

DESTINATION REPORT

YOUR TRAVEL SPECIALIST

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YOUR TRAVEL SNAPSHOT: Destinations included in this guide

Mexico

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mexico - Overview	Page 3
Mexico - See & Do: Sightseeing	Page 6
Mexico - See & Do: Recreation	Page 7
Mexico - See & Do: Shopping	Page 8
Mexico - Dining	Page 10
Mexico - Security	Page 11
Mexico - Facts	Page 15

INTRODUCTION

Mexico is popular with travelers from all over the world. They go there for reasons almost too numerous to mention: sunshine, blue seas teeming with fish and coral, crystal-white beaches, lofty mountains and volcanoes, jungles full of exotic wildlife, world-famous museums and painters, collectible folk art, postcard-perfect Spanish colonial cities and the breathtaking remains of ancient cultures. And some go for a less lofty reason: Mexico can be cheap, although you may have to get out of the popular resort areas to enjoy big savings.

Popular destinations in Mexico include Cancun, Cozumel and Playa del Carmen on the Yucatan Peninsula in the east, and Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo on the Baja Peninsula in the west. Between those two peninsulas lie such cities as Guadalajara, Mexico City, San Miguel de Allende, Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta and Oaxaca. Many visitors also take the train ride through Copper Canyon.

The megalopolis of Mexico City is Mexico's capital and lies roughly in the middle of the country. Approximately 10 million people live in the city limits, but at least twice that number call metropolitan Mexico City home: By most estimates this is the fifth- or sixth-largest city in the world.

We're compelled, of course, to remind would-be visitors of Mexico's unevenness. It remains a land of baffling contradictions. Just down the street from a five-star resort, families camp in ramshackle buildings without plumbing. Burros, with rough-hewn carts in tow, amble alongside express highways. Serious pollution problems confront some cities, and a huge population strains its resources. The economy is growing and the middle class is growing along with it, but there is widespread poverty, and people are yearning for a better standard of living.

Through it all, Mexico endures with patience and a laid-back, "live and let live" attitude.

GEOGRAPHY

Mexico is a large country with diverse landscapes. Much of the northern part of the country is on a high plateau and is made up of the Chihuahuan and Sonoran deserts. Two mountain chains—the Sierra Madre Occidental, to the west, and the Sierra Madre Oriental, to the east—extend for a good length of the country. Between these and some smaller mountain ranges are several plains and valleys that hold many of the country's major cities.

Mexico also features arid coastal plains, the famous Baja Peninsula and the thick tropical jungles of the Yucatan and Chiapas. The country has long and alluring coastlines washed by the Gulf of Mexico, the Pacific Ocean, the Gulf of California and the Caribbean Sea.

HISTORY

Mexico has one of the most fascinating histories in the Americas. The first residents reached the area more than 20,000 years ago. In time, the descendants of these first immigrants produced monumental architecture, incredibly precise calendars and advanced agricultural accomplishments (they gave the world corn, vanilla, chocolate and tomatoes).

Beginning around 1200 BC, a series of great civilizations waxed and waned along the Gulf Coast and southern portions of Mexico, including the Olmecs and the Maya. The Toltecs and a number of other groups came later.

The Aztecs began their rise to power around AD 1300, establishing their capital at Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico City) and eventually conquering all other groups in central and southern Mexico. Like some of their predecessors, they were a warrior civilization. Rivals who were forced to pay tribute to the Aztecs were looking for an opportunity to throw off their rule, and that opportunity soon presented itself.

Hernan Cortes first stepped ashore on Mexico in 1519 and established the town of Veracruz on the Gulf Coast. With just 500 followers, the conquistador engineered the downfall of an Aztec empire by forming alliances with the Aztec's enemies, which swelled his army to more than 5,000. Diseases that the Spanish brought with them, such as smallpox, also overwhelmed the Aztecs. It took Cortes two years to defeat the Aztecs, and with his victory,

Mexico came under Spanish rule.

Spanish-Mexican Indian intermarriage yielded a new mixed race of people—mestizos. Their culture was influenced by the mother country in its language, architecture, traditions and religion. The Spanish colonial capital—Mexico City—was literally built from the rubble of Tenochtitlan, as Aztec temples were dismantled to build royal palaces and churches. For the next 300 years, the city served as the center of the vast colony of New Spain.

Mexican patriots started fighting for freedom in 1810 and gained independence from the Spanish crown by 1821. The ensuing decades were turbulent for the new country: Mexico passed through years of dictatorship and instability. From the 1830s through the 1850s, Gen. Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana ruled the country. During this period, Mexico lost half of its territory in wars against rebellious Texans (in 1836) and against the U.S. (in 1847).

In the 1850s, the country was embroiled in a civil war that eventually resulted in Benito Juarez being elected president. One of Mexico's most progressive presidents, Juarez instituted a liberal government and the separation of church and state in a political movement called La Reforma. He also led the fight against French invaders, who ruled the country for several years and placed Emperor Maximilian on the throne before they were forced to withdraw, leaving Maximilian to the firing squad.

The modern era began in 1910 with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. The decade-long conflict produced some of Mexico's most enduring figures, including the rebel leaders Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) held power through the next seven decades, giving Mexico one of the longest-lasting governments in Latin America, some say with near dictatorial status.

The 1990s were unstable for Mexico. After years of state control, the government began liberalizing the economy, joining the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. For a time, the economy seemed to be booming, until a massive devaluation of its currency dragged the country back into crisis in late 1994. Earlier that year, a small group of rebels in Chiapas State, calling themselves Zapatistas, staged a rebellion that drew international attention to the poverty endured by the country's Maya Indians. A series of high-profile political assassinations rocked already waning faith in the government.

After several prominent victories by opposition candidates in local and regional elections, Vicente Fox was elected president in 2000, breaking the PRI's hold on power for the first time since the revolution. Fox's party, the PAN, a conservative centrist group, went on to win the next election in 2006 when Felipe Calderon was elected president. Winning by less than 1% of the vote, Calderon's victory was hotly contested by his opponent, Manuel Lopez Obrador of the leftist PRD party. Lopez Obrador tried unsuccessfully to set up a parallel government in the months following the election but failed. The Electoral Institute supported Calderon's win.

Then in 2012, Mexico did an about face by electing PRI candidate, Enrique Pena Nieto, president based mostly on his platform of reform. Although he has been praised internationally for standing up to big business monopolies and putting behind bars one of the country's most notorious drug lords, "El Chapo" Guzman, his popularity at home is waning because of an announcement in 2014 of turning the government-run energy sector over to private investors.

Mexico marked two important milestones in 2010: The country celebrated both the 200th anniversary of its independence and the 100th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution. In major cities and historical towns, celebrations marked the bicentennial and centennial year and observed 16 September, the most famous date in Mexican history. That was the date in 1810 when Miguel Hidalgo called on the Mexican populace, in an act known as the Grito de Dolores, to take up arms against the Spanish colonial government.

SNAPSHOT

Mexico's attractions include its historical sites, archaeological ruins, cuisine, fiestas, beaches, fishing, watersports (scuba diving, snorkeling, surfing), golf, bullfighting, shopping, handicrafts, music, dance, relaxation and moderate prices.

If you're interested in a unique culture and enjoy sand, sun and surf, as well as history, dance, music and friendly, fun-loving people, you'll love Mexico. Do be aware that you may fall prey to an upset stomach or other illness that can occur where sanitary conditions are less than optimal, though the risk gets a bit lower each passing year. You

should also be prepared to see extreme poverty, especially in rural areas. If you become unhappy when service isn't prompt and efficient or when things don't quite go as planned, you may not enjoy a trip to Mexico. If you go with the flow and delight in surreal experiences, you will.

POTPOURRI

The two rebel heroes of the Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata and Francisco "Pancho" Villa, were both treacherously assassinated—Zapata in 1919 (at the direction of then-President Venustiano Carranza) and Villa in 1923. Villa also was Mexico's first movie star, starring as himself in the 1914 Hollywood-produced *The Life of General Villa*.

The Tarahumara Indians, who live in the vicinity of Copper Canyon, are renowned for their fitness and stamina, which have been honed by years of running up and down the region's steep mountains. One of their many festivals includes an all-night run of more than 100 mi/160 km.

You can tour several tequila factories in the town of Tequila, birthplace of the quintessential Mexican drink. The Mexican government sponsors the Tequila Trail tour through five well-known tequila-producing towns. There's also a "Tequila Express" tourist train from Guadalajara to the Herradura distillery.

Los Cabos has become the party town of such celebrities as John Travolta, Jennifer Anniston and Oprah Winfrey.

The Fairmont Acapulco Princess in Acapulco became a refuge for eccentric billionaire Howard Hughes in the 1970s before he fled to Nicaragua.

Some say the word "jalopy" comes from the 1920s, when old U.S. cars were shipped to the capital of Veracruz for reconditioning and resale. U.S. longshoremen pronounced the destination, Jalapa, as *ja-la-pa* (rather than with the Spanish pronunciation, *ha-la-pa*). The mispronounced word evolved into "jalopy."

According to one legend, the margarita was invented in the town of Taxco at Bertha's Bar, which is still standing today. The drink reputedly started out as a hot toddy. Other stories claim the honor for Mexico City and Tijuana (where it was supposedly inspired by Rita Hayworth, then known by her original name of Margarita Cansino).

Mexican icon Frida Kahlo married and divorced her husband, famed muralist Diego Rivera, twice. Kahlo also had affairs with Russian intellectual Leon Trotsky and dancer Josephine Baker, among many others.

SIGHTSEEING

Mexico offers such a rich variety of sights it would be impossible to name them all without a multivolume book. The country boasts more than 100 national parks of every stripe, ranging from tropical marine sanctuaries to gorgeous snow-capped peaks and Canadian-style forests to arid badlands that would do justice to any Western film.

In addition, its colonial heritage—unrivaled anywhere in the Western Hemisphere—is such that entire cities, such as Queretaro, San Miguel de Allende, Taxco, Guanajuato, Morelia and Zacatecas, are now national landmarks (as well as UNESCO World Heritage Sites). Several (including San Luis Potosi and Zacatecas) are veritable shrines to baroque art and architecture, while others, such as Monterrey, Aguascalientes and Merida, mix colonial central cores with bustling modern surrounding areas.

Away from the cities, there is a profusion of wildlife for just about every type of ecosystem, ranging from rare birds (more than 400 varieties) to the even more rare jaguar, and everything in between. The flora is no less spectacular, running the gamut from desert sagebrush to as-yet-unclassified giant flowers found in deepest jungle recesses.

Just as popular are the glitzy resort towns, quaint adobe villages redolent of "Old Mexico," and the numerous other sightseeing options Mexico offers, such as its wineries in Baja Norte, distilleries in Jalisco, the beautiful rug-making and pottery centers of Oaxaca, the folk art communities in Michoacan and Guanajuato, and the many Maya ruins of the Yucatan.

Well-curated museums displaying pre-Hispanic archaeology, modern and classic art, and Mexican history can be visited in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Jalapa, to name a few.

Beyond these, the quaint fishing town of Zihuatanejo, the indigenous settlements in Chiapas, the Wild West atmosphere of states such as Durango and Chihuahua, and of course all those miles/kilometers of coast on either side of the country (to say nothing of the Yucatan itself), make sightseeing in Mexico an unforgettable experience from start to finish.

RECREATION

You can find enough recreational activities to keep you busy for several days, depending on your destination. Ecotourism has soared, and you'll find opportunities for river rafting in Veracruz, bird-watching all along the Gulf and Caribbean coasts, and whale-watching in Baja California and Punta Mita December-March. Be sure to visit the monarch butterfly preserves in Michoacan and the state of Mexico November-March and the parrot sanctuary outside of Monterrey year-round.

Some of the most remarkable beaches, with white, gossamer-soft sand bracketing an azure sea, are found along the Caribbean coast running south to Belize. Maya ruins are also opening to the public in the strip called the Costa Maya. There's more than a half-dozen major sites on the Yucatan Peninsula around the town of Merida. Farther inland, toward the borders with Belize and Guatemala, others are opening and offering unique "luxury jungle" experiences and opportunities for extreme sports.

Deep-sea fishing is superb off Cozumel and the Baja Peninsula, where record catches of marlin and other sports fish are common. Manzanillo and Mazatlan are famous for billfish tournaments. Some of the best surfing is along the Baja and the Oaxaca coasts, and tennis and racquet sports are found in all big cities and beach resorts. Mountain biking is good near the city of Oaxaca and along the Riviera Maya, which has an annual tournament.

Hiking and mountain climbing are especially alluring around the volcanoes outside Mexico City, in Veracruz and outside Monterrey. Several tour companies run week-long hiking or mountain biking tours in the Copper Canyon and in the mountains of Chiapas. Much of the interior also offers amazing hiking and trekking opportunities, most of which are barely known to the outside world.

Cozumel boasts superb snorkeling and scuba diving and is often named one of the top-five dive spots in the world. To the south along the Caribbean, cave diving is exceptional. Baby sea turtle releases can be seen at most beaches along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts June-September.

SHOPPING

The operative law for shopping in Mexico is *caveat emptor*—let the buyer beware. With that in mind, shop for almost anything you fancy. Mexico has everything from stuffed frogs (in various poses and costumes) to high-quality silver work.

Handicrafts, clothing and folk art vary regionally in style: Pottery, woven fabrics, hammocks and baskets are often good buys. Folk art from Oaxaca and Michoacan remains our favorite. Don't ignore the hand-loomed rugs, black pottery or highly popular hand-painted wooden animal figures, called *alebrijes*, from Oaxaca. The motifs in their designs usually represent a mixture of myths.

Bargain shoppers can find deals on handmade guitars, straw figures, hammered copper and lovely textile tableware in Michoacan. The best silver is found in Taxco; that of Zacatecas is also highly prized.

Typical Mayan crafts to look for throughout the Riviera Maya include panama hats, hammocks, wood carvings and traditional embroidered dresses known as *huipiles*. Playa del Carmen has by far the widest selection of shops on the Riviera Maya, representing the best of what the country produces in one place. Prices tend to be fairly high, but there is a wide variety of shops selling Cuban cigars, silver jewelry and semiprecious stones, Mexican crafts (of varying quality), decorative home products and much more. Puerto Morelos has some nice silver shops and craft boutiques, plus a small Maya-handicraft market called Mercado Hunab-Ku.

Onyx from Mexico City, lacquerware from Chiapas and Acapulco, embroidered blouses from Merida and leather goods are also good choices, but inspect an item closely if quality is what you want.

High-grade silver is stamped ".925" (by law)—but learn how to double-check for plated silver anyway. The silver capital of the country is Taxco, which has more silver shops than hotels and has been furnishing the world with high-grade silver for hundreds of years. Many of its designers have branches in other places such as Mexico City and Guadalajara.

Learn the difference between synthetic colors (bright) and natural colors (more subtle) when buying wool blankets and serapes. It's fun to shop for locally made toys, but safety regulations are not particularly strict—make sure there are no loose pieces or sharp edges if the toys are intended as gifts for children. Look for good buys on musical instruments (particularly traditional stringed or rhythm instruments).

Be sure to drop into local open-air markets in any town where clothing for men, women and children made of *manta* (Mexican cotton) and regional crafts are sold. If visiting the smaller towns, learn to bargain, because it's fun and expected, and considered a fine art in Mexico. In the cities, however, prices are fixed and attempts to bargain are considered gauche.

Use caution if buying designer-name items at very low prices—some are knock-offs or stolen from hijacked trucks. If that's the case, the items may be confiscated by customs agents when you return home. Turtle, tortoise, alligator, black coral and jaguar products will also be confiscated upon arrival in many countries. Products containing quetzal feathers, tortoise shells or any derivative from turtles, such as oil, are illegal in Mexico, as is transporting any type of archaeological artifact out of the country. Penalties can include stiff jail terms.

Tequila and rum are cheap, but be aware of your country's duty restrictions before you buy. Vanilla is a fraction of what you would pay at home and makes a nice small gift.

Don't forget one of the best features of shopping in Mexico: Most of the wares in the Indian markets are tax free. And even those that aren't can often be had at the same price if you are willing to go without an official receipt (known as a *factura*) or pay cash.

For high-end decorative products such as light fixtures, mirrors and hand-carved furniture, the top places to shop are San Miguel de Allende (in Guanajuato state) and Tlaquepaque outside Guadalajara. Prices are significantly lower at the point of origin, such as pottery workshops in Dolores Hidalgo (Guanajuato state) and Michoacan state outside Patzcuaro.

Note: Green or brown glaze on pottery often contains lead—don't use any of these ceramics for storing food or

See & Do: Shopping

drink. Much of the pottery produced in Puebla and Guanajuato state for export is now lead-free, however, so ask or look for a marking on the bottom.

Shopping Hours: Generally Monday-Saturday 10 am-8 pm. Many smaller stores, especially those in the interior, close 2-4 pm.

DINING OVERVIEW

Mexican cuisine is much more than just tacos and burritos. Depending on the region, it can have similarities to Caribbean, Spanish and even Middle Eastern cooking. In the coastal states—Yucatan, Campeche and Veracruz, for example—the emphasis is on fresh seafood (baby shrimp, Moro crab, squid, octopus, redfish and snapper).

The state of Michoacan is known for the tart-piquant flavors of such dishes as *salpicon de res* (shredded beef cooked with pickled serranos, cilantro and tomatoes) and corn cakes called *corundas*, and Oaxaca boasts a number of moles (sauces made with unusual combinations of ingredients such as chocolate, fruits, raisins, peanuts and pumpkin seeds) plus home-style *quesillo* (string cheese) and chocolate. Both states have outstanding cuisine.

Elsewhere, poultry, beef and pork dishes are featured. In Colima, try *tatemado* (pork baked in a clay pot over an open fire); in Tampico, try *carne tampiquena* (fillet of beef, usually with refried beans, fried tortilla chips and guacamole on the side). The basic *bolillos* (crispy bread rolls) and tortillas are magnificent because they're usually prepared fresh daily.

Cancun restaurants feature a variety of international dishes and fresh seafood from the nearby waters, but if you head downtown, you'll find more places to dine on typical Mexican fare and Yucatan food. In the Riviera Maya, there is something to please every palate, most of it beef, chicken and fish wrapped up in Continental cuisine. There's also Argentinean, German, Swiss, Italian and a smattering of places serving regional cuisine. The unpretentious beach huts are some of the best bets for seafood.

Yucatan specialties, which are found especially in Merida, Campeche and the surrounding countryside, include *cochinilla pibil* or *pollo pibil*—an outstanding dish of chicken or pork in a rich achiote (annatto seed) sauce, baked in banana leaves in a clay oven. (You probably don't want to know that the sauce contains ground insects, but don't let that deter you: The taste is phenomenal.) The Yucatan also boasts wonderful *sopa de lima* (soup with tortilla strips, chicken and limes).

Vegetarians will appreciate the wide variety of tropical fruits and vegetables available, as well as regional dishes such as *papadzules*, tacos stuffed with boiled eggs and covered in pumpkin-seed mole (its antecedents go all the way back to the Colonial Age). Melted cheese dishes and vegetable and legume casseroles are a good bet, too.

Be sure to try chiles rellenos (poblano peppers stuffed with cheese or meat, then fried in egg batter and topped with walnuts, pomegranate seeds and cream), which originated in the city of Puebla, also famous for its food fairs and candies. *Crepas de huitlacoche* (corn fungus crepes); *chicharrones* (fried pork skin); and the different kinds of tamales (wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves) are more common in Mexico City and the central highlands of the country. The Centro Historico of Mexico City also has many family-style restaurants serving dishes made from colonial recipes. Northern Mexico is famous for roasted kid and juicy steaks, along with wonderful, butterlike Chihuahua cheese.

Other cities known for their remarkable fusion of Mexican and international cuisine include Jalapa in the state of Veracruz, Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, Puerto Vallarta and San Jose del Cabo. Places with thousands of expatriates, such as San Miguel de Allende and Ajijic, will have more international and fusion restaurants than other parts of the country. Mexico City is the undisputed king of street food and gourmet restaurants, covering all parts of the spectrum in between.

Among the ingredients you'll find in Mexican markets are *recado* (a reddish paste flavored with achiote seed and bitter oranges), epazote (the herb that gives black beans their distinctive flavor and de-gases them), avocados, *tomates verdes* (tomatillos), plantains (a variety of banana that's not sweet and is always cooked before eating), limes, red papaya, nopalitos (cactus) and their fruit and, of course, the many varieties of beans (29) and chilies (120), ranging from the mild poblano to the smoky chipotle to the hotter-than-Hades habanero.

ETIQUETTE

Since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico has become an increasingly common destination for international business travelers. Nonetheless, the country's interesting and enjoyable traditions have not been diminished by increased business traffic: The Mexican people and their way of life may well prove the most memorable part of your visit.

Appointments—Having a local contact to put you in touch with the right people is a big advantage. Set your appointments at least a couple of weeks in advance, if possible. Punctuality is expected, but rarely adhered to except in Mexico City and Monterrey—though as a visitor, you should be on time. For dinner parties and other somewhat social occasions, plan to show up about 30 minutes after the announced time.

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. In the interior especially, women usually greet each other with a kiss on the cheek and men with a quick hug. This hug is called the *abrazo* and is common with both male and female acquaintances, although the hug may be accompanied by a quick kiss on the cheek between two women or a woman and a man, and a pat on the back between two men.

Titles are important. 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." Mexicans warm quickly to friendships.

Negotiating—Business in Mexico runs at a slower pace than elsewhere in North America, and is open and relaxed. Typically, junior executives have very little authority, so endeavor to meet with people at as high a level as possible. Relationships are very important to the decision-making process (sometimes the only thing that really matters), so spend time getting acquainted with your associates and don't expect to strike a quick deal or immediately "get down to business." Mexicans run a close second to the Japanese in their aversion to 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. Mexicans will often prefer to pay an entire bill than enter into finicky discussions of "who ordered what." 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 and gesticulation to emphasize points. Refrain from placing your 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. Outside of the main business centers, suits and ties are rare. A pressed dress shirt, slacks and dress shoes is about as formal as it gets for men outside of Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey.

Conversation—Learn some Spanish phrases well. It will be highly appreciated, and nobody cares if they are pronounced poorly. Be inquisitive about Mexican culture. Do not discuss travelers' health issues such as fear of drinking or swimming in the water. Don't use the term "American" to refer to someone from the U.S.: Mexicans consider themselves Americans, too. "North American" is better, and never use *gringo* (which is a mildly disparaging word) unless you are with people you know well.

Other Information—You are not likely to encounter many women at the higher levels of Mexican business.

However, women can and do conduct business in the country, though they may on occasion encounter some gender-based resistance. Women do own many independent businesses, hotels, language schools, restaurants and retail establishments. However, more women have entered politics in the last couple of decades, even being elected state governors.

PERSONAL SAFETY

As the drug-related turf battles continue to escalate and government steps up its fight against the narcos, violence in the areas bordering the U.S. is a serious matter. Guns coming from the U.S. and drugs going the other direction have created a volatile situation and border cities such as Ciudad Juarez have become like urban ghettos in a war zone, where gangs control the streets.

Unfortunately, the media has given many travelers the impression that this situation extends to all of Mexico, which is certainly not the case. Different regions of Mexico have radically different crime rates. While northern Chihuahua is a no-go zone and Tijuana is best avoided, most of the areas popular with tourists continue to have lower homicide rates than most cities of the U.S. or Canada. Some 24 million foreigners ignored the warnings and went to Mexico in 2013. The incidents of violence against any of them is statistically close to zero.

In a few cities along the Pacific Coast and especially the border towns, incidents of violent and nonviolent crime have increased. Robberies of taxi passengers are rare, but in the major cities, only get in a cab you've phoned for (be sure to get the driver's name and the taxi's license-plate number from the dispatcher) from a cab stand.

Although Mexican roadways are safer than they were years ago, and robberies of foreigners are very infrequent, they can occur along some highways, especially at night and in isolated areas. Remember that most Mexican highways are not lit and the sign posts are not reflective. Also, speed bumps are common on all nonhighway roads, so it's best not to drive at night for safety reasons. Beware, especially, the highways between Saltillo and the Texas border. Bus travel is generally safe and quite comfortable, with suitcases locked up underneath. Highways are improving at a rapid pace, such as the highway between Morelia and Zihuatanejo, and the one between Mazatlan and Durango, which have cut driving times in half.

Although instances are waning, beware, too, of police officers looking for bribes, which is most common in the border zones. It is virtually impossible to escape paying one if you are pulled over, and your best bet is simply to pay and be done with it as there is no appeal process.

Troubles in the southern state of Chiapas have waned considerably, but protests still erupt now and then against the national government. Travelers should check the latest conditions before they visit. Always be sure to carry your tourist visa if you are driving, as surprise spot checks on the highway are common. Many former trouble spots, such as Mexico City, have cleaned up their act considerably, but new trouble spots have taken their place. In general, all cities along the U.S. border are best avoided and those arriving overland with their car should head south several hours before spending the night. Better yet, take a plane from the U.S. to your northern Mexico destination.

There have also been many flare-ups of gang violence in Acapulco and the state of Michoacan. Apart from these and Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, however, few areas popular with tourists have been affected, and the number of major crimes committed against foreign travelers has not increased.

Small-time drug dealers have been openly selling their wares in dance clubs and markets in some beach resorts and in the border towns especially. They may be in cahoots with criminals who will turn you in to the police as soon as you buy. There are reports of horrific violence in Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo and Acapulco, but these are typically between police and drug traffickers. Stick to well-patrolled areas and do not look for trouble.

Wherever you travel in Mexico, it's best to dress plainly, skip the flashy jewelry and avoid carrying conspicuous big-ticket items such as large, expensive cameras. Nothing draws a thief like a tourist in shorts consulting a map in a less touristy district. When you go out for the day, take along only as much cash as you'll need for that outing (make use of hotel safes for the remainder). Choose an ATM that's *inside* a bank or other business and only make withdrawals during daylight hours. Ladies should not sling their purses over the back of chairs in restaurants as this beacons a thief. The vast majority of Mexicans are honest and helpful, but there are a few scams and pickpocketings there like you may encounter in Rome, Marrakech or New Delhi. Just don't drop your guard because

you're on vacation.

For the latest information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

HEALTH

It is common knowledge that travelers to Mexico may get an upset stomach or diarrhea, known as *turista*. To help prevent such problems, wash your hands frequently, avoid food from street stands in the smaller towns, don't drink tap water or anything with ice, and be careful with dairy products. (The larger cities are no less sanitary in terms of food or drink than those in the U.S., and ice in restaurants is nearly always made from purified water.)

Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe (especially in restaurants in major tourist resorts), but peel fresh fruit and avoid raw vegetables. Again, in the smaller towns, avoid foods that are difficult to clean, such as lettuce and strawberries. Make sure meat is cooked thoroughly and stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks if in doubt.

Medical facilities are good in the larger cities. Contact your embassy or consulate for English-speaking doctors and dentists. You can also check with the concierge of your hotel or a trusted local friend. All major hospitals have someone who can translate if you don't speak Spanish, and facilities have really improved since NAFTA was passed in 1994. Most doctors have trained in the U.S., Canada or Europe. Medical fees are far less than what you would pay in the U.S. (especially for dental work or elective surgery), and personnel are well-trained and caring individuals.

Malaria and dengue fever are still occasionally found in rural areas in the lowlands (resort areas are safe): Consult your physician about preventive measures. Protect yourself with insect repellent (preferably one containing deet). In some areas, stray dogs could carry rabies, so avoid them. If you're even nipped by an animal, get treatment immediately and insist that the animal be inspected.

The sun can be strong, especially along the coastal resort areas, so use sunscreen liberally, wear a hat and drink plenty of bottled water. Take into consideration that the heat in the desert areas and the Yucatan is particularly oppressive. Don't forget comfortable walking shoes and take it easy at higher altitudes: cities such as San Miguel de Allende and Zacatecas are at a higher altitude than Denver. Air pollution is extreme in Mexico City and may cause problems for people with respiratory ailments.

For the latest information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

DOS & DON'TS

Do be aware that if you are a woman, you may still encounter a bit of machismo, especially in the interior. You can minimize it by ignoring the perpetrator (any attention at all may be misinterpreted). Men will also insist on such old-fashioned behavior as opening doors, paying the bill at a restaurant and walking on the outside, near the curb.

Don't wear T-shirts and shorts in the big cities unless you are a student or want to advertise that you are a foreigner. (In general, most Mexicans only wear shorts at the beach, at the pool or to play soccer.)

Do remember that if you are invited to lunch, expect the appointment to be between 2 and 3 pm, since Mexicans dine later than in the U.S. The lunch is the most substantial meal of the day and lasts about two hours. Business lunches can stretch to three hours.

Do plan to eat dinner later. Most restaurants will be empty before 8 pm unless they cater specifically to tourists.

Don't ask questions about money unless you are negotiating a business deal. Mexicans consider it rude to talk or brag about personal finances.

Do ask about children and relatives. Mexicans are gregarious to a fault and love group settings. Any interest you show in their extended families will be well-received.

Don't get arrested in Mexico. Contrary to the law in the U.S., in Mexico you are presumed guilty until proven

innocent, and the process of justice is lengthy and antiquated.

Do exercise patience in all circumstances. Mexicans have a fluid view of time unless it's something set for a large crowd, such as the start of Mass or school. Efficiency is not nearly as prized as friendliness or the ability to get along with others.

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: Canadian and U.S. citizens need passports. Each visitor must fill out a tourist card. Tourists can stay up to six months in the country with this tourist card if requesting the full amount upon entry.

All U.S. citizens must have a passport when traveling by air to or from Bermuda, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America and Mexico. Citizens of Canada, Mexico and the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda also must have a passport or other designated secure document to enter the U.S.

Passports are required for land crossings at the Canadian and Mexican borders with the U.S. and for cruise passengers returning to the U.S. from Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada or Bermuda. Reconfirm travel-document requirements with your carrier prior to departure.

Population: 116,220,947.

Languages: Spanish.

Predominant Religions: Christian (Roman Catholic).

Time Zone: 5-8 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (-5 through -8 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is observed from the first Sunday in April until the last Sunday in October.

Voltage Requirements: 110 volts. Many hotels, schools and businesses also have 220 volts.

Telephone Codes: 52, country code;

Currency Exchange

The currency is the peso and hovers at roughly a 12:1 ratio against the U.S. dollar. It's been in place since 1920, the end of the Mexican Revolution. In recent years, it has dipped as low as 15 to the dollar and as high as 10 to the dollar, but it stays relatively stable.

Traveler's checks are becoming increasingly hard to cash in Mexico, even in resort areas. Credit cards are accepted at most tourist-oriented businesses. Most travelers rely on ATMs, though it is advisable to take out the maximum amount as there will be a local charge plus a charge from your bank of several dollars each time. Use reasonable caution when using ATMs: Try to use one that's *inside* a building (not just in an enclosure facing the street), and avoid making withdrawals at night.

Money exchange houses called *casas de cambio* are found along all major tourist routes in cities and offer better exchange rates and a quicker turnaround than banks do. By all means avoid hotels, which give the lowest exchange rates. Airport rate favorability varies greatly from place to place: check the official rate online before arrival to know if what's posted at the airport is good or bad. If it's poor, change only enough for a day or two.

Note that U.S. dollars are widely accepted, although somewhat less so in the interior. U.S. coins, however, are not accepted anywhere except at a few border towns. In early 2011 the government put restrictions on how much tourists could spend in U.S. dollars, in order to fight money laundering, but the ruling has only been applied to certain states, such as Quintana Roo. If this restriction spreads, it will be necessary to pay in pesos everywhere and use credit cards for big purchases.

Taxes

Mexico's VAT (value-added tax) is 16%, except in Baja California, some border regions and the Caribbean coast, where it's 11%. Only basic staples such as tortillas, rice and beans are exempt. A tax-refund program is under review. Note, however, that many retailers, especially smaller stores, will not include tax unless you ask for a receipt or pay in cash.

There is also—in theory—a 17%-18% hotel tax that may or may not be applied. It is usually added to the bill with luxury hotels but will usually be included in the price at resorts and smaller hotels. Be sure to check this when booking as the tax is not applied consistently.

Tipping

Tip 10% in restaurants unless service is exceptionally good, in which case 15% is appropriate. M\$5 at gas stations is appropriate, but if the attendant goes out of his way, M\$10 is better.

Taxi drivers are not tipped in Mexico unless they perform an extra service, such as carrying bags. Housekeepers in hotels should be tipped M\$12 a day and bellhops at least M\$24, depending on the amount of luggage. Skycaps at airports get a minimum of M\$24 per bag. Hairdressers and counter service people generally aren't tipped, but others traditionally are: The people who bag your groceries at a supermarket get a few pesos, for instance, as do the men who "help you" out of a parking space. Gas station attendants are usually tipped a few pesos, more if they wash your windshield or check the oil.

Luxury hotels will often add a service charge of 5%-10% to your bill. Inquire about this before tipping service personnel or housekeeping.

Weather

Despite major regional differences in weather, the best time to visit Mexico is mid-September through mid-May, though some parts still have a fair amount of rain in October and November. (It rains the most during the summer, but usually not often enough to spoil a vacation.) The Gulf of Mexico region is susceptible to hurricanes late July-early November.

Mexico City is chilly in the early morning and at night during the winter. The coldest cities are those in the mountains, especially Toluca, Patzcuaro and Zacatecas. Be prepared for higher humidity in coastal areas and at the inland archaeological sites in the Yucatan Peninsula. Summer temperatures there can hover around 100 F/38 C with near-100% humidity. The average coastal day temperatures year-round are in the 70s-80s F/23-32 C, with nights in the 60s-70s F/15-27 C. Take a sweater any time of year if heading to a destination away from the coasts, an umbrella if heading to a region where it rains outside of summer.

In many of the highland cities, such as Cuernavaca, Guanajuato and San Miguel de Allende, it gets cool at night—even in the summer—but will hit short-sleeve and sun-hat temperatures during the day.

What to Wear

Long sleeves and pants, plus plenty of insect repellent, are recommended for the mosquito season. Always wear a hat and plenty of sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) when visiting the tropics and coastal resorts to avoid painful sunburns. When sunbathing, avoid the hours between 11 am and 2 pm, when the sun is strongest. Packing a light jacket or sweater is advisable year-round.

Wear conservative clothes for business meetings (save the club clothes for later), though outside of the big cities sport jackets and ties are rare. Women may get by with a pantsuit or jacket and skirt. Both men and women should not parade around in shorts when traveling in a city; save them for the beach. Residents are more formally dressed.

Unless you want to twist an ankle, stick to low-rise, comfortable shoes when walking in the cities—the locals have more practice than foreigners with stilettos. Cobblestones, uneven sidewalks and gaping holes are tough on dressy

shoes.

Telephone

Service fees are tacked onto regular long-distance or collect calls from your hotel room, which makes them expensive. Pay phones are becoming harder to find with the prevalence of cell phones. When available, they can be found on street corners and in department stores and hotels. The airports are slower in phasing them out.. All Telmex public phones use prepaid phone cards, which cost M\$30-M\$500 and can be purchased at convenience stores, newsstands and in gift shops.

No area codes are necessary for local calls; in-country long-distance connections require 01 or 045 before the number; if you're calling to the U.S., dial 001 beforehand. For other countries, check with the operator (040) for the country code.

Most U.S.-issued cell phones can be used in Mexico, although the cost is considerably higher, often a dollar a minute or more. Some dual-country models are manufactured with a slot for a SIM card, although the card itself must be purchased in Mexico. (U.S. SIM cards cannot be read by Mexican networks more than a mile/kilometer or so across the border.) Check with your provider for the code.

Reception is excellent in big cities, resorts and elsewhere in the country as cell towers continue to pepper the landscape and local demand for the product is at an all-time high. One advantage to having a Mexican cell phone is that receiving calls and messages is free: You pay only for calls you make. You can buy a local phone and SIM card for as little as M\$240, so many business travelers go this route even for short visits. You prepay for minutes and recharge when they run out. The two largest carriers are Telcel and Movistar.

Many Internet cafes have Skype installed and have headphones hooked up to the computer. If you have a Skype account, you can log in and make cheap calls.

Internet Access

Major chain hotels have business centers, in some cases charging up to M\$264 per hour for Internet access. Most hotels in all price ranges now have wireless access available in guest rooms and the lobby. Only the foreign business and luxury hotels levy a charge. If they do, you'll spend a fraction of the hotel fee off-site at cyber cafes located in everything from a coffee shop to a McDonald's to a dress store. Look for an Internet sign outside or on the door. Most have high-speed wired or wireless access and rates are generally M\$12 or so per hour.

The largest Mexican airports have gone wireless, but you usually have to get a code at a restaurant or coffee shop because the main airport signal is only available to Telcel customers; smaller ones remain without service at all. First and executive class bus lounges at the intercity bus terminals offer free Wi-Fi and the very best buses offer it in transit as well. Very few bars in Mexico offer Wi-Fi, but most coffee shops do.

Mail & Package Services

If you want to mail something from Mexico (other than postcards), the most reliable services are UPS, FedEx or DHL, which are found in all major cities and beach resorts (DHL being the most common and most highly regarded).

Mexico's postal service has a reputation of being very slow; even its Expreso service is rarely on time. Private couriers should never be used. Their non- or late delivery rate is staggeringly high.

Newspapers & Magazines

Mexico City and Cancun have the English-language daily *The Herald*, published by *The Miami Herald*, and the English paper *The News* is produced in Mexico City and available in many other cities. There's little else in English-language newspapers in the country, although *The Guadalajara Reporter* covers news in Jalisco and Nayarit states for the expatriate community. All have good online versions.

Beach destinations such as Cancun, Riviera Maya, Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco (plus larger metropolitan areas) have free visitors guides, which are handed out at the airport and are available at hotels and tourist offices.

For those who read Spanish, the excellent travel magazine *Mexico Desconocido* (Hidden Mexico) is available on most newsstands.

Air

Many international carriers serve Benito Juarez International Airport (MEX), which is 4 mi/6 km from Mexico City, as well as international airports in Cancun, Los Cabos and Puerto Vallarta. Most large cities and big tourist destinations also have major international airports, which have undergone or are undergoing renovations to bring them up to date with high-tech demands such as Wi-Fi and tighter security.

Mexico City's airport has expanded greatly in the past decade, with two large terminals connected by an elevated railway. Mexico City is also studying the possibility of expanding air service into the capital by enlarging the airport in Toluca, a hour's drive west of the city; it is already being used as a secondary hub. The busy beach destination airports continue to expand and modernize.

Mexicana, one of the country's two main international carriers, went bankrupt in 2010 and its chances of revival are slim. U.S. carriers have grabbed some of that capacity within North America, while the other domestic airlines have all expanded their routes.

Several regional carriers offer frequent flights within the country. Low-cost airlines also have domestic itineraries. All offer lower prices than Aeromexico on most routes, but some have main hubs in Toluca, Guadalajara or Monterrey rather than Mexico City itself.

While Mexican airport security is still not as strict as in the U.S., it is best to play it safe and assume the same restrictions are in place when it comes to carry-on items and liquid maximums. Unless a liquor purchase is made at Duty Free, it should be put into checked baggage.

Bus

Some U.S. bus companies have permission to operate within Mexico, and they now take visitors from several U.S. border towns into the interior, although a two-hour stop at the border is obligatory for all carriers.

In addition, Mexican bus companies offer efficient first-class bus service between major cities. Some buses—usually those designated *de lujo*, *ejecutivo* or *primera*—are air conditioned, have toilets and might even have movies, Wi-Fi, and snacks and beverages. The highest level ones generally only have three seats across and have plenty of legroom—well-worth the small premium in cost. Second-class (*segunda*) service connects smaller towns, makes lots of stops and is generally less prompt and less luxurious.

Car

Getting around Mexico by car isn't as dubious an undertaking as it used to be. Rental cars are available in most major cities and tourist destinations, and at least 1.5 million North American visitors drive into Mexico each year. Note that rental cars are often manual drive and may not have air-conditioning. Expect to pay more than you would in the U.S. for an automatic with air that's large enough for your party and your luggage. It is also advisable to purchase liability insurance as an accident can turn into a multiday affair at the local jail without it.

If you're considering driving beyond the 12.5-mi/20-km border zone, be aware of the following requirements: A visitor driving his or her own car to Mexico must have proof of ownership (title or registration), a valid driver's license and a Temporary Vehicle Import Permit. If your car is financed, you must also have a notarized letter from the financing institution giving you permission to drive it into Mexico, although this requirement is usually overlooked if you have the original registration papers or title with you. Under no circumstances may you take someone else's car.

You must pay a nonrefundable fee to take a car into the country. You also have to provide assurance that you won't be leaving the car in Mexico. That is done by posting a bond (depending on the age of the vehicle), which is returned to you upon returning the certificate and leaving the country with your vehicle. You can pay this in cash or by credit card.

Note: If you've opted for the credit-card imprint, make sure to get your Temporary Vehicle Import Permit stamped when you leave the country or fines will start mounting up. If you fail to return with the vehicle and certificate within six months, the government has the right to confiscate it. Legal residents with the proper visa may import a vehicle for longer periods.

Mexican liability insurance is not required by law, but you should have it. U.S. and other foreign insurances are not recognized in Mexico, and should you be involved in an accident without having Mexican insurance, you will face many problems, including automatic imprisonment if responsibility is not determined at the scene.

It's easy to get a temporary policy, and they are not that expensive (depending upon the level of coverage you want). Agencies are located in nearly every U.S. border town. The insurance carriers are also good sources of information about document requirements and driving conditions—stop in at one before you attempt to drive across the border.

For rental vehicles brought in from the U.S., the rental contract must be in the visitor's name, and you will need written permission from the rental agency to cross the border. Be aware that many agencies do not allow their vehicles to cross international borders, and others may have strict guidelines: Be sure to check first. Although it's not always the case, plan for delays of about an hour at border crossings, up to two at Ciudad Juarez and Laredo, and as many as four hours during the Christmas season.

Mexico's highways range from excellent paved (usually toll) roads to pothole-ridden two-lane blacktops and rutted dirt roads. Toll roads, although every bit as good as those found in the U.S., can be very expensive. Expect to pay roughly M\$12 for every 6-12 mi/10-20 km. They also lack many roadside restaurants or gas stations, so plan ahead if making a long journey. An outstanding guide for Mexico's major roads is Guia Roji's *Atlas Turistico de Carreteras*.

Although you will hear tales of banditry on Mexican roads, most visitors drive in Mexico today without incident. Still, you should not drive after dark, and some isolated roads should be avoided altogether—the only other traffic is likely to be drug traffickers (or the army in search of them). In particular, avoid night travel in Baja California, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Tamaulipas, Sinaloa and Sonora.

To find out if any roads are considered unsafe when you'll be traveling in Mexico, consult the Green Angels, Mexico's excellent highway patrol. By day, hundreds of green trucks manned by an English-speaking staff patrol the country's main roads. They will not only provide you with accurate, up-to-date information but also assist you with towing or simple repairs. (There's a charge for parts, but not labor—though a tip is always appreciated.) Local tourist offices in Mexico can provide you with the phone number of the appropriate Green Angels office.

Federal (as opposed to local) police are also excellent sources of information and are courteous to a fault (even if they've pulled you over).

If refueling at a Pemex (the national gas company's service stations) make sure the meters are zeroed out. Most

service attendants will ask you to verify that they are zeroed out before they will pump your gas. And be sure to indicate which type of fuel you want, regular or premium. The default is to assume that foreigners will want the most expensive gas, although the difference between the two levels of octane is marginal at best.

Taxi

Taxis are plentiful and are usually moderately priced outside of the beach resort areas, but exercise caution in obtaining a cab in the major cities. In Mexico City, you should *never* hail a taxi in the street. Always use a radio taxi. Your hotel or restaurant can provide the phone numbers of reliable companies or make the call for you.

Most airports and some large bus terminals have honest and reliable pre-paid taxi rate kiosks with set fares to specific zones. You purchase a ticket to your zone and present it outside to an official by the taxi line. Sometimes gypsy cab drivers patrol airports in bigger cities looking for fares. Even if they offer you a lower rate, do not hire them, as cases of passengers being robbed have occurred.

In smaller towns, taxis don't use meters. Agree on the fare with the driver prior to getting into the cab. If it's metered, make sure the previous fare has been cleared.

For traveling between nearby towns, shared taxis are often a good option. These will usually await fares beside the town's main plaza.

Train

Passenger rail service from the U.S. and within Mexico does not exist. The only exceptions are the famous Chihuahua al Pacifico Railroad, which runs through the Copper Canyon area, and the Tequila Express that connects a few towns north of Guadalajara.

For More Information

Tourist Offices

Mexico: The national tourism office (SECTUR) in Mexico City provides is located at Ave. Presidente Masaryk 172, Mexico, D.F. Phone 5250-0123. Toll-free within Mexico 01-800-008-9090. <http://www.sectur.gob.mx>. For overseas offices, visit <http://www.visitmexico.com> and select your country.

Canada: Mexican Government Tourism Office, 2 Bloor St. W., Suite 1502, Toronto, ON M4W 3E2. Phone 416-925-2753. Fax 416-925-6061. There are also offices in Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver.

U.K.: Mexican Government Tourism Office, 42 Hert Fort Square, Mayfair, London, England W1Y7TF. Phone 4471-499-8586. Fax 44171-495-4035.

U.S.: Mexican Government Tourism Office, 152 Madison Ave., Suite 1800, New York, NY 10016. Phone 212-308-2110. Fax 212-308-9060. There are also offices in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and Miami.

Mexico does not have a tourist office in Australia.

Mexican Embassies

Australia: Embassy of Mexico, 14 Perth Ave., Yarralumla, ACT 2600. Phone 6273-3963. Fax 6273-1190.

Canada: Embassy of Mexico, 45 O'Connor St., Suite 1500, Ottawa, ON K1P 1A4. Phone 613-233-8988. Fax 613-235-9123.

U.K.: Embassy of Mexico, 16 St. George St., London W1S 1LX. Phone 20-7499-8586. Fax 20-7495-4035.

U.S.: Embassy of Mexico, 1911 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20006. Phone 202-736-1000. Fax

202-797-8458.

Foreign Embassies in Mexico

Australia: Australian Embassy, Ruben Dario 55, Col. Polanco, 11580 Mexico, D.F. Phone 1101-2200. Fax 1101-2201. There are also consulates in Guadalajara and Monterrey.

Canada: Canadian Embassy, Calle Schiller 529, Col. Bosque de Chapultepec, 11580 Mexico, D.F. Phone 5724-7900. Fax 5724-7980. There are also consulates in Acapulco, Cancun, Guadalajara, Mazatlan, Monterrey, Oaxaca, Puerto Vallarta, San Jose del Cabo and Tijuana.

U.K.: British Embassy, Rio Lerma 71, Col. Cuauhtemoc, 06500 Mexico, D.F. Phone 5242-8500. Fax 5242-8517. There are also consulates in Acapulco, Cancun, Ciudad Juarez, Guadalajara, Merida, Monterrey, Oaxaca, Tijuana and Veracruz.

U.S.: U.S. Embassy, Paseo de la Reforma 305, Col. Cuauhtemoc, Mexico City, D.F. Phone 5080-2000. Fax 5080-2001. There are also consulates or consular agencies in Acapulco, Aguascalientes, Cabo San Lucas, Cancun, Ciudad Juarez, Ciudad Acuna, Cozumel, Guadalajara, Hermosillo, Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo, Matamoros, Mazatlan, Merida, Monterrey, Nuevo Laredo, Nogales, Oaxaca, Piedras Negras, Playa del Carmen, Puerto Vallarta, Reynosa, San Luis Potosi, San Miguel de Allende and Tijuana.

Recommended Guidebooks

Yucatan & Mayan Mexico by Nick Rider (Cadogan Guides).

Mexico City: An Opinionated Guide for the Curious Traveler by Jim Johnston (iUniverse).

Mexico Birds: An Introduction to Over 140 Familiar Species by James Kavanagh (International Nature Guides).

Eat Smart in Mexico by Joan Peterson (Ginkgo Press).

Additional Reading

Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans by Alan Riding (Vintage Books). An analysis of the Mexican psyche.

Insurgent Mexico by John Reed (Greenwood Press). Journalistic account of Reed's adventures with Pancho Villa's army in the Mexican Revolution. Somewhat dated and not terribly objective, it nonetheless is a fascinating look at the events that transformed Mexico in the early years of the 20th century.

The Labyrinth of Solitude by Octavio Paz (Grove). *The* scholarly exposition on the Mexican character by the country's Nobel Prize-winning poet.

Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel (Doubleday). A novel that relates the fantastic events—and fantastic food—experienced by a Mexican family in the early 1900s.

The Old Gringo by Carlos Fuentes (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). A novel by Mexico's pre-eminent fiction writer that concerns a U.S. journalist's experiences in the Mexican Revolution.

La Capital by Jonathan Kandell (Random House). A stirring and sweeping history of Mexico City from the time of the Aztecs through the colonial era and the Revolution to today. As engrossing for its social portraits as for its political analysis.

Mexican Days by Tony Cohan (Broadway Books). Good narrative travelogue covering central Mexico, Veracruz, Oaxaca and Chiapas.

Mexico, a Traveler's Literary Companion by C.M. Mayo (Whereabouts Press). A collection of literary stories about the country spanning multiple geographies and situations, from many of Mexico's best writers.

First Stop in the New World: Mexico City, the Capital of the 21st Century by David Lida (Riverhead). The definitive guide to the beauty, madness and contradictions of the country's capital.

Any of the superb *Artes de Mexico* series of quarterly journals, covering Mexican culture, folklore, history and tradition. These are essential guides to Mexico, told from a Mexican point of view. All are bilingual and are available online. <http://www.artesdemexico.com>.