TIPS FOR TRAVELERS TO MEXICO
(From www.travel.state.gov)

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General Information
Between 15 and 16 million U.S. citizens visit Mexico each year, while more than 385,000 Americans reside there year round. Although the majority of visitors thoroughly enjoy their stay, a small number experience difficulties and serious inconveniences.

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

Before you go, learn as much as you can about Mexico. Your travel agent, local bookstore, public library, the Internet and the embassy of the country or countries you plan to visit are all useful sources of information.

How To Have a Safe and Healthy Trip
Know Before You Go
As you travel, keep abreast of local news coverage. If you plan a stay in one place for longer than a few weeks, or if you are in an area where communications are poor, or that is experiencing civil unrest or some natural disaster, you are encouraged to register with the Department of State. The web page for Americans to register with us is https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/.

You can register your entire itinerary on the web site. Alternately, after you have arrived in Mexico, you can register at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City or one of the U.S. consulates.

Registration takes only a few moments, and it may be invaluable in case of an emergency.

Other useful precautions are:
- Leave a detailed itinerary and the numbers of your passport or other citizenship documents with a friend or relative in the United States.
- Bring either a U.S. passport or a certified copy of your birth certificate and current, valid photo identification.
- Carry your photo identification and the name of a person to contact with you in the event of serious illness or other emergency.
- Keep photocopies of your airline or other tickets and your list of traveler’s checks with you in a separate location from the originals and leave copies with someone at home.
- Leave things like unnecessary credit cards and expensive jewelry at home.
- Bring travelers checks, not cash.
- Use a money belt or concealed pouch for passport, cash and other valuables.
- Do not bring firearms or ammunition into Mexico without written permission from the Mexican government.
Consular Information Program
The Department of State’s Consular Information Sheets are available for every country of the world. They describe entry requirements, currency regulations, unusual health conditions, the crime and security situation, political disturbances, areas of instability, and special information about driving and road conditions. They also provide addresses and emergency telephone numbers for U.S. embassies and consulates. In general, the sheets do not give advice. Instead, they describe conditions so travelers can make informed decisions about their trips. You can read the Consular Information Sheet for Mexico on our web site at http://travel.state.gov/. It is updated at least twice a year and has the most current information on travel to and in Mexico.

In some dangerous situations, however, the Department of State recommends that Americans defer travel to a country. In such a case, a Travel Warning is issued for the country in addition to its Consular Information Sheet. Public Announcements are a means to disseminate information about relatively short-term and/or trans-national conditions posing significant risks to the security of American travelers. They are issued when there is a perceived threat, even if it does not involve Americans as a particular target group. In the past, Public Announcements have been issued to deal with short-term coups, pre-election disturbances, terrorist violence and anniversary dates of specific terrorist events. You can access Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements 24-hours a day the following ways:

Internet
The most convenient source of information about travel and consular services is the Consular Affairs home page. Our web site is http://travel.state.gov.

Telephone
Consular Information Sheets and Travel Warnings may be heard any time by dialing the office of American Citizens Services at 1-888-407-4747 from a touchtone phone.

From overseas, that number is: 317-472-2328.

A Guide to Entry and Exit Regulations
Getting Into Mexico
The Government of Mexico requires that all U.S. citizens present proof of citizenship and photo identification for entry into Mexico. While U.S. citizenship documents such as a certified copy of a U.S. birth certificate, a Naturalization Certificate, a Consular Report of Birth Abroad, or a Certificate of Citizenship are acceptable, the U.S. Embassy recommends traveling with a valid U.S. passport to avoid delays or misunderstandings. U.S. citizens have encountered difficulty boarding onward flights in Mexico without a passport. U.S. citizens boarding flights to Mexico should be prepared to present one of these documents as proof of U.S. citizenship, along with photo identification. Driver’s permits, voter registration cards, affidavits and similar documents are not sufficient to prove citizenship for readmission into the United States.

Tourist Cards
U.S. citizens do not require a visa or a tourist card for tourist stays of 72 hours or less within “the border zone,” defined as an area between 20 to 30 kilometers of the border with the U.S., depending on the location. U.S. citizens traveling as tourists beyond the border zone or entering Mexico by air must pay a fee to obtain a tourist card, also known as an FM-T, available from Mexican consulates, Mexican border crossing points, Mexican tourism offices, airports within the border zone and most airlines serving Mexico. The fee for the tourist card is generally included in the price of a plane ticket for travelers arriving by air.

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

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

Tourists wishing to travel beyond the border zone with their car must obtain a temporary import permit or risk having their car confiscated by Mexican customs officials. To acquire a permit, one must submit evidence of citizenship, title for the car, a car registration certificate and a driver's license to a Banjercito branch located at a Mexican Customs office at the port of entry, and pay a processing fee. Mexican law also requires the posting of a bond at a Banjercito office to guarantee the departure of the car from Mexico within a time period determined at the time of the application. For this purpose, American Express, Visa or MasterCard credit card holders will be asked to provide credit card information; others will need to make a cash deposit of between $200 and $400, depending on the age of the car. In order to recover this bond or avoid credit card charges, travelers must return to any Mexican Customs office immediately prior to departing Mexico.

Disregard any advice, official or unofficial, that vehicle permits can be obtained at checkpoints in the interior of Mexico. Avoid individuals outside vehicle permit offices offering to obtain the permits without waiting in line. If the proper permit cannot be obtained at the Banjercito branch at the port of entry, do not proceed to the interior where travelers may be incarcerated, fined and/or have their vehicle seized at immigration/customs checkpoints. For further information, inquire with Mexican Customs offices about appropriate vehicle permits. Additional information (in Spanish) can be found at http://www.aduanas.sat.gob.mx/webadunet/aga.aspx?Q=ImpTempVehiculos_Tema1.

Upon arrival in Mexico, business travelers must complete and submit a form (Form FM-N 30 days) authorizing the conduct of business, but not employment, for a 30-day period. Travelers entering Mexico for purposes other than tourism or business or for stays of longer than 180 days require a visa and must carry a valid U.S. passport. If you wish to stay longer than 180 days, or if you wish to do business or conduct religious work in Mexico, contact the Mexican Embassy or the nearest Mexican consulate to obtain a visa or permit. Persons conducting religious work on a tourist card are subject to arrest and deportation.

Visitors intending to participate in humanitarian aid missions, human rights advocacy groups or international observer delegations should contact the nearest Mexican consulate or Embassy for guidance on how to obtain the appropriate visa before traveling to Mexico.

In an effort to prevent international child abduction, many governments have initiated procedures at entry and exit points, including requiring documentary evidence of relationship and permission of the parent(s) or legal guardian not present for the child's travel. Parents of minor children (under 18 years old) should carefully document legal custody prior to traveling to Mexico. If a minor child is traveling with only one parent, the absent parent should provide notarized consent. If only one parent has legal custody, that parent should be prepared to provide such evidence to airlines and Mexican authorities. In cases in which a minor child is traveling to Mexico alone or in someone else's company, both parents (or the sole, documented custodial parent) should provide notarized consent. If a child traveling to Mexico has a different last name from the mother and/or father, the parents should be prepared to provide evidence to airlines and Mexican authorities, such as a birth certificate or adoption decree, to prove that they are indeed the parents. Mexican entry regulations require Spanish translations of all legal documents, including notarized consent decrees and court agreements. Enforcement of this provision is not always consistent, however, and English-language documents are almost always sufficient.

Residing or Retiring in Mexico

If you plan to live or retire in Mexico, consult a Mexican consulate on the type of long-term visa required. As soon as possible after you arrive in the place you will live, it is a good idea to register with the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate or consular agent. You may register online at https://travelregistration.state.gov.

If you wish to register in person, bring your passport or other identification with you. Registration makes it easier to contact you in an emergency. (Registration information is confidential and will not be released to inquirers without your express authorization.)
For further information concerning entry and visa requirements, travelers may contact the Embassy of Mexico at 1911 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20006, phone (202) 736-1000, Internet site: http://portal.sre.gob.mx/usa/ or any Mexican consulate in the United States.

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

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

The following frequently-cited documents are NOT sufficient proof to enter the United States: US driver’s license alone, Social Security Card, US military ID, a non-certified photocopy of a US birth certificate, a notarized Affidavit of Citizenship signed at the airport in the U.S., or even a voter’s registration card. Travelers with only these documents may not be able to enter the U.S.

Without proof of both identity and citizenship, the traveler will not be allowed to board an airplane to the U.S. The airline faces a fine of $3,300 if a passenger that the airline boarded is not admitted to the U.S., and in addition the airline must bear the cost of flying the passenger back to the point of departure. Because of these penalties, most airlines will not board anyone – including probable U.S. citizens – without proof of citizenship and identity.

Health

Health Problems Sometimes Affect Visitors to Mexico
For the most current information on immunizations and health risks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains an international travelers hotline at 1-888-232-3228 and a travel health home page at http://www.cdc.gov/travel. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the World Health Organization’s web site at http://www.who.int/en. Further health information for travelers is available on the World Health Organization’s International Travel and Health page at http://www.who.int/ith.

Immunizations are recommended against typhoid, hepatitis A and hepatitis B. Booster shots for tetanus-diphtheria and measles are also recommended. For visitors coming directly from the United States, no immunization certification is required to enter Mexico. If you are traveling from a part of the world infected with yellow fever, a vaccination certificate is required.

Malaria is found in some rural areas of Mexico, particularly those near the southwest coast. Travelers to malarial areas should consult their physician and take the recommended dosage of chloroquine, mefloquine (Lariam™), doxycycline, or atovaquone/proguanil (Malarone™) or other anti-malarial medication. Although these preventative drugs are not considered necessary for travelers to the major resort areas on the Pacific and Gulf coasts, travelers to those areas should use insect repellent and take other personal protection measures to reduce contact with mosquitoes, particularly from dusk to dawn when malaria transmission is most likely. Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and hats, and, use insect repellents that contain DEET.

Air pollution in Mexico City is severe. It is most dangerous during thermal inversions that occur most often from December to May. Air pollution plus Mexico City’s high altitude are a particular health risk for the elderly and persons with high blood pressure, anemia, or respiratory or cardiac problems. If this applies to you, consult your doctor before traveling to Mexico City.
In high altitude areas, such as Mexico City, most people need a short adjustment period. Spend the first few days in a leisurely manner, with a light diet and reduced intake of alcohol. Avoid strenuous activity, including everything from sports to rushing up the stairs. Reaction signs to high altitude are lack of energy, a tendency to tire easily, shortness of breath, occasional dizziness, and insomnia.

Drink only bottled water or water that has been boiled for 20 minutes. Beware of ice cubes that may not have been made with purified water. Vegetables and fruits should be peeled or washed in a purifying solution. If you can’t peel it or cook it, do NOT eat it. Don’t eat food purchased from street vendors. Don’t eat dairy products unless you know for a fact that they have been pasteurized. Diarrhea sufferers may benefit from anti-microbial treatment that may be prescribed or purchased over the counter. Travelers should consult a physician, rather than attempt self-medication, if the diarrhea is severe or persists several days.

It is Wise to Review Your Health Insurance Policy Before You Travel

In some places, particularly at resorts, medical costs can be as high or higher than in the United States. U.S. medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Further, U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States. However, many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas, including emergency services such as medical evacuations. If your insurance policy does not cover you in Mexico, it is strongly recommended that you purchase a policy that does. Short-term health insurance policies designed specifically to cover travel are available.

Medical facilities in Mexico differ from those in the United States. Adequate medical care can be found in all major cities. There are some excellent health facilities in Mexico City. Some remote areas or coastal islands may have few or no medical facilities. For these reasons, in addition to medical insurance that you can use in Mexico, consider obtaining insurance or joining a medical assistance program to cover the very high cost of medical evacuation in the event of an accident or serious illness. As part of the coverage, these programs usually offer emergency consultation by telephone. They may refer you to the nearest hospital or call for help on your behalf; they may translate your instructions to a health care worker on the scene. The cost of medical evacuation coverage is minimal for a trip of 30 days. Without this insurance, medical evacuation can cost thousands of dollars.

When making decisions regarding health insurance, consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that medical air evacuation to the U.S. may cost over $50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expense that you incur. Some insurance policies also include coverage for psychiatric treatment and for disposition of remains in the event of death.

If you become seriously ill, U.S. consular officers can assist in finding a doctor and in notifying your family and friends about your condition.

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs are listed in our publication, Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad, accessible at our Internet site at http://travel.state.gov/. The U.S. government cannot pay to have you medically evacuated to the United States.

Safety Tips

General information on personal safety abroad can be found in our brochure, A Safe Trip Abroad, on our home page at http://travel.state.gov/.

In an Emergency

Call (55) 5250-0123, the 24-hour hotline of the Mexican Ministry of Tourism. They also have two toll free numbers: if calling
within Mexico (01) 800-903-9200 and from the U.S. 1-800-482-9832. The hotline is for immediate assistance but it provides
general, non-emergency guidance as well. It is an important number to keep with you. In an emergency, you should also
call the U.S. Embassy, nearest U.S. consulate or consular agent. (See the contact information at the end of this brochure.)
As a visitor to Mexico, be alert to your new surroundings. Problem situations in Mexico may be different from those you
are used to, and safety regulations and their enforcement are generally not equivalent to U.S. standards.

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

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

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

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

If a Mexican official solicits a bribe from you, it is up to you whether to pay. Bribing officials is illegal. Demands for bribes
are often dropped if the subject insists on being taken to the “delegación” (police station).

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

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

Visitors to Mexican resorts should carefully assess the risk potential of recreational activities. Diving equipment provided
by dive shops may not meet U.S. safety standards and due to frequent use, may be substandard or defective. Unless you
are certain that scuba diving equipment is up to standard, you should not use it. “Pool certification courses” lasting a
few hours are not considered adequate by U.S. dive certification entities. Inexperienced scuba divers in particular should
beware of dive shops that promise to “certify” you after a few hours’ instruction. Safe diving requires lengthy training.
Parasailing is offered at many Mexican beach resorts. Be aware that by putting your name on the passenger list, you may
be relieving the boat operator and owner of responsibility for your safety. There have been cases in which tourists have
been dragged through palm trees or slammed into hotel walls while participating in this activity.

Be extremely careful when renting jet-skis. Several tourists have been killed or injured in jet-ski accidents, particularly
when participating in group tours. Often inexperienced tour guides allow their clients to follow too closely or operate the
jet-skis in other unsafe manners. In one case the jet-ski rental company carried liability insurance limited to $2,500 U.S.
dollars. Make sure that the rental company has adequate medical/accident insurance, is staffed with personnel on-site
with water rescue training, and properly demonstrates safe operation of the vehicle to you before you rent or operate
such equipment.
Do not use pools or beaches without lifeguards, or, if you do, exercise extreme caution. Warning flags on the beach should be taken seriously. If black flags are up, do not enter the water. Do not dive into unknown bodies of water because hidden rocks or shallow depths can cause serious injury or death. Some Mexican beaches, such as those in Cancun, have warning signs about undertow; take them seriously. Newer resorts may lack comprehensive medical facilities.

**Travel by Car**

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

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

All vehicular traffic is restricted in the capital city of Mexico City to reduce air pollution. The restriction is based on the last digit of the vehicle license plate. (This applies equally to permanent and temporary plates. Cars with license plates ending in letters may not be driven on Fridays.)

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

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

**Learn Local Driving Signals**

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

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

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

To avoid highway crime, try not to drive at night and never drive alone during this time. Never sleep in vehicles along the road. Do not, under any circumstances, pick up hitchhikers who not only pose a threat to your physical safety, but also put you in danger of being arrested for unwittingly transporting narcotics or narcotics traffickers in your vehicle. Your vehicle can be confiscated if you are transporting marijuana or other narcotics. There are checkpoints and temporary roadblocks where vehicles are checked.
If you plan to drive, learn about your route from an auto club, guide book or a Mexican government tourist office. You may not be able to avoid all problems, but at least you will know what to expect if you have done some research. Also, some of the newer roads have very few restaurants, motels, gas stations or auto repair shops. For your safety, have your vehicle serviced and in optimum condition before you leave for Mexico. It is wise to bring an extra fan belt, fuses and other spare parts. Pack a basic first-aid kit and carry an emergency water supply in your vehicle. Unleaded gasoline (magna sin) is generally available throughout Mexico.

If you have an emergency while driving, call the Ministry of Tourism’s hotline or (55) 5250-8221, extension 130/297, to obtain help from the “Green Angels,” a fleet of radio dispatched trucks with bilingual crews. Services include protection, medical first aid, mechanical aid for your car, and basic supplies. You will not be charged for services, only for parts, gas, and oil. The Green Angels patrol daily, from dawn until sunset. If you are unable to call them, pull off the road and lift the hood of your car; chances are good they will find you.

**Insurance**

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

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

On many of the toll highways you may be automatically covered by the insurance that is included in the toll fee. This can provide added coverage for you in certain situations.

**Rental Cars**

**Renting in the United States**

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

**Renting a Car in Mexico**

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

**Yucatan-Campeche and Quintana Roo Borders**

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

**Military Checkpoints**

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

**Travel through Mexico to Central American Countries**

Mexican authorities require that all international transit of persons (transmigrantes) and merchandise from the U.S. through Mexico, destined for Central America, be handled only at the Los Indios Bridge located south of Harlingen, Texas, on Route 509. Every transmigrante must obtain the services of a Mexican customs broker to prepare the documents required by Mexican Customs for their entry into Mexico.

Transmigrantes must declare everything they are bringing through Mexico or any undeclared items found by Mexican Customs will be confiscated. Although items for international transit are not taxed, transmigrantes will have to pay a fee to the customs broker for their professional services. The customs broker is responsible for informing the transmigrante about items that are prohibited for international transit.

Crossing into Mexico by a bridge other than Los Indios is considered importation of goods and will result in everything being taxed. When the transmigrante leaves Mexico through Chiapas, he must then also pay export taxes. The earlier “import” tax is not returned.

Transmigrantes on their way to Central America have ten days to leave Mexico through Chiapas. Mexican Customs now has a barcode system that controls the entry and exit of transmigrantes.

Americans who intend to transit Mexico are cautioned that some unscrupulous vendors on the U.S. side, known as “grupos,” purport to be Mexican customs brokers but are not. “Grupos” have been known to charge large sums of money but do not provide the required services that only bona fide Mexican customs brokers can, potentially leaving the American transmigrante bilked and his goods confiscated.

Currently, there are only two Mexican customs brokers handling transmigrantes. For further information, travelers can contact the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros prior to departing the U.S. at (011-52) 868-812-4402 and ask for the American Citizens Services Unit, or visit the Consulate’s Web site at http://mexico.usembassy.gov/matamoros/matamoros.html.

**Bringing Your Own Plane or Boat to Mexico**

Private aircraft and boats are subject to the same Mexican customs regulations as are motor vehicles. When you arrive at a Mexican port in your private boat, you can obtain a temporary import permit similar to the one given for motor vehicles. Flying your own plane to Mexico, however, is more complicated. Well before your trip, inquire about private aircraft regulations and procedures from a Mexican consulate or Mexican Government Tourist Office.

**Crime**

In Mexico City, crime has reached critical levels. Low apprehension and conviction rates of criminals contribute to the high rate of crime. Metropolitan areas other than the capital are considered to have lower but still serious levels of crime activity. Travelers to Mexico should leave valuables and irreplaceable items at home in the U.S. All visitors to Mexico are encouraged to make use of hotel safes when available, avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing and carry only the cash or credit cards that will be needed on each outing. Travelers are discouraged from bringing very large amounts of cash into Mexico, as officials may suspect money laundering or other criminal activity. While public safety officials in Mexico City point to statistical evidence that crime in the capital has fallen off in the last three years, public concern regarding security – and in particular kidnappings – is greater than ever.

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

U.S. citizens should be very cautious in using ATM cards and machines in Mexico. If an ATM machine must be used, it should be only during the business day at large protected facilities (preferably inside commercial establishments, rather than at a glass-enclosed, highly visible ATM machine on streets where criminals can observe financial transactions.) U.S. citizens are advised to be careful when ordering beverages in local nightclubs and bars, especially at night. Some establishments may contaminate or drug the drinks to gain control over the patron. Victims, who are almost always unaccompanied, have been robbed of personal property and abducted and held while their credit cards were used at various businesses and ATM locations around the city.

U.S. Citizens Should Not Hitchhike or Accept Rides From Strangers Anywhere in Mexico

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

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

Kidnapping, including the kidnapping of non-Mexicans, is increasing. U.S. businesses with offices in Mexico or concerned U.S. citizens may contact the Embassy to discuss precautions to take. Travelers to Mexico should exercise caution when traveling on all highways in Mexico. The U.S. Embassy advises its personnel to exercise extreme caution and not to travel on Mexican highways after dark for safety reasons.

All bus travel should be done during daylight and on first-class conveyances. These buses travel on toll roads that have a markedly lower rate of incidents than buses (second and third class) that travel the less secure free highways. Tourists should exercise caution by not walking on lightly frequented beaches, off-the-path ruins or trails. Additionally, visitors should not carry excessive cash or valuables, and, should place travel documents in a safe place.

Taxicab Crime

U.S. citizens visiting Mexico City should absolutely avoid taking any taxi not summoned by telephone or on their behalf by a responsible individual or contracted in advance at the airport. Robbery assaults on passengers in taxis have become more frequent and violent, with passengers subjected to beatings and sexual assaults. When in need of a taxi, telephone a radio taxi or “sitio” (pronounced “C-T-O”). Ask the dispatcher for the driver’s name and the cab’s license plate number. If you walk to a “sitio” taxi stand, use only a driver known to you. Ask the hotel concierge or other responsible individual calling on your behalf to write down the license plate number. Passengers arriving at Mexico City’s Benito Juarez International Airport should take only airport taxis (yellow with an airplane symbol on the door) after pre-paying the fare at one of the special booths inside the airport. Radio taxis may be called at telephone numbers: 5271-9146, 5271-9058 and 5272-6125. U.S. citizens should avoid taking taxis parked outside the Bellas Artes Theater, in front of nightclubs, restaurants or cruising throughout the city.

In Case of Emergency

Call (55) 5250-0123, the 24-hour hotline of the Mexican Ministry of Tourism. They also have a national toll free number: (01)
800-903-9200. You can also call the Mexican “911”: in Mexico City, dial 060; in the rest of Mexico, dial 066. In Mexico City, dial 5346-8733, 8730, 8154, 8734 for police with English translators.

**If an American is Injured in an Accident and Needs Immediate Medical Attention...**
Call the Mexican Red Cross at 5395-1111, 5557-5758, 5557-5759, or 5557-5760. While the service is free, the Red Cross does request that patients give a donation. The Red Cross ambulance will deliver the patient to the nearest Red Cross hospital, which provides basic care. The patient may then choose to be taken to one of the private hospitals listed in the “Illness/Injury” section if he/she has the necessary funds or insurance.

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

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

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

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

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

**WARNING ON FIREARMS**
Mexico has severe penalties for taking in any type of firearm, weapon, or ammunition without first obtaining written authorization from Mexican authorities. It does not matter whether U.S. citizens are licensed to carry the firearm in the United States by commercial or private plane or boat. It also does not matter if visitors to Mexico are U.S. law enforcement or military officials. Mexican authorities strictly enforce laws restricting the entry of firearms and ammunition along their borders and at air or seaports.

Each year dozens of Americans are arrested or fined in Mexico in connection with weapons violations. There are several dozen U.S. citizens currently incarcerated in Mexican prisons on weapons-related charges. Many of them inadvertently transported a firearm that they were licensed to carry in the United States without realizing they were violating Mexican laws. Some were driving across the border for a day visit, to shop or to eat in a restaurant. Remember that if caught bringing in a firearm, ammunition, or other weapon, Mexican authorities may confiscate a visitor’s vehicle or other
personal property and place the individual under arrest. Detained U.S. citizens may spend months in pre-trial detention while their case is being investigated. If convicted, they may face several years in a Mexican prison. While the U.S. consul can visit U.S. citizens in jail, make sure that they are being treated humanely, and provide a list of attorneys to assist with the Mexican judicial process, the U.S. consul cannot get U.S. citizens released from jail.

U.S. citizens who approach Mexico along the land border or who arrive by boat should check carefully to ensure that someone else has not left weapons or ammunition in the vehicle or boat. If U.S. citizen visitors realize they are in possession of firearms, ammunition, or other weapons, they should not proceed into Mexico. They should not attempt to enter Mexico - even to turn around - or go through Mexican Customs. All land border crossings have pull-offs or turnarounds on the U.S. side. The only way to legally import firearms and ammunition into Mexico is to secure a permit in advance from the Mexican Embassy in Washington, D.C. or from a Mexican Consulate in the United States. Mariners who have obtained a Mexican firearm permit should contact Mexican port officials before attempting to enter Mexican waters, to learn about specific procedures to report and secure weapons and ammunition.

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

**Failure to Pay Hotel Bills**

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

**Be Cautious When Purchasing Real Estate**

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

**To Avoid Disputes With Merchants, Be a Careful Shopper**

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

**U.S. Assistance in Mexico**

**Where To Turn If You Have Serious Legal or Financial Difficulties**

**Legal Problems**

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

Worldwide, Mexico has the highest number of arrests of Americans abroad - over 1,000 per year - and the highest prison population of U.S. citizens outside of the United States - about 800 at any one time. If you are arrested, ask permission to notify the U.S. Embassy or nearest U.S. consulate. Under international agreements and practice, you have the right to talk with an American consul. Although U.S. consuls are limited in what they can do to assist you in legal difficulties, they
can monitor the status of detained U.S. citizens and make sure they are treated fairly under local laws. They will also notify your relatives or friends upon your request.

An individual is guaranteed certain rights under the Mexican constitution, but those rights differ significantly from U.S. constitutional guarantees. The Mexican judicial system is based on Roman and Napoleonic law and presumes a person accused of a crime to be guilty until proven innocent. There is no trial by jury or writ of habeas corpus in the Anglo-American sense. Trial under the Mexican system is a prolonged process based largely on documents examined on a fixed date in court by prosecution and defense counsel. Sentencing usually takes 6 to 10 months. Bail can be granted after sentencing if the sentence is less than 5 years. Pre-trial bail exists but is never granted when the possible sentence upon conviction is greater than 5 years.

Financial Problems
Consular officers can arrange the transfer of emergency funds to you if you become destitute as a result of robbery, accident or other emergency.

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

Operating Citizens Band (CB) Equipment
American tourists are permitted to operate CB radios in Mexico. You must, however, obtain a 180-day permit for a nominal fee by presenting your U.S. citizens’ band radio authorization at a Mexican consulate or Mexican Government Tourist Office. This permit cannot be obtained at the border.

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

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

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

Unless you prepare ahead, you may have difficulty bringing computers or other expensive electronic equipment into Mexico for your personal use. To prevent being charged an import tax, write a statement about your intention to use the equipment for personal use and to remove it from Mexico when you leave. Have this statement signed and certified at a Mexican consulate in the United States and present it to Mexican customs as you enter Mexico.
Land travelers should verify from Mexican customs at the border that all items in their possession may be legally brought into Mexico. You will be subject to a second immigration and customs inspection south of the Mexican border where unlawful items may be seized and you could be prosecuted regardless of whether or not the items passed through the initial customs inspection. Guns and ammunition cannot be brought into Mexico without a permit from a Mexican Consulate in the United States.

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

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

**Pets**
U.S. visitors to Mexico may bring a dog, cat or up to four canaries by presenting the following certificates at the border: (1) A pet health certificate signed by a registered veterinarian in the United States and issued not more than 72 hours before the animal enters Mexico; and (2) A pet vaccination certificate showing that the animal has been treated for rabies, hepatitis, pip and leptospirosis.

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

**Shopping - Some Things To Beware of Buying**

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

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

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

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

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

**Returning to the United States**

You must present the visitor’s copy of your tourist card at your point of departure from Mexico; you will be required to pay a fine if you cannot do so. If you are returning by motor vehicle, you will need to show your vehicle import permit when you cross the border. At the time of publication, the airport departure tax is $10 or the equivalent in Mexican currency for those returning by commercial airline.

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

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

**Useful Addresses & Telephone Numbers**

**American Embassy**
Paseo de la Reforma 305
Colonia Cuauhtemoc
Mexico 06500, D.F.
Telephone from the United States: 011-52-55-5080-2000
Telephone within Mexico City: 5080-2000
Long distance telephone within Mexico 01-55-5080-2000
http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/emenu.html

**U.S. Consulates General**
American Consulate General
Avenue Lopez Mateos 924-N
Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua
Tel: (52)(656) 611-3000
http://usembassy.state.gov/posts/mx2/wwwhmain.html

**American Consulate General**
Progreso 175
Guadalajara, Jalisco
Tel [52] (33) 3825-2998/2700
http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/guadalajara/guadalajara.htm

**American Consulate General**
Avenida Constitucion 411 Poniente
Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, 64000
Tel [52] (81) 8345-2120
http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/monterrey/Monterrey.html

**American Consulate General**
Tapachula 96
Tijuana, Baja California
Tel [52] (664) 622-7400
http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/tijuana/Tijuana.htm

U.S. Consulates

**American Consulate**
Ave. Monterrey 141 Pte.
Hermosillo, Sonora
Tel [52] (662) 289-3500

**American Consulate**
Ave. Primera 2002
Matamoros, Tamaulipas
Tel [52] (868) 812-4402

**American Consulate**
Paseo Montejo 453
Merida, Yucatan
Tel [52] (999) 925-5011

**American Consulate**
Calle Allende 3330, Col. Jardin
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas
Tel [52] (867) 714-0512

**American Consulate**
Calle San Jose s/n
Fracc. Alamos
Nogales, Sonora
Tel [52] (631) 313-4820

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

**Acapulco**: Hotel Continental Emporio Costera Miguel Aleman 121 - Local 14, telephone (52)(744) 484-0300 or (52)(744) 469-0556

**Cabo San Lucas**: Blvd. Marina Local C-4, Plaza Nautica, Col. Centro, telephone (52)(624) 143-3566

**Cancun**: Plaza Caracol Two, Second Level, No. 320-323, Boulevard Kukulcan, km. 8.5, Zona Hotelera, telephone (52)(998) 883-0272

**Ciudad Acuna**: Ocampo # 305, Col. Centro, telephone (52)(877) 772-8661

**Cozumel**: Plaza Villa Mar en El Centro, Plaza Principal, (Parque Juarez between Melgar and 5 th Ave.) 2nd floor, Locales #8 and 9, telephone (52)(987) 872-4574.

**Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo**: Hotel Fontan, Blvd. Ixtapa, telephone (52)(755) 553-2100

**Mazatlan**: Hotel Playa Mazatlan, Playa Gaviotas #202, Zona Dorada, telephone (52)(669) 916-5889
Oaxaca: Macedonio Alcala No. 407, Interior 20, telephone (52)(951) 514-3054 (52)(951) 516-2853

Piedras Negras: Prol. General Cepeda No. 1900, Fraccionamiento Privada Blanca, telephone (52) (867) 788-0343

Puerto Vallarta: Zaragoza #160, Col. Centro, Edif. Vallarta Plaza, Piso 2 Int.18, telephone (52)(322) 222-0069

Reynosa: Calle Monterrey #390, Esq. Sinaloa, Colonia Rodriguez, telephone: (52)(899) 923 – 9331


San Miguel de Allende: Dr. Hernandez Macias #72, telephone (52)(415) 152-2357 or (52)(415) 152-0068