German- or French-speakers) may find teaching jobs in language schools, *preparatorias* (high schools) or universities, or can offer personal tutoring. The pay is low, but you can live on it. Press ads, especially in the various local English-language papers and magazines, and the Yellow Pages are sources of job opportunities.

Schools will often pay a foreign teacher in the form of a *beca* (scholarship), and thus circumvent the laws precluding foreigners from working in Mexico without a permit. In some cases, the school's administration will procure the appropriate papers. Apart from teaching, you might find a little bar or restaurant work in tourist areas.

**Jobs Abroad** ([www.jobsabroad.com](http://www.jobsabroad.com)) posts paid and unpaid job openings in Mexico. The **Lonely Planet** website ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) has several useful links.

# Transportation

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### TRANSPORTATION

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### THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works, and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Immigration officers won't usually keep you waiting any longer than it takes to flick through your passport and enter your length of stay on your tourist card (p290). Anyone traveling to Mexico via the USA should be sure to check the current US visa and passport requirements. Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\\_services](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services).

### Passport

Though it's not recommended, US and Canadian tourists can still, at the time of writing, enter Mexico without a passport if they have official photo identification such as a

driver's license, plus some proof of their citizenship, for example an original birth certificate. But this is likely to change soon, including for Canadians passing through the USA, due to new US regulations called the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. These regulations, which come into effect from December 31, 2006 (for air and sea travelers), and from December 31, 2007 (for land travelers), are expected to require all travelers entering the USA from Mexico or Canada to carry passports. In theory, travelers will still be able to enter Mexico from the US with just proof of citizenship and photo ID, but they won't be able to return to the US (or to enter the US from Canada) without a passport. For more information on the regulations, visit the **US State Department website** ([travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov)).

In any case it's much better to have a passport. In Mexico you will often need your passport to change money or when you check into a hotel.

All citizens of countries other than the US and Canada should have a passport that's valid for at least six months after they arrive in Mexico.

Travelers under 18 who are not accompanied by both parents may need special documentation (see p280).

For information on Mexican visa requirements and the tourist card, see p290. Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\\_services](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services).

### AIR

Most visitors to Mexico's Pacific coast arrive by air. You can fly direct to Mexico's Pacific coast from at least a dozen US cities and from Toronto. From anywhere else you'll have to either fly first to Mexico City or to the cities with direct connections. Airports in the region are shown in the boxed text, opposite.

### Airports & Airlines

Mexico's two flag airlines are Mexicana and Aeroméxico. Formerly state-controlled, Mexicana was bought by Grupo Posadas, Mexico's biggest hotel company, in 2005, and the government hoped to sell off



**PACIFIC COAST AIRPORTS**

**Acapulco** (ACA; ☎ 744-466-94-34)  
**Guadalajara** (GDL; ☎ 33-3688-5504)  
**Huatulco (Bahías de Huatulco)** (HUX; www.asur.com.mx)  
**Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo** (ZIH; ☎ 755-554-20-70)  
**Manzanillo (Playa de Oro)** (ZLO; ☎ 314-333-25-25)  
**Mazatlán** (MZT; ☎ 669-928-04-38)  
**Oaxaca** (OAX; ☎ 951-511-50-78; www.asur.com.mx)  
**Puerto Vallarta** (PVR; ☎ 322-221-28-48)

Aeroméxico in 2006. Their safety records are comparable to major US and European airlines: Mexicana has had one fatal crash in about two million flights since 1970, while Aeroméxico has suffered no fatal events since 1986.

The following airlines service Mexico's Pacific coast. The phone numbers are those in Mexico.

**Aero California** (code JR; ☎ 800-237-62-25; hub Tijuana)

**Aeroméxico** (code AM; ☎ 800-021-40-00; www.aeromexico.com; hub Mexico City)

**Air Canada** (code AC; ☎ 800-719-28-27; www.aircanada.ca; hub Toronto)

**Alaska Airlines** (code AS; ☎ 800-252-75-22; www.alaska-air.com; hub Seattle)

**America West** (code HP; ☎ 800-235-92-92; www.americawest.com; hub Phoenix)

**American Airlines** (code AA; ☎ 800-904-60-00; www.aa.com; hub Dallas)

**Continental Airlines** (code CO; ☎ 800-900-50-00; www.continental.com; hub Houston)

**Delta Air Lines** (code DL; ☎ 800-123-47-78; www.delta.com; hub Atlanta)

**Mexicana** (code MX; ☎ 800-502-20-00; www.mexicana.com; hub Mexico City)

**Tickets**

The cost of flying to Mexico's Pacific coast is usually higher around Christmas and New Year, and during July and August. In addition to online and other ticket agents such as those recommended in the following sections, it's often worth checking the airlines' own websites for special deals. Newspapers, magazines and websites serving Mexican communities outside of Mexico are also good sources.

Try international online booking agencies such as **CheapTickets** (www.cheaptickets.com)

and, for students and travelers under the age of 26, **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com).

A departure tax equivalent to about US\$25 is levied on international flights from Mexico. It's usually included in the cost of your ticket, but if it isn't you must pay in cash at check-in. Ask your travel agent in advance.

**Asia**

You normally have to make a connection in the US or Canada (often Los Angeles, San Francisco or Vancouver), and maybe one in Asia as well. From more westerly Asian points such as Bangkok, routes via Europe are also an option. There are numerous branches in Asia of **STA Travel** Bangkok (☎ 02-2237-9400; www.statravel.co.th); Singapore (☎ 6737-7188; www.statravel.com.sg); Hong Kong (☎ 2736-1618; www.statravel.com.hk); Japan (☎ 03-5391-2922; www.statravel.co.jp). Another resource in Japan is **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3205-6073; www.no1-travel.com).

**Australia & New Zealand**

The cheapest routes are usually via the USA (normally Los Angeles). You're normally looking at A\$2300 or NZ\$2300 or more, round-trip (several hundred dollars extra during high season).

The following agents are well-known for cheap fares and have branches throughout both countries:

**Flight Centre** Australia (☎ 133-133; www.flightcentre.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0800-243-544; www.flightcentre.co.nz)

**STA Travel** Australia (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0508-782-872; www.statravel.co.nz)

For online fares try www.travel.com.au or www.zuji.com from Australia, and www.travel.co.nz or www.zuji.co.nz from New Zealand.

**Canada**

Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver all have direct flights to Mexico, though better deals are often available with a change of flight in the USA. Round-trip fares from Toronto start around C\$900 to Mexico City, Cancún or Puerto Vallarta. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student-travel agency. For online bookings try www.kayak.com, www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

## Europe

Airlines with direct flights to Mexico City include Aeroméxico, Air Europa, Air France, Air Madrid, British Airways, Iberia, Jetair, KLM and Lufthansa. An alternative is to fly with a US or Canadian airline or alliance partner, changing planes in North America.

For online bookings throughout Europe, try **Opodo** (www.opodo.com) or **Ebookers** (www.ebookers.com).

### THE UK

Round-trip fares to Mexico City or Cancún start around UK£500 to UK£600 from London. Flight ads appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and the free online magazine *TNT* (www.tntmagazine.com).

An excellent place to start your inquiries is **Journey Latin America** (☎ 020-8747-3108; www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk), which offers a variety of tours as well as flights. Other recommended agencies include the following:

**Travelbag** (☎ 0800-082-5000; www.travelbag.com)

**Flight Centre** (☎ 0800-587-700-58; flightcentre.co.uk)

**Flightbookers** (☎ 0800-082-3000; www.ebookers.com)

**STA Travel** (☎ 08701-630-026; www.statravel.co.uk)

For travelers under the age of 26.

**Trailfinders** (☎ 0845-058-5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

### CONTINENTAL EUROPE

Flights to Mexico City or Cancún cost €600 to €700 from Frankfurt, Paris or Madrid. The two budget airlines currently operating between Europe and Mexico (Air Madrid from Madrid to Mexico City, and Jetair from Brussels to Cancún) can save you a couple of hundred euros if you fly on certain dates. Recommended ticket agencies include the following:

#### France

**Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 0825-00-07-47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

**Voyageurs du Monde** (☎ 0892-68-83-63; www.vdm.com)

**OTU Voyages** (☎ 01-55-82-32-32; www.otu.fr) A student and youth travel specialist.

#### Germany

**Expedia** (www.expedia.de)

**Just Travel** (☎ 089-747-3330; www.justtravel.de)

**STA Travel** (☎ 069-743-032-92; www.statravel.de) For travelers aged under 26.

## Other European Countries

**Airfair** (☎ 070-307-6110; www.airfair.nl) Dutch company.

**CTS Viaggi** (☎ 199-501150; www.cts.it) Italian specialist in student and youth travel.

**eDreams** (☎ 902-887-107; www.edreams.es) Spanish company.

**Kilroy Travels** (www.kilroytravels.com) Scandinavian company.

**Rumbo** (☎ 902-123-999; www.rumbo.es) Spanish company.

## South America

You can fly direct to Mexico City from at least eight cities in South America. Round-trip fares start around US\$800 to US\$1000. Recommended ticket agencies include the following:

**ASATEJ** (☎ 011-4114-7595; www.asatej.com) In Argentina.

**IVI Tours** (☎ 0212-993-6082; www.ividiomas.com) In Venezuela.

**Student Travel Bureau** (☎ 3038-1555; www.stb.com.br) In Brazil.

## USA

You can fly to Mexico without changing planes from around 30 US cities. A number of these cities have direct flights to Mexico's Pacific coast. There are one-stop connecting flights from many other cities. Continental (from Houston), Aeroméxico and Mexicana offer the most Mexican destinations.

US budget airlines including ATA, Spirit Air, America West, Frontier Airlines, and Ted have entered the USA–Mexico market, and economical fares are also available on Mexico's Aero California, Aviacsa and Líneas Aéreas Azteca. If you're lucky, you can get round-trip fares from the USA to Mexico for US\$250. If you're not lucky, 'budget' operators can cost as much as other airlines. For current bargain offers, check **Airfare Watchdog** (www.airfarewatchdog.com).

Here are some typical return-trip, mid-season fares for trips booked two weeks in advance:

From	To Acapulco	To Puerto Vallarta	To Mazatlán
Chicago	US\$520	US\$400	US\$580
Dallas/ Fort Worth	US\$600	US\$500	US\$570
Los Angeles	US\$460	US\$350	US\$320
Miami	US\$500	US\$400	US\$740
New York	US\$740	US\$530	US\$650

In high season you may have to pay US\$100 to US\$200 more, though competitive fares are offered by some of the major booking websites, such as Expedia or Travelocity, year-round if you book ahead.

Another possibility is a package-tour flight. Check newspaper travel ads and call a package-tour agency, asking if you can buy 'air only' (just the return air ticket, not the hotel or other features). This often works out cheaper than buying a discounted return ticket.

## LAND

### Border Crossings

There are about 40 crossings on the USA–Mexico border, including the following:

**Arizona** Douglas–Agua Prieta, Nogales–Nogales, San Luis–San Luis, Río Colorado and Naco–Naco (all open 24 hours); Sasabe–El Sásabe (open 8am to 10pm); Lukeville–Sonoita (open 8am to midnight).

**California** Calexico–Mexicali (two crossings, one open 24 hours); San Ysidro–Tijuana (open 24 hours); Otay Mesa–Mesa de Otay (near Tijuana airport; open 6am to 10pm); Tecate–Tecate (open 6am to midnight).

**New Mexico** Columbus–General Rodrigo M Quevedo (also called Palomas; open 24 hours).

**Texas** Brownsville–Matamoros, McAllen–Reynosa, Laredo–Nuevo Laredo, Del Rio–Ciudad Acuña, Eagle Pass–Piedras Negras, Presidio–Ojinaga and El Paso–Ciudad Juárez (all open 24 hours).

There are also 10 border crossings between Guatemala and Mexico and two crossings between Belize and Mexico.

See below for more information on entering Mexico with a car.

### Car & Motorcycle

The regulations for taking a vehicle into Mexico change from time to time. See p297 if you're bringing in a vehicle from the US or Canada. For information on driving and motorcycling once you're inside Mexico, see p299.

### INSURANCE

It is very foolish to drive in Mexico without Mexican liability insurance. If you are involved in an accident, you can be jailed and have your vehicle impounded while responsibility is assessed. If you are to blame for an accident causing injury or death, you may be detained until you guarantee restitution to the victims and payment of any

finer. This could take weeks or months to arrange. Adequate Mexican insurance coverage is the only real protection.

Mexican law recognizes only Mexican motor *seguro* (insurance), so a US or Canadian policy, even if it provides coverage, is not acceptable to Mexican officialdom. Sanborn's and the AAA are both well worth looking into for motor insurance in Mexico. Mexican insurance is also sold in US border towns; as you approach the border from the USA you will see billboards advertising offices selling Mexican policies. Some deals are better than others.

Short-term insurance costs about US\$15 a day for full coverage on a car worth under US\$10,000; for periods longer than two weeks it's often cheaper to get an annual policy. Liability-only insurance costs around half the full coverage cost.

### DRIVER'S LICENSE

To drive a motor vehicle in Mexico, you need a valid driver's license from your home country.

### VEHICLE PERMIT

You will need a *permiso de importación temporal de vehículos* (temporary vehicle import permit) if you want to take a vehicle to Mexico's Pacific coast. The permits are issued at offices at border crossings or (for some border crossings) at posts a few kilometers into Mexico. Information on their locations and application forms for the vehicle permit are available online at [www.banjercito.com.mx](http://www.banjercito.com.mx) (mostly in Spanish). The person importing the vehicle will need the original and one or two photocopies (people at the office may make photocopies for a small fee) of each of the following documents, which as a rule must all be in their own name (except that they can bring in a spouse's, parent's or child's vehicle if they can show a marriage or birth certificate proving a relationship):

- tourist card (FMT): go to *migración* before you get your vehicle permit
- certificate of title or registration certificate for the vehicle (note: you should have both of these if you plan to drive through Mexico into Guatemala or Belize)
- a Visa, MasterCard or American Express credit card issued by a non-Mexican institution; if you don't have one, you

must pay a returnable deposit of between US\$200 and US\$400 (depending on how old the car is) at the border. Your card details or deposit serve as a guarantee that you'll take the car out of Mexico before your tourist card (FMT) expires.

- proof of citizenship or residency such as a passport, birth certificate or voter's registration card accompanied by official photo ID such as a driver's license
- driver's license
- if the vehicle is not fully paid for, a partial invoice and/or letter of authorization from the financing institution
- for a leased or rented vehicle (though few US rental firms allow their vehicles to be taken into Mexico), the contract, which must be in the name of the person importing the vehicle
- for a company car, proof of employment by the company and proof of the company's ownership of the vehicle

At the border there will be a building with a parking area for vehicles awaiting permits. After some signing and stamping of papers, you sign a promise to take the car out of the country, pay a processing fee of about US\$29 to the Banco del Ejército (also called Banjército; it's the army bank), and go and wait with your vehicle. Make sure you get back the originals of all documents. Eventually someone will come out and give you your vehicle permit and a sticker to be displayed on your windshield.

While in Mexico, other persons are allowed to drive the car only if the permit holder is in the car with them.

You have the option to take the vehicle in and out of Mexico for the period shown on your tourist card. Ask for a *tarjetón de internación*, a document that you exchange for a *comprobante de retorno* each time you leave Mexico; when you return to Mexico, you swap the *comprobante* for another *tarjetón*. When you leave Mexico the last time, you must have the import permit canceled by the Mexican authorities. An official may do this as you enter the border zone, usually 20km to 30km before the border itself. If not, you'll have to find the right official at the border crossing. If you leave Mexico without having the permit canceled, the authorities may assume you've left the vehicle in the country illegally and decide either to keep your

deposit, charge a fine to your credit card, or deny you permission to bring a vehicle into the country on your next trip.

Only the owner may take the vehicle out of Mexico. If the vehicle is wrecked completely during your visit, you must contact your consulate or a Mexican customs office to make arrangements to leave without it.

## Belize

**Novelo's Bus Line** (☎ 227-2025 in Belize City) runs around 20 buses a day between Belize City and Chetumal, Mexico (US\$5 to US\$7, four hours), calling at the Belizean towns of Orange Walk and Corozal en route. From Chetumal you can hop on a long-distance bus to the Pacific coast.

## Guatemala

The road borders at La Mesilla–Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Ciudad Tecún Umán–Ciudad Hidalgo and El Carmen–Talismán are all linked to Guatemala City, and nearby cities within Guatemala and Mexico, by plentiful buses and/or combis. **Transportes Galgos** (☎ 2232-3661 in Guatemala City; [www.transgalgosinter.com.gt](http://www.transgalgosinter.com.gt)), **Línea Dorada** (☎ 2232-5506 in Guatemala City; [www.tikalmayanworld.com](http://www.tikalmayanworld.com)) and **Tica Bus** (☎ 2331-4279 in Guatemala City; [www.ticabus.com](http://www.ticabus.com)) run a few buses daily from Guatemala City to Tapachula, Chiapas (US\$14 to US\$22, six hours) via Escuintla and Mazatenango.

There are a few daily buses from Flores, Guatemala, to Chetumal, Mexico (US\$25, seven to eight hours), via Belize City, run by **Línea Dorada** (☎ 7926-0070 in Flores) and **San Juan Travel** (☎ 7926-0041 in Flores).

## USA BUS

Cross-border bus services, mainly used by Mexicans working in the US, link many US cities with northern Mexican cities. They're not very well publicized: Spanish-language newspapers in the US have the most ads. The major companies include **Autobuses Americanos** ([www.autobusesamericanos.com.mx](http://www.autobusesamericanos.com.mx) in Spanish; ☎ 512-928-9237 in Austin, ☎ 303-292-0333 in Denver, ☎ 713-928-8832 in Houston, ☎ 213-627-5405 in Los Angeles, ☎ 602-258-4331 in Phoenix), operating to northeast Mexico, central north Mexico and central Mexico from Los Angeles, Denver, Albuquerque, Chicago, Phoenix and Tucson and several Texan cities; **Autobuses Crucero** (☎ 602-258-4331 in Phoenix), operating

from California, Nevada and Arizona to northwest Mexico; and **Transportes Baldomero Corral** (TBC; ☎ 602-258-2445 in Phoenix), operating between Arizona and northwest Mexico. **Greyhound** (☎ 800-231-2222; www.greyhound.com) also has some cross-border routes.

You can also, often in little or no extra time, make your way to the border on one bus (or train), cross it on foot or by local bus, and then catch an onward bus on the other side. Greyhound serves many US border cities; to reach others, transfer from Greyhound to a smaller bus line.

For train travel to the border, **Amtrak** (☎ 800-872-72-45; www.amtrak.com) serves four US cities from which access to Mexico is easy: San Diego, El Paso, Del Rio and San Antonio, which is linked by bus to Eagle Pass and Laredo.

#### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

For information on the procedures for taking a vehicle into Mexico, check with the **American Automobile Association** (AAA; www.aaa.com), **Sanborn's** (☎ 800-222-0158; www.sanbornsinsurance.com), a Mexican consulate or the Mexican tourist information numbers in the USA and Canada (☎ 800-446-3942, 800-482-9832). If you're traveling from Mexico into the USA at a busy time of year, have a look at the website of **US Customs & Border Protection** (apps.cbp.gov), which posts waiting times at entry points.

#### SEA

If you'd like to combine snatches of Mexico with a life of ease on the high seas, take a cruise! Ever more popular, cruises from the USA now bring over 7 million passengers a year to Mexican ports, enabling people to enjoy activities and attractions on and near Mexico's coasts. On the Pacific route (the Mexican Riviera in cruise parlance), the main ports of call are Ensenada, Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlán, Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco, each with more than 100 cruises a year (over 200 at Puerto Vallarta); some cruises also call at Manzanillo, Zihuatanejo and Bahías de Huatulco, and a new cruise port is opening at Puerto Chiapas, near Tapachula.

Following are some of the cruise lines visiting Mexico, with US phone numbers: **Carnival Cruise Lines** (☎ 888-227-6482; www.carnival.com)

**Celebrity Cruises** (☎ 800-722-5941; www.celebrity.com)

**Crystal Cruises** (☎ 800-804-1500; www.crystalcruises.com)

**Holland America Line** (☎ 877-724-5425; www.hollandamerica.com)

**Norwegian Cruise Lines** (☎ 800-327-7030; www.ncl.com)

**P&O Cruises** (☎ 415-382-8900; www.pocruises.com)

**Princess Cruises** (☎ 800-774-6237; www.princess.com)

**Royal Caribbean International** (☎ 800-398-9813; www.royalcaribbean.com)

## GETTING AROUND

### AIR

Flying is considerably cheaper between an inland city (Mexico City, Guadalajara or Oaxaca) and a coastal destination, than from one coastal destination to another. This is because nearly all flights head to/from Mexico City and Guadalajara, making it necessary to purchase two fares to get from coastal-point A to coastal-point B (via the inland city). Mazatlán, Tepic, Puerto Vallarta, Manzanillo, Colima, Lázaro Cárdenas, Acapulco, Puerto Escondido, Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, Oaxaca, and Bahías de Huatulco all have passenger airports.

Aeroméxico and Mexicana are the country's two largest airlines. There are also smaller ones, often flying to/from smaller cities on the coast that the big two companies don't bother with (see the boxed text on p298 for websites and telephone numbers in Mexico). Information on specific flights can be found within the Getting There & Away sections of individual city sections.

Aerolitoral and Aeromar are feeder airlines for Aeroméxico and normally share its ticket offices and booking networks.

### Tickets

Fares can depend on whether you fly at a busy or quiet time of day, week or year, and how far ahead you book and pay. High season generally corresponds to the Mexican holiday seasons (see p284). Round-trip fares are usually simply twice the price of one-way tickets, though some advance-payment cheaper deals do exist.

**MEXICAN DOMESTIC AIRLINES**

Airline	Phone	Website	Areas served
Aero California	☎ 800-237-62-25	–	Mexico City, Baja California, north, west
Aero Tucán	☎ 800-640-41-48, 951-501-05-30	www.aero-tucan.com	Oaxaca city, Puerto Escondido, Puebla
Aerolitoral	☎ 800-800-23-76	www.aerolitoral.com	Central Mexico, Baja California, north, west, Gulf coast
Aeromar	☎ 800-237-66-27	www.aeromar.com.mx	Central Mexico, west, northeast, Gulf coast, southeast
Aeroméxico	☎ 800-021-40-00	www.aeromexico.com	Mexico City & more than 50 cities nationwide
Aviaca	☎ 800-006-22-00	www.aviaca.com	Mexico City & 19 other cities around the country
Avolar	☎ 800-021-90-00	www.avolar.com.mx	Puebla, Acapulco, Tijuana, Hermosillo, Uruapan
Click Mexicana	☎ 800-122-54-25	www.clickmx.com	Mexico City & 16 other cities around the country
Interjet	☎ 800-011-23-45	www.interjet.com.mx	Guadalajara, Toluca, Cancún, Monterrey
Líneas Aéreas Azteca	☎ 800-229-83-22	www.aazteca.com.mx	Mexico City, Oaxaca, Acapulco, Cancún, north, west
Magnicharters	☎ 55-5566-8199	www.magnicharters.com.mx	Mexico City, Guadalajara, Toluca, Aguascalientes, Monterrey, Bajío, Torreón, San Luis Potosí, Morelia, Mérida
Méxicana	☎ 800-502-20-00	www.mexicana.com	Mexico City and more than 50 cities nationwide

Here are examples of one-way fares to/from Mexico City for trips booked two weeks in advance:

To/from	Fare
Acapulco	US\$152
Bahías de Huatulco	US\$129
Guadalajara	US\$157
Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo	US\$173
Manzanillo	US\$315
Mazatlán	US\$260
Oaxaca	US\$135
Puerto Vallarta	US\$217

**BICYCLE**

Cycling is not a common way to tour Mexico's Pacific coast, but some people do it. Reports of highway robbery, poor road surfaces and road hazards are deterrents. However, this method of moving up or down the coast is not impossible if you're prepared for the challenges. You should be very fit, use the best equipment you can muster and be able to handle your own repairs. Take the mountainous topography and hot climate into account when planning your route.

It's possible to rent bikes in many resort towns for short excursions, and the same places often offer guided rides.

**BOAT**

Vehicle and passenger ferries connecting Baja California with the Mexican mainland travel between La Paz and Mazatlán, and La Paz and Topolobampo, Sinaloa. For more information, see p124.

**BUS**

Mexico has a good road and bus network, and comfortable, frequent, reasonably priced bus services connect all cities. Most cities and towns have one main bus terminal where all long-distance buses arrive and depart. If there is no main terminal, different bus companies will have separate terminals scattered around town.

Baggage is safe if stowed in the bus's baggage hold, but get a receipt for it when you hand it over. Keep your most valuable documents (passport, money etc) on you, and keep them closely protected.

**Classes****DELUXE**

*De lujo* (deluxe) services, sometimes termed *ejecutivo* (executive), run mainly on the busy routes. They are swift, modern and comfortable, with reclining seats, adequate legroom, air-conditioning, few or no stops, toilets on board (but not necessarily toilet paper), and sometimes drinks or snacks.

**1ST-CLASS**

*Primera (1a) clase* buses have a comfortable numbered seat for each passenger. All sizable towns have 1st-class bus services. Standards of comfort are adequate at the very least. The buses usually have air-conditioning and a toilet and they stop infrequently. They always show movies (often bad ones) for most of the trip: too bad if you don't want to watch, as all seats face a video screen. As with deluxe buses, buy your ticket in the bus station before boarding.

**2ND-CLASS**

*Segunda (2a) clase* buses serve small towns and villages, and provide cheaper, slower travel on some intercity routes. Many 2nd-class services have no ticket office; you just pay your fare to the conductor. These buses tend to take slow, nontoll roads in and out of big cities and will stop anywhere to pick up passengers: if you board midroute you might make some of the trip standing. The small amount of money you save by traveling 2nd-class is not usually worth the discomfort or extra journey time entailed.

Second-class buses can also be less safe than 1st-class or deluxe buses, due to lower maintenance or driver standards or because they are more vulnerable to being boarded by bandits on some roads. Out in the remoter areas, however, you'll often find that 2nd-class buses are the only buses available.

You may also encounter various other types of buses in your travels:

- *directo*: very few stops
- *semi-directo*: a few more stops than a *directo*
- *ordinario*: stops wherever passengers want to get on or off the bus

**Costs**

First-class buses typically cost roughly US\$4 per hour of travel (70km to 80km). Deluxe buses may cost just 10% or 20% more than 1st-class, or about 60% more for super-deluxe services such as ETN, UNO and Turistar Ejecutivo. Second-class buses cost 10% or 20% less than 1st-class.

**Reservations**

For trips of up to four or five hours on busy routes, you can usually just go to the bus terminal, buy a ticket and head out without much delay. For longer trips, or routes with

infrequent services, buy a ticket a day or more in advance. Deluxe and 1st-class bus companies have computerized ticket systems that allow you to select your seat when you buy your ticket. Try to avoid the back of the bus, which is where the toilets are and also tends to give a bumpy ride.

**CAR & MOTORCYCLE**

Driving in Mexico is not as easy as it is in North America and Europe (much of Europe anyway), but few experiences can replace dodging donkeys and homemade speed bumps as you buzz along coastal Hwy 200 or chug up mountain roads in a VW Beetle. It's often the only way to reach those isolated beaches and tiny villages.

See p281 for a warning about risks of highway robbery in some areas, and p295 and p297 for information on the paperwork required for bringing a vehicle into Mexico.

**Automobile Associations**

Sectur, the Mexican tourism ministry, maintains a network of *Ángeles Verdes* (Green Angels) – bilingual mechanics in green uniforms and green trucks, who patrol 60,000km of major highways throughout the country daily during daylight hours looking for tourists in trouble. They make minor repairs, change tires, provide fuel and oil, and arrange towing and other assistance if necessary. Service is free; parts, gasoline and oil are provided at cost. If you are near a phone when your car has problems, you can call their **24-hour hotline** (☎078). There's a map of the roads they patrol at [www.sectur.gob.mx/wb2/sectur/sect\\_9454\\_rutas\\_carreteras](http://www.sectur.gob.mx/wb2/sectur/sect_9454_rutas_carreteras).

**Bring Your Own Vehicle**

Drivers should know some Spanish and have basic mechanical knowledge, reserves of patience and access to extra cash for emergencies. Good makes of car to take to Mexico are Volkswagen, Nissan, General Motors and Ford, which have plants in Mexico and dealers in most big towns. A sedan with a trunk (boot) provides safer storage than a station wagon or hatchback. For security, have something to immobilize the steering wheel, and consider getting a kill switch installed.

Motorcycling in Mexico is not for the fainthearted. Roads and traffic can be rough,

and parts and mechanics hard to come by. The parts you'll most easily find will be for Kawasaki, Honda and Suzuki bikes.

### Driver's License

To drive a motor vehicle in Mexico, you need a valid driver's license from your home country.

### Fuel & Spare Parts

All *gasolina* (gasoline) and diesel fuel in Mexico is sold by the government's monopoly, Pémex (Petróleos Mexicanos). Most towns, even small ones, have a Pémex station, and the stations are pretty common on most major roads. Nevertheless, in remote areas you should fill up whenever you can.

The gasoline on sale is all *sin plomo* (unleaded). At the time of research, a liter cost about US\$0.60 (US\$2.40 a US gallon). Gas stations have pump attendants (who appreciate a tip of US\$0.20 to US\$0.50).

Mexican mechanics are resourceful, and most repairs can be done quickly and inexpensively, but it still pays to take as many spare parts as you can manage (spare fuel filters are very useful). Tires (including spare), shock absorbers and suspension should be in good condition.

### Hire

Auto rental in Mexico is expensive by US or European standards but not hard to organize. You can book by Internet, phone or in person and pick up cars at city offices, at airports, at many big hotels and sometimes at bus terminals.

Renters must provide a valid driver's license (your home license is OK), passport and major credit card, and are usually required to be aged at least 21 (or sometimes 25; otherwise, if you're aged 21 to 24 you may have to pay a surcharge). Be sure to read the small print of the rental agreement. In addition to the basic rental rate, you pay tax and insurance costs to the rental company, and the full insurance that rental companies encourage can almost double the basic cost. You'll usually have the option of taking liability-only insurance at a lower rate. Ask exactly what the insurance options cover: theft and damage insurance may only cover a percentage of costs. It's best to have plenty of liability

coverage: Mexican law permits the jailing of drivers after an accident until they have met their obligations to third parties. The complimentary car-rental insurance offered with some US credit cards does not usually cover Mexico.

Local firms may or may not be cheaper than the big international ones. In most places the cheapest car available (often a Volkswagen Beetle) costs US\$50 to US\$60 a day including unlimited kilometers, insurance and tax. If you rent by the week or month or during the low season the per-day cost can come down by 20% to 40%.

Here is contact information (with Mexican phone numbers) for some major firms:

**Alamo** (☎ 800-849-8001; www.alamo.com)

**Avis** (☎ 800-288-88-88; www.avis.com.mx)

**Budget** (☎ 55-5705-5061; www.budget.com.mx)

**Dollar** (☎ 998-886-23-00; www.dollar.com)

**Hertz** (☎ 800-709-50-00; www.hertz.com)

**National** (☎ 800-716-6625; www.nationalcar.com.mx)

**Thrifty** (☎ 55-5207-1100; www.thrifty.com.mx)

### Insurance

For information about motor insurance in Mexico, see p295.

### Road Conditions

Many Mexican highways, even some toll highways, are not up to the standards of US, Canadian or European ones. Still, the main roads are serviceable and fairly fast when traffic is not heavy. Mexicans on the whole drive cautiously, and traffic density, poor surfaces and frequent hazards (potholes, speed bumps, animals, bicycles, children) all help to keep speeds down.

### Road Hazards

Driving on a dark night is best avoided since unlit vehicles, rocks, pedestrians and animals on the roads are common. Hijacks and robberies do occur, most often after dark.

In towns and cities and on rural roads, be especially wary of *Alto* (Stop) signs, *topes* (speed bumps) and holes in the road. They are often not where you'd expect, and missing one can cost you a traffic fine or car damage. Speed bumps are also used to slow traffic on highways that pass through built-up areas: they are not always signed, and some of them are severe!



## Road Rules

Drive on the right-hand side of the road. Speed limits range between 80km/h and 120km/h on open highways (less when highways pass through built-up areas), and between 30km/h and 50km/h in towns and cities. Seat belts are obligatory for all occupants of a car, and children under five must be strapped into safety seats in the rear.

One-way streets are the rule in cities. Priority at street intersections is indicated by thin black and red rectangles containing white arrows. A black rectangle facing you means you have priority; a red one means you don't. The white arrows indicate the direction of traffic on the cross street; if the arrow points both ways, it's a two-way street.

## HITCHHIKING

Hitchhiking is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and is not recommended. Travelers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go. A woman traveling alone certainly should not hitchhike in Mexico, and even two women together is not advisable.

## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

### Bicycle

Most Mexican towns and cities are flat enough to make cycling an option. Seek out the less traffic-infested routes and you should enjoy the experience. Even Mexico City has its biking enthusiasts. You can rent bikes in several towns and cities for US\$10 to US\$15 a day.

### Boat

Here and there you may find yourself traveling by boat to an outlying beach, along a river or across a lake or lagoon. The craft are usually *lanchas* (fast, open outboard boats). Fares vary widely: on average costs are about US\$1 a minute if you have to charter the whole boat (haggle!), or around US\$1 for five to 10 minutes if it's a public service.

### Bus

Generally known as *camiones*, local buses are often the cheapest way to get around

cities and out to nearby towns and villages. They run everywhere frequently and are cheap. Fares in cities are rarely more than US\$0.50. In many cities, fleets of small, modern *microbuses* have replaced the noisy, dirty and crowded older buses.

Buses usually halt only at fixed *paradas* (bus stops), though in some places you can hold your hand out to stop one at any street corner.

### Colectivo, Combi, Minibus & Pesero

These are all names for vehicles that function as something between a shared taxi and a bus, running along fixed urban routes usually displayed on the windshield. They're cheaper than taxis and quicker than buses. They will pick you up or drop you off on any corner along their route: to stop one, go to the curb and wave your hand. Tell the driver where you want to go. Usually, you pay at the end of the trip and the fare (a little higher than a bus fare) depends on how far you go. In some northern border towns, *pesero* is used to mean a city bus.

### Taxi

Taxis are common in towns and cities, and surprisingly economical. City rides cost around US\$1 per kilometer, and in some cities there's a posted fixed rate for journeys within defined central areas. If a taxi has a meter, you can ask the driver if it's working (*¿Funciona el taxímetro?*). If it's not, or if the taxi doesn't have a meter, establish the price of the ride before getting in (this may involve a bit of haggling.)

Some airports and big bus terminals have a system of authorized ticket-taxis: you buy a fixed-price ticket to your destination from a special *taquilla* (ticket window) and then hand it to the driver instead of paying cash. This saves haggling and major rip-offs, but fares are usually higher than you could get on the street.

In some (usually rural) areas, some taxis operate on a *colectivo* basis, following set routes, often from one town or village to another, and picking up or dropping off passengers anywhere along that route. Fares per person are around one-quarter of the normal cab fare.

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