

Mexico Travel Tips

As in any big city, it is important to take responsibility for your personal safety and exercise precaution.

BEFORE YOU GO

Think preventively when packing for your trip; consider leaving behind expensive jewelry, watches, and items of sentimental value. A smaller, inexpensive camera may be a better choice than larger, expensive models.

Make a Xerox copy of your passport to carry in your luggage separately from your actual passport. Consider storing a digital scan of your passport (and/or other critical documents) with family, friends, or your employer so that it could be emailed to you in an emergency.

GETTING FROM THE AIRPORT TO YOUR HOTEL

Taxis are regulated and passengers should pay in advance at the taxi counter in Arrivals. Taxi fare from the airport to the Polanco district should be approximately 190 Pesos. Use only the clearly marked "AUTHORIZED TAXI" service.

These cars are white and yellow with black airplane stickers on the doors. A drawing of a car on the ticket will tell you what type of car the ticket is valid for. It is not recommended to walk outside the airport terminal in search of cheaper taxi service unless you have pre-arranged your service.

Do not use the Green and White taxis.



More information about Taxis from the airport is available at:
<http://tinyurl.com/taxiairportmexico>



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SAFETY & SECURITY

- When leaving your hotel room to go out at night, take only the cash you need for each excursion and consider leaving your credit cards, watch, & jewelry behind in the hotel room safe. Be aware that laptop bags and exposed mobile phones are tempting items for thieves.
- Use the available shuttle buses between the hotel and Convention Center on show days or request a safe taxi from the hotel. Avoid taking the Metro and hailing taxis or asking strangers for directions on the street.
- As in any big city, use common sense. If you must walk at night, walk with companions, avoid the empty streets and keep to the major thoroughfares, even if that means walking a few extra blocks. What may look like a safe side street in the daytime, may pose greater risks after dark.
- Be careful near traffic. Automobile accidents are not uncommon and vehicles do not defer to pedestrians. Some sidewalks in older areas may be in need of repair - so watch you step and avoid distractions such as talking or texting on your phone while walking.
- Avoid crowds of demonstrators. Demonstrations near the meeting venue are common, and usually peaceful. However, even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate to violence and police arrest unexpectedly.
- If you need to use a cash machine, use those located in hotels or banks. Avoid cash machines on streets or less busy areas. If you need help, ask an employee at the bank or hotel.
- Keep your belongings in sight particularly in open areas like restaurants, bars, parks, and even in the rooms at the Meeting venue. Don't leave purses, laptop bags, or cameras hanging on chairs or on the floor.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Typhoid fever, cholera and salmonella are dangers in areas where sanitation practices are poor, but even then, few people encounter any of these diseases. However, traveler's diarrhea, commonly known as turista, may hit you. There are many remedies—consult your hotel's doctor. Before you go, consult your doctor if you have asthma or other respiratory problems or if you have blood-pressure problems. The air in Mexico City is heavily polluted, which can cause problems for asthma sufferers, and the high altitude can also cause difficulties for people with heart or circulatory problems. Asthma problems can be especially acute November-February.

Do not drink the water from the tap, even if the hotel administration assures you that it's safe. Do drink plenty of bottled water (you're in a dry, semiarid region at high altitude), but always first ascertain that the seal is unbroken. Eating the food sold on the streets is always a risk, particularly in hotter months. Sanitation standards in Mexico are below those in most developed countries. Food stalls will almost certainly not observe the same standards of hygiene as most restaurants.

SIMPLE DOS & DON'TS

DON'T make jokes about unsanitary conditions or being in the "third world." Much of Mexico City is very modern & cosmopolitan; although some residents may joke about the developing-nation problems, you're best off leaving the joke-making to them.

DON'T participate in political protests or openly endorse any political candidates. It's against Mexican law for foreigners to participate in the Mexican political process.

DON'T even try to drive a car in Mexico City. Leave that up to the taxi drivers who understand the unstated rules of the road. Traffic can be wild, undisciplined and downright dangerous for one not attuned to the local vibe.

DON'T expect service at restaurants, banks and hotels to be at the same standard (and speed) you are used to in your home country, even in expensive establishments. "The consumer is always right" is an unknown phrase in much of Mexico. However, the graciousness with which the services are carried out may more than compensate.

DO smile & be cheerful as much as possible in interactions with Mexicans. Mexico places a high value on friendliness & attentiveness. Maintaining a cheerful face, even if you can't follow the conversation, will go a long way toward giving a good impression.

DO say buenas dias, buenas tardes (between noon and sundown) or buenas noches to strangers or service people before asking them a question. It's polite to do so, and you'll find that people will be much more gracious when you've greeted them before asking for help.

DO allow Mexican men to open the door for you, ladies, as well as pull out a chair for you at the dinner table, walk on the outside of the sidewalk with you and so on. Even in a country with a growing demand for equality for women, a woman is not considered less equal for allowing a man to perform these little niceties for her.



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ETIQUETTE

Appointments—Having a local contact to put you in touch with the right people is a big advantage. Set your business appointments at least a couple of weeks in advance. Punctuality is expected but not strictly adhered to, although as a visitor, you should be on time. For dinner parties & other casual social occasions, plan to show up about 30 minutes after the announced time. You'll still arrive before many others.

Personal Introductions—Handshakes are the typical greeting between men. Maintain direct eye contact but not too intensely. When members of the opposite sex meet, the woman should extend her hand to initiate the greeting. But know that when women meet, or when two people of the opposite sex meet for that matter, a kiss is often exchanged, both on the first meeting and subsequent times. Mexicans warm quickly to friendships. Your acquaintances are as likely to hug on a second meeting as they are to shake your hand. This hug is called the abrazo & is common with both male and female acquaintances, although the hug may be accompanied by a kiss on the cheek between two women and a pat on the back between two men. Titles are important, and the title "Doctor" is used for those with advanced university degrees. Last names with the appropriate Spanish title are used. If your acquaintance has a professional title, you will learn it when introduced. If not, *senor* (male), *senora* (married female) and *senorita* (unmarried female) are appropriate. The title and the person's last name should be used until you are instructed otherwise. Note that it is typical for Mexicans to have two surnames, one from their father and one from their mother. The father's surname will be given first during the introduction, and that's the name that is used to address or speak of the person. Thus, "Senor Mario Sanchez Benitez" would be addressed as "Senor Sanchez."

Negotiating—Business in Mexico is open & relaxed and runs at a slower pace than elsewhere in North America. Typically, junior executives have very little authority, so try to meet with people at as high a level as possible. Relationships are important to the decision-making process, so spend time getting to know your associates and letting them get to know you. Mexicans typically dislike open disagreement, but they do like to negotiate.

Business Entertaining—Mexicans love to entertain and take pride in doing so. Typically, your host will pay, but you should offer to do so and, when refused, insist on paying "next time." Then, be sure to do so. If invited to an acquaintance's home, don't plan on discussing business: It's an opportunity to socialize.

Body Language—Conversations may take place at close quarters. Expect polite conversational touching. Refrain from placing hands on your hips, as this can be perceived as an aggressive stance. Keeping your hands in your pockets is also bad form. Dress conservatively, particularly in business situations or if visiting a church.

Gift Giving—Don't be surprised if Mexican friends and contacts present you with some curio or small gift. It is good form to have a similar offering. Even if you don't receive anything, a small, inexpensive gift, preferably an item or product representative of your home country, will be well-received. One tip is to take a number of such gifts & have them ready to dispense should the opportunity arise. If you are already in Mexico and gift-less, flowers, imported chocolate & liquor generally go over well, depending on the situation.

Conversation—Learn some Spanish phrases well. It will be appreciated. Be inquisitive about Mexican culture. Do not discuss travelers' health issues, such as fear of drinking the water. Don't use the term "American" to refer to someone from the U.S. Mexicans consider themselves Americans, as well. In Spanish, people from the U.S. are called *estadounidenses*. Sometimes Mexicans refer to people from the U.S. and Canada as *norteamericanos* (North Americans), to distinguish them from people in other parts of the Americas.

Other Information—You are not likely to encounter many women at the higher levels of Mexican business. However, there is slowly an increasing number of women in prominent positions, though they still encounter some gender-based resistance. There are many more female politicians than in the past, too, including state governors and cabinet members. There was even a strong rumor a few years ago that the president's wife might run to replace him in the next election.



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