

# México

## Getting Started



NAME:	Mexico
CAPITAL:	Mexico City
LANGUAGE:	Spanish
RELIGION:	Roman Catholic
CURRENCY:	Mexican Peso

### When to Visit

[Mexico's](#) coasts shift temperature from hot to hotter and humid, however this heat is why most people visit the country to begin with so there's no real bad time to visit unless you mistakenly arrive in Cancun on college spring break (and that's not your intention). Parts of the country's interior are quite mountainous and hence substantially cooler.

The coasts average about 86° F (30° C) in most places during July-August including [Puerto Vallarta](#) and Cancun. During the winters, the coasts dip a bit to about 74° F (23° C). The inland mountains get much cooler. In Mexico City temperatures range from about 62° F (17° C) in summer to about 53° F (12° C) in the winter.

The tourist spots' busy times tend to be over the summer months of July and August and during any major North American holiday period like Christmas-New Years and college spring break which shifts year to year, but tends to fall around Easter. Price also rise with the crowds.

A final point to consider before planning your travel is local holidays. Holidays can make travel either more attractive, such as for large festivals, or less attractive, due to tourist site closings and more expensive transportation options. To see [Mexico's Official & Unofficial Holidays](#), visit the [Mexican Government's Official Website](#).

### Weather

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit weather websites like [weather.com](#); many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

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## Tours & Cruises

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip, that involves little effort on your part, then you should consider going on an organized tour or cruise. Organized tours and cruises vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price, but all the options below will help you arrange all the details so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

[Caravan Tours](#): In business since the 1950s, Caravan offers tours too all ages, but there are few young people on many of their tours.

[Carnival Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Contiki Tours](#): A tour company that only offers tours to 18-35 year olds; known as offering fun and social tours for young singles and couples.

[Gap Adventures](#): Known best among young adults, Gap Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food, which cuts costs and introduces the local culture, but can also be challenging for those seeking luxury.

[Gecko's Adventures](#): Active in "responsible" tourism, Gecko's Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food in small group settings.

[Holland America Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Intrepid Travel](#): Boasts more "off the beaten track" destinations; do your research though since some tours are very adventurous and involves camping and local hotels.

[Journey Mexico](#): Personalized, high-end luxury travel, ranked highly by Conde Nast Traveler.

[Road Scholar](#): For older adults, Road Scholar offers tours with an educational emphasis; formerly known as Elder Hostel.

## Guidebooks

Although this mini travel guide to Mexico might be enough if you're traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with [Mexico](#), but if you need more detailed and up to date information, there are a number of great country-wide, region-wide, and city-wide guidebooks available for travel in Mexico.

[Eyewitness Guides](#): Incredible pictures and detailed maps of popular tourist sites including museums. Those living abroad can't put these books down.

[Fodor's](#): Good maps and information for the major tourist locations, but has little information for anyone heading off the beaten track. Great for those on organized tours.

[Frommer's](#): Incredible number of lists, which divide travel into various categories based upon your interests. Travelers looking to spend most of their time in a single location or on organized tours enjoy these books.

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

[National Geographic Traveler](#): Almost more of an information book about Mexico, than a guidebook; offers great pictures, maps, history, and culture. Popular with armchair travelers and history buffs on organized tours.

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# Culture

## Personality, Culture, & Identity

[Mexico](#) is like a child with multiple personalities disorder stuck in a dysfunctional family with daddy issues. Before independence, the Spanish and indigenous populations had an awkward relationship based upon miscommunication and today's Mexico is the result of this marriage.

[Mexico](#)'s father, Spain abused, ignored, neglected, and exploited Mexico for centuries resulting in Mexico's lack of interest in her father, however, like any abused child taking her father's name, Mexico has taken the Spanish language as a constant reminder of her past. On the other hand, although her mother initially appeared weak due to the Aztecs quick fall from power, Mexico today is continuously turning more and more to her mother through indigenous clothing, foods, architecture, and history.

From the time [Mexico](#) gained independence to today, the people and government officials have fought over which direction to go, who should lead, how they should lead, and what their priorities are. With each presidency (many of which lasted less than a year) a different group was represented, a different opinion was stressed, and a different minority was suppressed. But worse, as each group or president came to power their loyalties and focus always shifted from the people's needs to their own personal interests as each discovered the profit available in running a government.

The constant instability in [Mexico](#) has stolen any identity from the people of Mexico as many dream of one day running away from this dysfunctional family and starting a new life elsewhere; even if that means a new life with their seemingly arrogant neighbor to the north, who many of them envy and secretly dream of each night.

## History

[Mexico](#)'s history begins with their ancient civilizations of the Mayans and Aztecs among others. These two groups created strong governments, cultures, communication, and architecture that still stands today. These cultures are still known for their monuments, like the ones in Chichen Itza or the city of Teotihuacan, but also for their incredible understanding of astrology and their tendency to sacrifice humans to appease the gods.

Despite the arrival of the [Europeans](#) and the incredibly quick fall of the native civilizations, modern day [Mexico](#) takes much of its culture and heritage from these ancient peoples. Most Mexicans have at least some native blood in them and the Mexican flag is taken from the Aztecs' (also known as Mexica) sighting of an eagle devouring a snake while standing on a cactus.

The [European](#) arrival also destroyed much of the local population as each group approached the other with hesitancy. The Spanish arrived en-force in modern-day [Mexico](#) in 1519 and the two groups saw the other as mystical. The Aztecs believed, according to their calendar, that the god Quetzalcoatl was to return from the east that year and when Cortez arrived on horseback it was believed he was Quetzalcoatl so the Aztecs let the Spanish into their city. On the other hand, the Spanish believed the Aztecs to be sub-human and didn't believe otherwise until Pope Paul III determined the Aztecs to be so in 1537.

The influence the Spanish had on [Mexico](#) was significant, beginning with the conversion of much of the local population to Catholicism. However soon after this conversion, the people weren't treated as equals so much as being treated like slaves as the Spanish began ruthlessly exploiting the local populations.

As chaos ensued in [Europe](#), particularly war with [France](#) and Napoleon's eventual takeover of Spain, tensions rose in [Mexico](#) as the different groups fought over power until 1810 when Padre Miguel Hidalgo launched a rebellion for independence. After 11 years of

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fighting, Mexico won independence. However, from 1821 until the 1860 Mexico's political stability was non-existent and they were continuously invaded as they failed to control their lands.

Beginning in 1866 [Mexico](#) undertook a number of changes including greater access to education, better transportation networks, and improved healthcare, but during this time, free elections were stopped and in 1910 the Mexican Revolution broke out to remedy this, but not without first killing nearly 15% of the country and destroying any stability the government once held.

From 1920 until today [Mexico](#) has been under strict government rule and the people have hardly had a chance at a fair election or any freedoms at all. This has caused emigration, particularly to the [United States](#) a growing concern for both Americans and Mexican alike.

## **Dress & Behavior**

There are few dress or behavioral restrictions in [Mexico](#). Many tourists visit Mexico solely for the beaches so scantily clad dress is commonly accepted. However, unlike many beaches in [Europe](#), sunbathing naked is not always permitted. Check with local restrictions; while some beaches may permit naked sunbathing, many tend to forbid this.

To learn about dining etiquette in [Mexico](#), see the section below.

# Food

## **Dinning Etiquette**

Eating in [Mexico](#) is a social event so the eating itself will always be severely delayed. If you're asked to meet at 6:00 at a restaurant, your acquaintances most likely won't show up until 6:30 or even 7:00. You'll then most likely wait another 30 minutes for a table and after you finally sit down, expect to have drinks and conversation for another half hour before ordering. This essentially means that meeting at 6:00 for dinner won't get food in your mouth until 8:00, if not later. This same time frame is fairly consistent if you get invited to dinner at a local's house; plan on arriving at least 30 minutes late or you'll be imposing on the host who still has plenty of work to finish.

Dinning takes so long in [Mexico](#) because it's meant to be enjoyed with family and friends; don't rush this process (instead eat a snack before going to dinner or eat a late lunch). Trying to expedite dinner can be seen as a sign that you want to finish dinner and escape your company. The primary motivation for dining with others is to socialize, not to eat.

Once you actually get to a dining room, wait until your host invites you to sit and once seated, never place your hands under the table. During dinner festivities, reserve the toast-making to men. Once you finally get to the food, wait until your host takes his or her first bite, then feel free to begin. As you close in on finishing your food, leave a little food left on the plate. Despite the protests of lunch ladies across the [United States](#) reminding you that there are starving children elsewhere in the world, finishing all the food on your plate is somewhat rude, especially in a home.

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## History & Influences

[Mexican](#) food is primarily the result of Mayan and Spanish influences. The Mayans lived off the land as hunters & gathers, eating any local meats along with fruits, chilies, beans, tomatoes, avocado, herbs, and the most common ingredient, corn.

When the Spanish arrived they brought with them new meats in beef, pork, and chicken, a new starch in rice, along with other common ingredients in today's Mexican cooking like garlic and onions. Today, most [Mexican](#) dishes include a variety of these ingredients, although cooking styles and combinations have continuously developed over time.

Due to the popularity of [Mexican](#) food, particularly in the [United States](#), many dishes have gained alterations to the originals and other dishes have actually been created outside of Mexico by Mexican immigrants. For example, the tostada was created in [San Antonio, Texas](#), refried beans were also created in [Texas](#), and the burrito was created in [California](#). Other "Mexican favorites" were also invented in the United States like nachos & chimichangas.

## Staple Foods

**Tortillas** - flat bread typically made of corn, but sometimes made from flour

**Beans** - often served as a side dish with any dinner main course or as an ingredient

**Rice** - again, often served as a side dish or as an ingredient

**Vegetables** - varies by region, local vegetables are often included in dishes; some of the most common being both hot and sweet peppers, chilies, and onions

## Regional Varieties & Specialties

**North** - this area is known for their emphasis on meat dishes

**Southeast** - known for their blends of spices and focus on fish or chicken-based dishes

**Southwest** - this region is famous for their moles (pepper-based sauces) and tamales (corn meal encased meats, vegetables, or cheeses)

## Drinks

Although water is the world's most common drink, don't ever drink the tap water in [Mexico](#); it is not known for its cleanliness or purity.

[Mexico](#) has a number of popular alcoholic drinks, including the one they're synonymous with: tequila. Other well known drinks include margaritas (which again use tequila) and the mojito, which is made of fresh mint, lime, sugar and either rum or tequila among other ingredients. Lastly, Mexico has a few local beers, which are popular.

# Practical Information

## Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter [Mexico](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. To learn more about who need visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit the [Website of Your Local Mexican Embassy](#) (this link is only in Spanish) or the [Mexican Department of External Relations](#).

## Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including [Mexico](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, Mexico didn't have any health immunizations that are required prior to arrival, although a number of immunizations are strongly recommended.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

## Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to [Mexico](#), then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices during your trip.

**Largest International Airlines:** [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

**Largest Mexican Airlines:** [AeroMexico](#) & [VivaAerobus](#).

**Largest Rental Car Agencies in Mexico:** [Budget](#); [Dollar](#); [Hertz](#); [Thrifty](#).

**Flight & Rental Car Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

## Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping options.

**Popular International Hotel Chains:** [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges); [Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

**Hotel Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

**Hostels:** Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

**Camping:** The best starting point for [Camping Options in Mexico](#) can be found on the [Official Mexico Tourism Board's Website](#)

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## Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

[Mexico](#) is on the same time schedule as much of southern [Europe](#). Shops and tourist attractions tend to open at about 9:00-10:00 am and close at about 5:00 pm, but inconsistencies are everywhere. Many factory workers put in much more than 40 hours a week, while shops and attractions may open late, close early, or shut down mid-afternoon based upon whose working that day and what their personal schedules look like. Having said that, all major tourist attractions are on a set schedule and don't tend to shift based upon whose working. Weekends in Mexico are Saturdays and Sundays.

Restaurant hours vary depending on what they serve and who they cater to. Most [Mexicans](#) eat a modest breakfast, have a large lunch at about 2:00-4:00 pm then a light dinner at about 7:00-9:00 pm. In tourist locations restaurants tend to be open all day or are on the [American](#) and [Canadian](#) eating time schedule (lunch at about 11:30 am-2:00 pm and dinner anywhere from 5:00-9:00 pm), however restaurants catering to the locals will only open (or begin service) at about 2:00 pm so you could be stuck waiting hours to get some food.

Bars are very popular in tourist destinations in [Mexico](#), although most people stay at all-inclusive resorts, which eliminates the need for outside bars. Bars tend to open late and tend to close later. Most places in Mexico allow open intoxicants so as bars close they may offer you a plastic glass to pour your drink into to finish on the way home. In tourist locations, bars and dance clubs tend to be on the [American](#) schedule, however remain open later (9:00 pm-past 2:00 am).

[Mexico](#) is relatively inexpensive on [European](#) standards, however at the all inclusive resorts the prices can escalate quickly. Decent hotels can easily be found for about 500 pesos (\$40) a night (make sure they have air conditioning included), while resorts tend to begin at 1,200 pesos (\$100) during the off season, but more during peak tourist times. Food can range greatly from street food for 30 pesos (\$3) and up; average prices are about 200-250 pesos (\$10-20) for a good meal in a clean restaurant. Transportation costs in Mexico are reasonable if you

take buses, however due to the country's size and mountainous interior, flying or renting a car is often times more convenient. Car rentals tend to be about \$40 a day and one-way domestic flights begin at about \$100, both of which are often times quoted in US dollars.

When eating out at a sit-down restaurant a tip of between 10-16% (before tax is added) is expected, but some restaurants catering for tourists already include a service charge in the bill so check before tipping. In bars a tip of 10 pesos (\$1) per drink is standard and for bell hops in hotels 10 pesos (\$1) a bag is appreciated. For tourist services that last more than a couple hours (driver, tour guide in a museum, etc.) tips are expected for the guides in the amount of a few US dollars or Euros. Other services, like taxis don't expect a tip, however if extra service is given so should a tip.

## Crime & Safety

[Mexico](#) can be extremely dangerous or safe and luxurious depending on how and where you travel. Most major crimes target the local drug and human traffickers in Mexico's major cities and US border towns. For most tourists who book an all-inclusive resort, arriving, taking a taxi to the resort, and relaxing on your private beach for a week poses little threat.

The biggest threats to the tourist are the oceans, the pick pocketers, and the scams, which are numerous both before you arrive and after landing. The oceans can be very dangerous if you don't know the currents and geography so remaining on beaches with lifeguards or simply remaining in your resort's pool are your best options. While swimming though, another threat is the robbery of your unprotected possession that remain on the beach.

Major cities, tourist locations, and public transportation are breeding grounds for pick pocketers so keep your passport and wallet protected at all times if they're not locked away in your hotel safe.

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The first of many scams are by taxi drivers, in both legitimate and fake taxis so be careful which taxi you step into. There are often times two taxis, one is owned by the Mexican government and the second by the state government you're in. Both of these are overly expensive but generally safe so long as you make sure you pay in advance at the airport or the driver uses his meter. Don't get into any unmarked taxi and be extra cautious in Mexico City with all taxi drivers, even in government-owned taxis. Another scam is the booking of fake hotels and resorts. While this is quickly decreasing in popularity, booking your flight and hotel through a respected travel agency or at a chain you are familiar with will prevent any related stress.

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