

Directory

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ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations in Mexico range from hammocks and huts to hotels of every imaginable standard upwards to super-luxury resorts. This book divides accommodations into three price ranges: budget (where a typical room for two people costs under M\$400), midrange (M\$400 to M\$1000) and top end (above M\$1000).

Budget accommodations include camping grounds, hammocks, palm-thatched *cabañas*, backpacker hostels, guesthouses and economical hotels. Recommended accommodations in this range will be simple and without frills but generally clean. Hotel rooms usually have

a private bathroom containing hot shower, WC and washbasin. (In this book, rooms are assumed to have private bathroom unless otherwise stated.)

Midrange accommodations are chiefly hotels, ranging in comfort and atmosphere according to price, though in some areas of Mexico even M\$400 can get you a cozy, attractively decorated room in a friendly small hotel. Some midrange hotels have swimming pools, restaurants, in-house travel agencies and other facilities. Many of the country's most appealing and memorable lodgings are in this price bracket – small or medium-sized hotels, well-designed and cared for, with a friendly atmosphere and personal attention from staff. In some places you'll also find apartments, bungalows and more comfortable *cabañas* in this same price range.

Top-end hotels run from the classier hotels in the cities to deluxe coastal resort hotels and luxurious smaller establishments catering to travelers with a taste for comfort and beautiful design, and the funds to pay for it.

Room prices given in this book, except where stated otherwise, are high-season prices. The exact dates of the high season vary from city to city, and sometimes between different hotels in the same city, but in most of Mexico high season typically means *Semana Santa* (the week before Easter and a couple of days after it), most of July and August, and the Christmas–New Year holiday period of about two weeks. Outside the high seasons, many midrange and top-end establishments in tourist destinations cut their room prices by 10% to 40%. Budget accommodations are more likely to keep the same rates all year. Through this book we note major deviations from the normal seasonal pattern; in many places on the Pacific coast, for example, high season runs from December right through to Easter. We also note special deals, low weekend rates and other ways you can cut costs.

In this book we use 'single' (abbreviated to 's') to mean a room for one person, and 'double' ('d') to mean a room for two people. Mexicans sometimes use the phrase *cuarto sencillo* (literally, single room) to mean a room with one bed, which may be a *cama matrimonial* (double bed); sometimes one person

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

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

can occupy such a room for a lower price than two people. A *cuarto doble* often means a room with two beds, which may both be *camas matrimoniales*.

In popular destinations at busy times, it's best to reserve a room in advance or go early in the day to secure a room. Many places take reservations through their websites or by email. Otherwise try by telephone – if the place is not booked out, a simple phone call earlier in the day, saying what time you'll arrive, is usually sufficient. A few places are reluctant to take reservations, but don't worry, you'll always end up with a room somewhere.

Accommodation prices are subject to two taxes: IVA (value-added tax; 15%) and ISH (lodging tax; 2% or 3% depending on the state). Many budget and some midrange establishments only charge these taxes if you require a receipt, and they quote room rates accordingly (ie not including taxes). Generally, though, IVA and ISH are included in quoted prices. In top-end hotels a price may often be given as, say, 'M\$1500 *más impuestos*' (M\$1500 plus taxes), in which case you must add 17% or 18% to the figure. When in doubt, you can ask, '*¿están incluidos los impuestos?*' ('are taxes included?'). Prices given in this book are those you are most likely to be charged at each place, with or without the taxes, according to the establishment's policy.

In our accommodations listings the internet icon (🌐) means that the establishment has internet-connected computers for guests to use (this service may or may not be free of charge). A growing number of accommodations also provide wi-fi access for those traveling with their own machines.

The air-con icon (❄️) means that the establishment offers at least some rooms with air-conditioning.

Similarly, the nonsmoking icon (🚭) indicates that some rooms, but not necessarily all, are nonsmoking.

Apartments

In many resort areas you can find tourist apartments with fully equipped kitchens. Some are very comfortable and attractive and they can be good value for three or four people, especially if you're staying more than a few days. The internet, local ads and tourist offices are good sources of information on these.

B&Bs

Mexico's growing number of B&Bs, mostly found in tourist destinations, are usually small, comfortable, midrange or top-end guesthouses, often beautifully designed and offering friendly, personal attention from the owners.

Bungalows, Cabañas & Villas

Cabañas are usually huts (of wood, brick, adobe, stone or other materials) with a palm-thatched roof. The most basic have dirt floors and nothing inside but a bed, and you provide the padlock for the door. At the other extreme, some *cabañas* are positively deluxe, with electric light, mosquito nets, large comfy beds, private bathroom, fans, décor, hammock-strung deck and even air-con and kitchen – though they'll usually still have an agreeably rustic, close-to-nature ambience. Prices for simple *cabañas* run from about M\$100 to M\$200. The most expensive ones are on the Caribbean, where some luxury *cabañas* cost over M\$1000.

A bungalow is usually similar to upper-range *cabañas* but more sturdily built and generally forming part of a midrange or top-end hotel. Bungalows are typically free-standing units set in gardens or grounds. Villas, in hotel contexts, tend to be even more sturdy, comfortable and upmarket.

Camping & Trailer Parks

Most organized campgrounds are actually trailer parks set up for RVs (recreational vehicles, camper vans) and trailers (caravans), but are open to tent campers at lower rates. They're most common along the coasts. Some are very basic, others quite luxurious. Expect to pay between M\$100 and M\$200 to pitch a tent for two, and M\$250 to M\$300 for two people with a vehicle, using full facilities. Quite a lot of restaurants and guesthouses in beach spots or country areas will let you pitch a tent on their patch for around M\$25 to M\$40 per person.

Hammocks

You will find hammock space – and often hammocks too – available in many of the more low-key beach spots in the southern half of the country. A hammock can be a very comfortable, not to mention cheap, place to sleep in hot, southern areas (keep mosquito repellent handy). You can rent one and a place to hang it, usually under a palm roof outside a small posada or beach restaurant, for M\$30 or M\$40 in some places, though it can reach M\$100 on the more expensive Caribbean coast. With your own hammock, the cost comes down a bit. It's easy enough to buy hammocks in Mexico, especially in the states of Oaxaca and Chiapas and on the Yucatán Peninsula.

Hostels

There are now hostels suitable for budget travelers in most towns and cities where this kind of traveler congregates. If you follow reasonably well-trodden trails, it's quite easy to stay in nothing but hostels throughout your entire Mexico trip. Hostels provide dormitory accommodation for typically between M\$70 and M\$150 per person, plus communal kitchens, bathrooms, living space and, in many cases, some economical private rooms as well. Some of the best places offer extra enticements such as pools, bars, gardens, sun decks, internet access and even design and charm. Standards of cleanliness and security do vary, but popular hostels are great places for meeting fellow travelers, and word of mouth will often let you know which is the best one in town to head for if you want a party scene/decent sunbathing area/good night's sleep. **Hostelworld** (www.hostelworld.com) and **HostelBookers** (www.hostelbookers.com) provide plentiful listings and offer online reservations.

Fourteen hostels are members of Mexico's HI affiliate, **Hostelling International Mexico** (www.hostellingmexico.com, www.hihostels.com), whose flagship is **Hostel Mundo Joven Catedral** (p166) in Mexico City. There are small discounts for HI members at these places. **Ciara Hostels** (www.ciarogroup.com) is a small, independent group with half a dozen hostels in Mexico City and the southeast.

Note that the Spanish word *hostal* actually means 'small hotel' rather than 'hostel', but is now increasingly used for both types of place.

Hotels

Mexico specializes in good midrange hotels, where two people can get a comfortable room with private bathroom, and usually air-con, for about M\$400 to M\$1000. The more you pay within that price range, the more facilities, comfort, style and design the place is likely to have. Many Mexican hotels have modernized and upgraded their facilities in recent years, adding aesthetics and additional comforts to their priorities, often in pleasing combinations of contemporary and traditional, Mexican and internationally influenced taste. Many midrange hotels have a restaurant, bar and internet facilities (often including wi-fi). Quite a lot have swimming pools. Among the most charming lodgings, in both the midrange and the top-end brackets, are the many old mansions, inns, and even monasteries and convents, turned into hotels. These can be wonderfully atmospheric, with fountains gurgling in flower-decked, stone-pillared courtyards or verdant gardens. These are probably the lodgings you will remember most fondly after your trip. Modern hotels are often designed around traditional patio-based plans too.

Every Mexican town also has its cheap hotels. There are clean, friendly, secure ones, and there are dark, dirty, smelly ones where you may not feel your belongings are safe. Adequate rooms with a private hot shower are available for under M\$300 per double in most of the country.

Mexico has plenty of top-end hotels too, particularly in the coastal resort towns and largest cities. They offer the expected levels of luxury – with pools, gyms, bars, restaurants and so on – at prices that are sometimes agreeably modest (and sometimes not!). They range in style from converted haciendas or small, chic boutique hotels to expansive modern resorts, but more often than not the architecture is eye-catching and the facilities and service excellent. Prices at many such establishments are highly flexible, and if you like to stay in luxury but also enjoy saving some money, look for deals on hotel websites or phone them up and ask how to obtain the best price.

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

PRACTICALITIES

- Mexicans use the metric system for weights and measures.
- Most prerecorded videotapes and DVDs on sale in Mexico (like the rest of the Americas and Japan) use the NTSC image registration system, incompatible with the PAL system common to most of Western Europe and Australia and the Secam system used in France.
- If buying DVDs, look for the numbered globe motif indicating which regions of the world it can be played in. Region 1 is the US and Canada; Europe and Japan are in region 2; and Australia and New Zealand join Mexico in Region 4.
- Electrical current is 110V, 60Hz, and most plugs have two flat prongs, as in the US and Canada.
- Mexico's only English-language daily newspaper is **The News** (www.thenews.com.mx). Distribution is very patchy outside Mexico City. The best and most independent-minded Spanish-language national newspapers include *Reforma* and the left-wing *La Jornada*.

Posadas & Casas de Huéspedes

Posadas are inns, meaning anything from basic budget hotels to tastefully designed, small, midrange places. A *casa de huéspedes* is a guesthouse, a home converted into simple guest lodgings, usually family-run and often with a relaxed, friendly atmosphere.

ACTIVITIES

You can hike, bike, climb, canoe, kayak, raft, ride horses and watch wildlife in some of Mexico's most spectacular areas, and have fun enjoying most imaginable aquatic activities along Mexico's coasts. Active tourism is a fast-growing field in Mexico. The following is a brief introduction to what you can do and where you can do it; for more detail, see the destination sections of this book. Good sources on active tourism in Mexico include **Amtave** (Mexican Association of Adventure Travel & Ecotourism; ☎ 55-5688-3883, 800-654-44-52; www.amtave.com), based in Mexico City with 60 member organizations and companies around the country, and the websites www.planeta.com, www.gorp.com and www.mexonline.com.

Canyoneering, Rappelling & Zip-lining

Matacanes (boxed text, p411) is heaven for canyoneers, with its 27 cliff jumps. Other good bases for this adrenaline-charging activity are Creel (see p349) and Durango (p380). There's exciting rappelling in places like the Sima de las Cotorras (p810) and Coscomatepec (p697), and fun zip-lining at places around Monterrey such as the Cañón de la Huasteca (p410) and Cascada Cola de Caballo (p410), or at Cascada de Tzarácua (p580), near Uruapan, and Las Nubes (p48) in Chiapas.

Climbing

The Monterrey area is Mexico's mecca for technical climbers, especially the limestone of Potrero Chico (p411), with 600 routes developed. Peaks in Mexico's central volcanic belt, including Pico de Orizaba (p699), Mexico's highest, and Iztaccíhuatl (p231), present fine challenges. A number of good climbing spots, some appropriate for beginners, have been opened up near Oaxaca (p723). You can also climb in the Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon) area (p341) and Baja California's Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Mártir (p288). Guides are available for all these places. A good book is *Mexico's Volcanoes: A Climbing Guide* by RJ Secor. Conditions at high altitude are best from October to February.

Hiking

Trails in the Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon; p341) and Oaxaca's Pueblos Mancomunados (p747) are among the most spectacular, popular and developed. Mountains you can summit without technical climbing include Nevado de Toluca (p269), Volcán Parícutín (p581), Volcán Nevado de Colima (p555), La Malinche (p237), Volcán San Martín (p704) and Volcán Tacaná (p860). There's also good hiking on the lower slopes of Iztaccíhuatl (p231). Other fine hiking areas are the forests of the Reserva de la Biosfera El Cielo (p423), Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda (boxed text, p651) and Reserva de la Biosfera Calakmul (p955), and the deserts of the Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra de la Laguna (p308). A guide is a very good idea for many routes, as trail marking is generally incipient

and walking alone across remote territory can be risky. The best seasons for hiking vary from place to place, but conditions at high altitude are usually best from October to February.

Horseback Riding

Ever more popular among visitors, excellent riding is available at many places, including the Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon; p341), Sinaloa's Tufted Jay Preserve (boxed text, p441), Puerto Vallarta (p456), Real de Catorce (p610) and Teotitlán del Valle (p741). And you can canter along the beaches at Mazatlán (p433), Sayulita (p451), Barra de Potosí (p498), Zihuatanejo (p491), Pie de la Cuesta (p499), Puerto Escondido (p756) and many other Pacific resorts.

Mountain Biking

Countless tracks and trails through magnificent country await pedalers. You'll find mountain bikes available for rent or for guided trips of up to several days in places as diverse as Loreto (p300) in Baja California, the mountains around Monterrey (p409), the Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon; p341), Coscomatepec (p697), Oaxaca (p723), Puerto Vallarta (p457), around San Cristóbal de Las Casas (p824), and many places on the flat Yucatán Peninsula. See p990 for some tips on cycling in Mexico.

Water Sports

Most coastal resorts rent snorkel gear and can arrange boat and fishing trips. There's great diving along the Caribbean coast, but also some fine spots on the Pacific. Waterskiing, parasailing, jet skiing and 'banana' riding are widespread resort activities. Always cast an eye over the equipment before taking off.

FISHING

Mexico is justly famous for its sportfishing for marlin, swordfish, sailfish and tuna along the Pacific coast and Sea of Cortez. Deep-sea charters are available in all of the major Pacific resorts, many of them now practicing catch-and-release for billfish. The prime locations include Ensenada (p286), San Carlos (p332), Mazatlán (p433), Puerto Vallarta (p456), Barra de Navidad (p472), Manzanillo (p476), Zihuatanejo (p493), Acapulco (p509), Puerto Escondido (p756) and Puerto Ángel (p766). In general the biggest catches occur from April to July and from October to December. Fishing

licenses (costing around M\$130/250 per day/week) are required for fishing from boats in estuaries and on the ocean; charters usually include them, but you'll need your own if you hire a local fisher to take you out. Most towns have an *oficina de pesca* (fisheries office) that issues licenses.

Elsewhere, there's lake and reservoir fishing inland, and some very good lagoon, river and sea fishing along the Gulf and Caribbean coasts. Fans flock to La Pesca (p420) in the northeast, and Punta Allen (p904) and Xcalak (p907) in the southeast.

KAYAKING, CANOEING & RAFTING

Mexico's many coastal lagoons and sheltered bays make magnificent waters for kayaks and canoes, and there's often interesting wildlife to be seen in the places you'll reach. Rent equipment or take guided trips at prime sites such as Mulegé (p297), La Paz (p303) and Loreto (p300) in Baja California; Mazatlán (p433), Barra de Potosí (p498) and Laguna Manialtepec (p762) on the Pacific coast; Campeche (p950) on the Gulf coast; and on the Caribbean coast at Bahías de Punta Solimán (p895), or Xcalak (p907).

Veracruz state, where rivers fall dramatically from the Sierra Madre Oriental to the coastal plain, is the place for white-water rafting, called *descenso de ríos* in Mexico. The two main centers are Tlapacoyan (p675) and Jalcomulco (p684). You can also raft on some rivers in the Lacandón Jungle in Chiapas (see p817). Always use a reliable company with good equipment and experienced guides.

A Gringo's Guide to Mexican Whitewater by Tom Robey details 56 kayak, canoe and raft runs on 37 different rivers.

SNORKELING & DIVING

The Caribbean is world famous for its wonderful coral reefs and translucent waters full of tropical fish. Great diving locations include Cozumel (p887), Isla Mujeres (p876), Playa del Carmen (p883) and the Banco Chinchorro coral atoll (p906). Most of these are good for snorkeling too. Inland, you can dive some of the Yucatán's famed cenotes (limestone sinkholes) near Akumal (p894) and Tulum (p898) and at Gran Cenote (p901), and there are few more extraordinary experiences than snorkeling amid Mexico's northern deserts in the pellucid pools of Cuatro Ciénegas (p389).

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR DIVING

Before embarking on a scuba-diving, skin-diving or snorkeling trip, carefully consider the following points to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience:

- Possess a current diving-certification card from a recognized scuba-diving instruction agency (if scuba diving).
- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable diving.
- If you don't have your own equipment, ask to see the dive shop's before you commit. And make sure you feel comfortable with your dive master: after all, it's your life.
- Obtain reliable information about physical and environmental conditions at the dive site from a reputable local dive operation, and ask how local trained divers deal with these considerations.
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about marine life and the environment.
- Dive only at sites within your level of experience; if available, engage the services of a competent, professionally trained dive instructor or dive master.
- Be aware that underwater conditions vary significantly from one region (or even site) to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any site or dive conditions. These differences influence the way divers dress for a dive and what diving techniques they use.
- Know the locations of the nearest decompression chambers and the emergency telephone numbers.
- Avoid diving less than 18 hours before a high-altitude flight.

On the Pacific coast, strap on your tanks at San Blas (p445), Puerto Vallarta (p456), Manzanillo (p475), Zihuatanejo (p491), Puerto Escondido (p756) or Bahías de Huatulco (p779). There's top snorkeling at most of these places too, and elsewhere.

Baja California's top diving and/or snorkeling bases are Mulegé (p297), Loreto (p300), La Paz (p303), La Ventana (p307), Cabo Pulmo (p307) and Cabo San Lucas (p312).

When renting diving equipment, try to make sure that it's up to standard. And beware of dive shops that promise certification after just a few hours' tuition. Make sure the dive shop is certified by **PADI** (www.padi.com), **NAUI** (www.nau.com) or the internationally recognized Mexican diving organization **FMAS** (www.fmas.org.mx), and that its accreditation is up to date.

Coral reefs and other marine ecosystems are particularly fragile environments. For tips on responsible diving, see the boxed text on p889.

SURFING, WINDSURFING & KITEBOARDING

The Pacific coast has awesome surf. Among the very best are the summer breaks at Costa Azul (Zipper's) in Baja California (see p311); the 'world's longest wave' on Bahía de Matanchén (p444), near San Blas; and

the barreling 'Mexican Pipeline' at Puerto Escondido (p753). Other fine spots include Ensenada (p284), Todos Santos (p315), Mazatlán (p432), Sayulita (p451), Manzanillo (p475), Boca de Pascuales (p480), Barra de Nexpa (p482), Troncones (p485), Acapulco's Playa Revolcadero (p508) and Barra de la Cruz (p783)...for starters. Most beach breaks receive some sort of surf all year, but wave season is really May to October or November, with June, July and August the biggest months. You can rent surfboards and take classes in many spots. If you're planning to fly to Mexico with your own board, check with the airline first: most of them charge US\$50 or more (each way) to carry surfboards, and some won't carry them at all to some destinations or at some times of year.

Los Barriles (p307) is Baja California's windsurfing capital (September to March) and the same winds blow at La Ventana (p307), which is also good for kiteboarding. Further south, Puerto Vallarta (p456) and Manzanillo (p475) can be good too.

Wildlife- & Bird-Watching

Observing Mexico's varied and exotic fauna is an increasingly popular and practicable pastime – see p114 for an introduction to what you can see and where.

BUSINESS HOURS

Stores are typically open from 9am to 8pm, Monday to Saturday. In the south of the country and in small towns, some stores close for a siesta between 2pm and 4pm, then stay open till 9pm. Some don't open on Saturday afternoon.

Offices have similar Monday to Friday hours to stores, with a greater likelihood of the 2pm to 4pm lunch break. Offices with tourist-related business, including airline and car-rental offices, usually open on Saturday too, from at least 9am to 1pm.

Typical restaurant hours are 7am (9am in central Mexico) to midnight. If a restaurant has a closing day, it's usually Sunday, Monday or Tuesday. Cafés typically open from 8am to 10pm daily.


Banks are normally open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1am Saturday. In smaller towns they may close earlier or not open on Saturday. *Casas de cambio* (money-exchange offices) are usually open from 9am to 7pm daily, often with even longer hours in coastal resorts.

Post offices typically open from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1pm Saturday.

In this book we spell out opening hours where they differ from those above.

It's worth remembering that supermarkets and department stores usually open from 9am or 10am to 10pm every day, and stores in malls and coastal resort towns often open on Sunday too.

CHILDREN

Mexicans love children, and will affectionately call any child whose hair is less than jet black 'güero' (blondie). With a tiny handful of exceptions, children are welcome at all kinds of hotels and in virtually every café and restaurant. In this book you'll find especially child-friendly attractions and places to stay and eat identified with the  icon.

The sights, sounds and colors of Mexico excite and stimulate most children, but few kids like traveling all the time; they're happier if they can settle into a place for a while and make friends. Try to give them time to get on with some of what they like doing back home. Children are also more easily affected than adults by heat, disrupted sleeping patterns and strange food. They need time to acclimatize and you should take extra care to

avoid sunburn. Ensure you replace fluids if a child gets diarrhea (see p1004).

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

Documents for Under-18 Travelers

To conform with regulations aimed at preventing international child abduction, minors (people under 18) traveling to Mexico without one or both of their parents may need to carry a notarized consent form signed by the absent parent or parents, giving permission for the young traveler to make the international journey. Airlines flying to Mexico may refuse to board passengers without it. In the case of divorced parents, a custody document may be required. If one or both parents are dead, or the traveler has only one legal parent, a death certificate or notarized statement of the situation may be required.

Contact a Mexican consulate to find out what you need to do. Required forms for these purposes are usually available from these authorities.

Practicalities

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

It's usually not hard to find a babysitter if parents want to go out on their own – ask at your hotel. Diapers (nappies) are widely available, but if you depend on some particular cream, lotion, baby food or medicine, bring it with you.

The most family-oriented hotels, with expansive grounds and facilities like pools and playgrounds, tend to be found on the coasts. A few hotels (mostly top-end or upper mid-range) offer free accommodation for one or two kids under about 12 if they share a room with their parents. On flights to and within Mexico, children under two generally travel for 10% of the adult fare, as long as they do not occupy a seat, and those aged two to 11 normally pay 67%. Children under 13 pay half price on many Mexican long-distance buses, and if they're small enough to sit on your lap, they will usually go for free.

Sights & Activities

In some places, apart from the obvious beaches and swimming pools, you'll find special kids' attractions such as amusement parks, water parks, zoos, aquariums, safari parks and adventure parks with zip-lines, abseiling and other fun activities. These attractions tend to cluster in and around the cities – such as in Mexico City (p164), Monterrey (boxed text, p403) and Villahermosa (see Parque-Museo La Veta, p792, and Yumká, p797) – and in coastal resorts such as Cancún (p867), Mazatlán (p433) and Acapulco (p509).

Outdoor activity opportunities are growing fast all over Mexico (see p962), and kids don't have to be very old to enjoy snorkeling, watching wildlife, kayaking or riding bicycles or horses. Kids will enjoy some archaeological sites if they're into climbing pyramids and exploring tunnels (few aren't). On the Yucatán Peninsula, away from the beaches and snorkeling, some of the cenotes and caves, such as Boca del Puma (p881), Siete Bocas (p881), Loltún Caverns (p931) and the Grutas de Xtacumbilxunaan (p955), provide a touch of adventure.

CLIMATE CHARTS

June to October are the hottest and wettest months across most of Mexico. For tips on the best seasons to travel, see p31.

COURSES

Taking classes in Mexico is a great way to meet people and get an inside angle on local life as well as study the language, culture or cuisine. The country specializes in short courses in the Spanish language, and as the flavors of Mexican food gain a growing army of fans outside Mexico, cooking classes are becoming ever more popular.

In addition, Mexican universities and colleges often offer tuition to complement college courses you may be taking back home. For long-term study in Mexico you'll need a student visa; contact a Mexican consulate about these.

You'll find helpful links on study possibilities in Mexico on the **Lonely Planet website** (www.lonelyplanet.com).

Cooking

Oaxaca is Mexico's cooking-school capital (see boxed text, p726). Fans of Mexican food can also learn from experts how to

prepare delicious dishes at excellent cooking schools in Monterrey (p404), Puebla (see Restaurant Sacristía, p224), Tlaxcala (p234), Puerto Vallarta (p457) and even little Yambigapan (p704).

Language

Many of Mexico's most attractive and exciting cities are home to Spanish language schools, among them Cuernavaca, Guadalajara, Guanajuato, La Paz, Mérida, Morelia, Oaxaca, Mexico City, Monterrey, Pátzcuaro, Playa del Carmen, Puerto Escondido, Puerto Vallarta, Querétaro, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, San Miguel de Allende, Taxco, Veracruz and Xalapa (see city sections for more details). Many schools are private; some are affiliated to universities.

Depending on the school, you can study for any period from a few hours to a year. In many places you can enroll on the spot and may be able to start the same day. You may be offered accommodations with a local family as part of the deal, which can help your language skills as much as the formal tuition. In a growing number of schools, extra or alternative courses in art, crafts, dance, indigenous languages and in-depth studies of Mexico are also available.

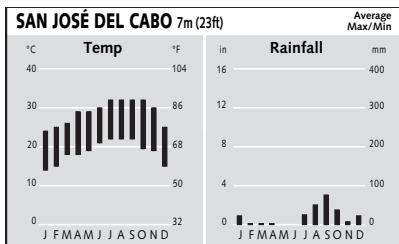
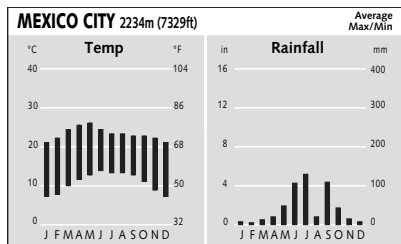
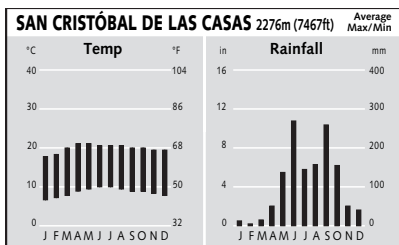
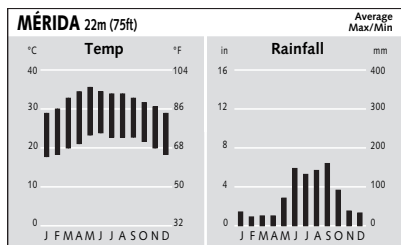
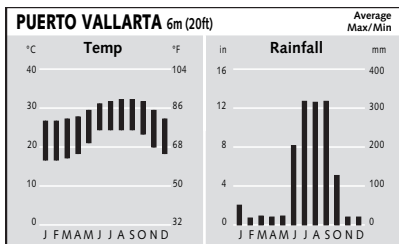
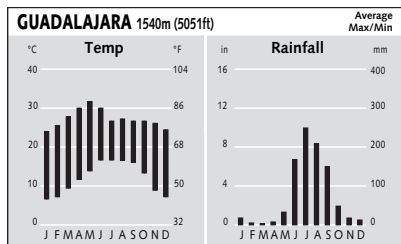
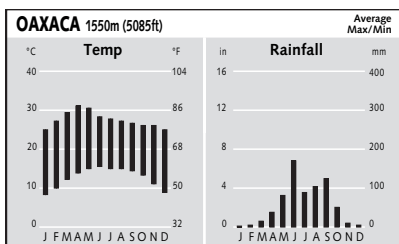
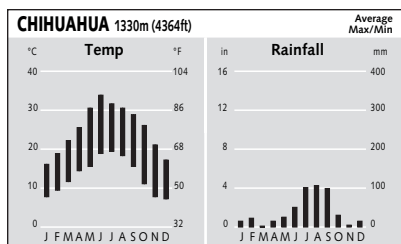
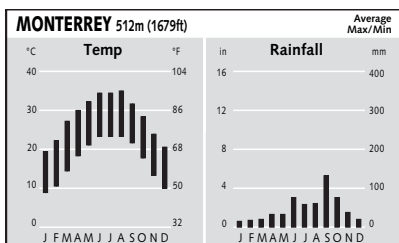
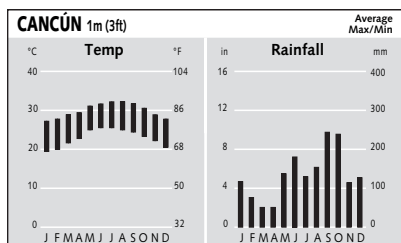
Costs per week, with accommodations and meals included, can range from around M\$2000 to over M\$5000 depending on the city or town, the school and how intensive the study is.

Useful information is available from the **National Registration Center for Study Abroad** (www.nrcsa.com), **AmeriSpan** (www.amerispan.com) and the **Council on International Educational Exchange** (www.ciee.org).

CUSTOMS

Things that visitors are allowed to bring into Mexico duty-free include items for personal use such as: clothing; two cameras; two mobile phones; a portable computer; a portable radio/CD or DVD player or digital music player; three surfboards or windsurfing boards; one musical instrument; one tent; four fishing rods; medicine for personal use, with prescription in the case of psychotropic drugs; 3L of wine and 3L of other alcoholic drinks (adults only); and 400 cigarettes (adults).

The normal routine when you enter Mexico is to complete a customs declaration form (which lists duty-free allowances), and



then place it in a machine. If the machine shows a green light, you pass without inspection. If a red light shows, your baggage will be searched.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Despite often alarming media reports and official warnings, Mexico is generally a safe place to travel, and with just a few precautions you can minimize the risk of encountering problems.

Some cities, such as Mexico City, Acapulco, Monterrey and several places along the US border (such as Nuevo Laredo, Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez), have a crime problem, but tourists are rarely involved in the drug trade-related violence that brings such a lot of bad publicity.

Enjoy yourself along the coasts, but beware of undertows and riptides on any ocean beach, and don't leave your belongings unattended on the beach while you swim. Run-and-grab thefts happen.

And everyone should be extremely careful with taxis in Mexico City.

Official information can make Mexico sound more alarming than it really is, and is not always up to date, but for a variety of useful information on travel to Mexico consult your country's foreign affairs department:

Australia (www.smartraveller.gov.au)

Canada (www.voyage.gc.ca)

UK (www.fco.gov.uk)

USA (travel.state.gov)

If you're already in Mexico, you can contact your embassy (opposite). Keep an ear to the ground as you travel. If you do become a crime victim, report the incident to the police and to your country's nearest consulate, which should be able to offer useful advice.

Theft & Robbery

As a rule, Mexicans are very honest and unlikely to steal anything from you. But thieves exist everywhere and tourists are vulnerable because they are generally wealthy by Mexican standards and are considered likely to be carrying valuables. Pocket-picking and purse- or bag-snatching are risks on crowded buses and subway trains, at bus stops, bus stations, airports, markets, packed streets and plazas, and anywhere frequented by large numbers of tourists – especially in Mexico City and other large cities.

Pickpockets often work in teams, crowding their victims in already crowded places like markets or city buses: one or two of them may grab your bag or camera (or your arm or leg), and while you're trying to get free another will pick your pocket. Or one may 'drop' something as a crowd jostles onto a bus and in the crush a pocket will be picked or a bag slashed. The objective is to distract you. If your valuables are underneath your clothing, the chances of losing them are greatly reduced.

Mugging is less common than pocket-picking and purse-snatching, but more alarming and more serious: resistance may be met with violence (do *not* resist). These robbers may force you to remove your money belt, watch, rings etc. They may be armed. Usually they will not harm you, they just want your money, fast. But there have been cases of robbers beating victims, or forcing them to drink large amounts of alcohol to extract credit-card security numbers.

To avoid being robbed in cities and even tourist resorts, do not go where there are few other people. This includes empty streets and empty metro cars at night, and little-used pedestrian underpasses and similar places. Use taxis instead of walking in potentially dodgy areas. And, in Mexico City, make sure you take the right kind of cab (see p141).

Isolated stretches of beach can also be risky. Never camp in any lonely spot unless you are absolutely sure it's safe.

As you travel, you will develop a sense of which situations and places are more threatening than others. To reduce your chances of becoming a victim, stick to the following rules:

- Walk with purpose and be alert to people around you.
- Leave most of your money, credit cards, passport, jewelry and air tickets in a sealed envelope in your hotel's safe, unless you have immediate need of these items. Virtually all hotels provide safe-keeping for guests' valuables. Failing that, leave your valuables in a locked bag in your room, or in a hostel locker. If you have to leave money or cards in your room, divide them into several stashes and hide them in different places.
- Carry a small amount of ready money – just enough for your outing – in a pocket. If you have to carry valuables, avoid making your pockets bulge with them, and

preferably keep them in a money belt, shoulder wallet or pouch *underneath* your clothing.

- Don't keep cash, credit cards, purses, bags or cameras in open view any longer than you have to. At ticket counters in bus stations and airports, keep your bag between your feet.
- Do not leave anything valuable-looking visible in a parked vehicle.
- Don't accept lifts from strangers.
- Be careful about accepting food or drinks from strangers, especially in resort cities and on buses; there have been cases of drugging followed by robbery and assault, including sexual assault.
- Go easy on alcohol – drunkenness makes you an easier victim.
- Use ATMs only in secure indoor locations, not those open to the street, and try to use them during daylight. Using stand-alone ATMs or booths on the street makes you more vulnerable to theft, and also to card 'cloning' (see p974).
- Cocaine and marijuana are prevalent in Mexico. They are both illegal. The easiest way to avoid problems connected with these drugs is by having nothing to do with them. If you get busted using or transporting illegal drugs, your consulate will not be able to get you out of trouble.

HIGHWAY ROBBERY

Bandits occasionally hold up buses, cars and other vehicles on intercity routes, especially at night, taking luggage or valuables. Sometimes buses are robbed by people who board as passengers. The best ways to avoid highway robbery are to travel by day and to travel on toll highways as much as possible. Deluxe and 1st-class buses use toll highways, where they exist; 2nd-class buses do not. Hwy 200, along the Pacific coast through Michoacán and Guerrero states and as far south as Huatulco in Oaxaca, Hwy 199 between Palenque and Ocosingo in Chiapas, and Hwy 175 between Oaxaca city and Pochutla, have all been the scene of highway robberies over the years.

DISCOUNT CARDS

The ISIC student card, the IYTC card for travelers under 26, and the ITIC card for teachers can help you obtain reduced-price air tickets to or from Mexico at student- and youth-oriented travel agencies. Reduced prices on Mexican

buses and at museums and archaeological sites are usually only for those with Mexican education credentials, but the ISIC, IYTC and ITIC will sometimes get you a reduction. The ISIC card is the most widely recognized. It may also get you discounts in a few hostels.

A Hostelling International card will save you M\$10 or so in some hostels in Mexico.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

If you're having trouble locating your nearest Mexican embassy or consulate, look at the website of Mexico's foreign ministry, the **Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores** (www.sre.gob.mx), which lists all Mexican diplomatic missions including the more than 30 consulates in US cities. Some Mexican embassy and consulate websites have useful information on visas and similar matters.

Embassies & Consulates in Mexico

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

Australia Mexico City (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-1101-2200; www.mexico.embassy.gov.au; Rubén Darío 55, Polanco; **M** Polanco)

Belize Chetumal (☎ 983-832-19-34; Av San Salvador 566, Fraccionamiento Flamboyanes); Mexico City (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-5520-1274; www.mfa.gov.bz; Bernardo de Gálvez 215, Lomas de Chapultepec; **M** Auditorio)

Canada Acapulco (☎ 744-484-13-05; Local 23, Centro Comercial Marbella); Cancún (☎ 998-883-33-60; Local 330,

3er Piso, Plaza Caracol II, Blvd Kukulcán Km 8.5, Zona Hotelera); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3671-4740; World Trade Center, Piso 8, Torre Pacífico, Av Otero 1249, Colonia Rinconada del Bosque); Mazatlán (☎ 669-913-73-20; Mexico Playa Mazatlán, Av Las Gaviotas 202, Zona Dorada); Mexico City (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-5724-7900; www.canada.gc.ca; Schiller 529, Polanco; **M** Auditorio); Monterrey (☎ 81-8344-3200;

Local 108A, C1 Piso, Edificio Kalos, Zaragoza 1300 Sur); Oaxaca (☎ 951-513-37-77; Local 11B, Pino Suárez 700); Puerto Vallarta (☎ 322-293-00-98; Edificio Obelisco Local 108, Av Francisco Medina Ascencio 1951, Zona Hotelera Las Glorias); San José del Cabo (☎ 624-142-43-33; Local 9,

Plaza José Green, Blvd Mijares); Tijuana (☎ 664-684-04-61; Condominio del Parque, Gedovius 10411-101, Zona Río)

Cuba Cancún (☎ 998-884-34-23; Pecari 17, SM 20); Mérida (☎ 999-944-42-15; Calle 1-D No 320, Colonia Campestre); Mexico City (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-5280-8039; www.embacuba.com.mx; Av Presidente Masaryk 554, Polanco; **M** Polanco)

France Acapulco (☎ 744-484-45-80; Despacho 205, Condominio NIKKO, La Costera 91, Fraccionamiento

Club Deportiva); Cancún (☎ 998-883-98-16; Colegio Británico, Pargo 24, SM 3); Mazatlán (☎ 669-985-12-28; Belisario Domínguez 1008 Sur, Colonia Centro); Mérida (☎ 999-925-28-86; Calle 33B No 528); Mexico City (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-9171-9700; www.francia.org.mx; Campos Elíseos 339, Polanco; **M** Auditorio); consulate in Mexico City (☎ 55-9171-9840; Lafontaine 32, Polanco); Oaxaca (☎ 951-515-21-84; Planta Baja, 3a Privada de J López Alavez 5, San Felipe del Agua)

Germany Acapulco (☎ 744-484-18-60; Alaminos 26, Casa Tres Fuentes, Colonia Costa Azul); Cancún (☎ 998-884-18-98; Punta Conoco 36, SM24); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3810-2146; Calle 7 No 319, Colonia Ferrocarril); Mazatlán (☎ 669-914-93-10; Av Playa Gaviotas 212, Zona Dorada); Mexico City (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-5283-2200; www.mexiko.diplo.de; Horacio 1506, Los Morales; **M** Polanco)

Guatemala Ciudad Hidalgo (☎ 962-698-01-84; 9a Calle Ote 11, Colonia San José); Comitán (☎ 963-632-26-69; 1a Calle Sur Pte 35); Mexico City (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-5540-7520; ambaguetemx@minex.gob.gt; Av Explanada 1025, Lomas de Chapultepec; **M** Auditorio); Tapachula (☎ 962-626-12-52; 5A Nte 5)

Ireland (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-5520-5803; embajada@ireland.org.mx; Piso 3, Cerrada Blvd Ávila Camacho 76, Lomas de Chapultepec; **M** Auditorio) In Mexico City.

Italy Cancún (☎ 998-884-12-61; Alcatrazes 39, SM22); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3616-1700; 1er Piso, Av López Mateos Nte 790, Fraccionamiento Ladrón de Guevara); Mexico City (Map pp126-7; ☎ 55-5596-3655; www.ambcittadelmessic.esteri.it; Paseo de las Palmas 1994, Lomas de Chapultepec)

Japan (Map pp132-3; ☎ 55-5211-0028; www.mx.emb-japan.go.jp; Paseo de la Reforma 395; **M** Sevilla) In Mexico City.

Netherlands Cancún (☎ 998-886-00-70; Martinair, Planta Alta, Terminal 2, Aeropuerto Cancún); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3673-2211; 2 Piso, Av Vallarta 5500, Colonia Lomas Universidad, Zapopan); Mexico City (☎ 55-5258-9921; www.paisesbajos.com.mx; 7th fl, Edificio Calakmul, Av Vasco de Quiroga 3000, Santa Fe)

New Zealand (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-5283-9460; kiwimexico@prodigy.net.mx; Level 4, Jaime Balmes 8, Los Morales; **M** Polanco) In Mexico City.

Spain Acapulco (☎ 744-484-88-15; La Costera 75); Cancún (☎ 998-848-99-18; Edificio Oasis, cnr Blvd Kukulkán & Cenzontle, Zona Hotelera); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3630-0450; Mezzanine Izquierdo, Torre Sterling, Francisco de Quevedo 117, Sector Juárez); Mexico City (Map pp136-7; ☎ 55-5280-4383; www.mae.es/consulados/mexico; Galileo 114, Polanco; **M** Polanco); Oaxaca (☎ 951-518-00-31; Calzada Porfirio Díaz 341, Colonia Reforma)

UK Cancún (☎ 998-881-01-00; Royal Sands, Blvd Kukulkán Km 13.5, Zona Hotelera); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3343-2296; Jesús de Rojas 20, Colonia Los Pinos, Zapopan); Mexico City (Map pp132-3; ☎ 55-5242-8500; www.britishembassy

.gov.uk/mexico; Río Lerma 71, Colonia Cuauhtémoc; **M** Insurgentes); consulate in Mexico City (☎ 55-5242-8500; Río Usamacinta 26); Tijuana (☎ 664-686-53-20; Blvd Salinas 1500, Fraccionamiento Aviación Tijuana)

USA Acapulco (☎ 744-469-05-56; Hotel Continental Emporio, La Costera 121, Local 14); Cabo San Lucas (☎ 624-143-35-66; Blvd Marina Local C4, Plaza Nautica, Centro); Cancún (☎ 998-883-02-72; 2o Nivel No 320-323, Plaza Caracol Dos, Blvd Kukulkán Km 8.5, Zona Hotelera); Ciudad Juárez (☎ 656-611-30-00; López Mateos 924 Nte); Guadalajara (☎ 33-3268-2100; Progreso 175, Colonia Américas); Hermosillo (☎ 662-289-35-00; Monterrey 141); Ixtapa (☎ 755-553-21-00; Hotel Fontán, Blvd Ixtapa); Matamoros (☎ 868-812-44-02; Calle 1 No 2002); Mazatlán (☎ 669-916-58-89; Hotel Playa Mazatlán, Av Las Gaviotas 202, Zona Dorada); Mérida (☎ 999-942-57-00; Calle 60 No 338K, btwn Calles 29 & 31); Mexico City (Map pp132-3; ☎ 55-5080-2000; www.usembassy-mexico.gov; Paseo de la Reforma 305; **M** Insurgentes); Monterrey (☎ 81-8345-2120; Av Constitución 411 Pte); Nogales (☎ 631-313-81-50; San José s/n, Fraccionamiento Los Álamos); Nuevo Laredo (☎ 867-714-05-12; Allende 3330); Oaxaca (☎ 951-514-30-54; Plaza Santo Domingo, Alcalá 407, Interior 20); Puerto Vallarta (☎ 322-222-00-69; Local 1, Interior 17, Paradise Plaza, Paseo de los Cocoteros 1, Nuevo Vallarta); San Miguel de Allende (☎ 415-152-23-57; Hernández Macías 72); Tijuana (☎ 664-622-74-00; Tapachula 96, Colonia Hipódromo)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Mexico's many fiestas are full-blooded, highly colorful affairs, which often go on for several days and provide the chili in the recipe of Mexican life. In addition to the major national festivals listed here, each town has many local saints' days, regional fairs, arts festivals and so on (see destination sections for more information). There's also a national public holiday just about every month (see opposite), often the occasion for yet further partying.

January

Día de los Reyes Magos (Three Kings' Day or Epiphany; January 6) This is the day when Mexican children traditionally receive gifts – rather than at Christmas – although some get two loads of presents!

February/March

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

Carnaval (late February or early March) A big bash preceding the 40-day penance of Lent, Carnival takes place during the week or so before Ash Wednesday (which falls

46 days before Easter Sunday). It's celebrated most wildly in Mazatlán, Veracruz and La Paz, with parades and masses of music, food, drink, dancing, fireworks and fun.

March/April

Semana Santa (Holy Week) Starts on Palm Sunday (Domingo de Ramos). Particularly colorful celebrations are held in San Miguel de Allende, Taxco and Pátzcuaro; most of Mexico seems to be on the move at this time.

September

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

November

Día de Todos los Santos (All Saints' Day; November 1) and **Día de Muertos** (Day of the Dead; November 2) Every cemetery in the country comes alive as families visit graveyards to commune with their dead on the night of November 1 and the day of November 2, when the souls of the dead are believed to return to earth. The souls of dead children (*angelitos*, little angels) are celebrated on November 1, All Saints' Day (see boxed text, p71).

December

Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe; December 12) A week or more of festivities throughout Mexico leads up to this celebration in honor of the Virgin who appeared to an indigenous Mexican, Juan Diego, in 1531, and has since become Mexico's religious patron. Children are taken to church dressed as little Juan Diegos or indigenous girls. The biggest festivities are at the *Basilica de Guadalupe* in Mexico City.

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

FOOD

Some of the Eating reviews in city sections of this book are divided into budget, midrange and top-end categories. We define a midrange restaurant as one where a main dish at lunch or dinner costs between M\$70 and M\$130; budget and top-end places charge less than M\$70 and over M\$130 respectively.

Typical restaurant hours are 7am (9am in central Mexico) to midnight. Restaurant hours are spelt out in this book's Eating sec-

tions if they don't conform to these standard hours. If a restaurant has a closing day, it's usually Sunday, Monday or Tuesday.

For a full introduction to Mexico's fabulously piquant cuisine, see the Food & Drink chapter (p91).

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

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

Gay Mexico Network (www.gaymexico.net) offers information plus accommodation and night-life listings for several cities and has a host of good links. **Gay Mexico** (www.gaymexico.com.mx) has a clickable map linking to gay guides for many cities. **Sergay** (www.sergay.com.mx), a Spanish-language magazine and website, is focused on Mexico City, but with bar, disco and meeting-place listings for the whole country. **Homópolis** (www.homopolis.com.mx) has further listings. Also well worth checking out are **Gay.com** (www.gay.com), with detailed gay travel guides for nine Mexican cities, the **International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association** (www.iglta.org), with worldwide information on travel providers in the gay sector, and **PlanetOut** (www.planetout.com).

San Diego-based **Arco Iris Tours** (www.arcoiris.com) specializes in gay travel to Mexico, including group trips to gay festivals in Cancún (May and November), Mexico City's Gay Pride Week (June), and New Year's in Puerto Vallarta.

HOLIDAYS

The chief times when Mexicans take breaks from work are *Semana Santa* (the week leading up to Easter and a couple of days afterwards), mid-July to mid-August, and the Christmas–New Year period. Transportation and tourist accommodations are heavily booked at these times.

The following national holidays see banks, post offices, government offices and many other offices and shops closed throughout Mexico:

- Año Nuevo** (New Year's Day) January 1
- Día de la Constitución** (Constitution Day) February 5
- Día de Nacimiento de Benito Juárez** (anniversary of Benito Juárez' birth) March 21
- Día del Trabajo** (Labor Day) May 1
- Día de la Independencia** (Independence Day) September 16
- Día de la Revolución** (Revolution Day) November 20
- Día de Navidad** (Christmas Day) December 25

Holidays that fall on Saturday or Sunday are often switched to the nearest Friday or Monday. In addition, many offices and businesses close on the following optional holidays:

- Día de la Bandera** (Day of the National Flag) February 24
- Viernes Santo** (Good Friday) Two days before Easter Sunday; April or May
- Cinco de Mayo** (anniversary of Mexico's victory over the French at Puebla) May 5
- Día de la Raza** (commemoration of Columbus' discovery of the New World) October 12
- Día de Muertos** (Day of the Dead) November 2
- Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe** (Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe) December 12

INSURANCE

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

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, ensure that you keep all documentation. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home. For further information on medical insurance, see p999.


For information on motor insurance see p994.

Worldwide travel cover is available online at lonelyplanet.com/bookings.

INTERNET ACCESS

Most travelers make constant use of Mexico's thousands of internet cafés (which typically charge M\$10 per hour) and free web-based email such as Gmail (mail.google.com), Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) and Hotmail (www.hotmail.com). Many Mexican internet cafés are equipped with CD burners, webcams, head-

phones, Skype and so on, but it's a good idea to carry your own or the camera-to-USB cable if you plan on burning photos to CD along the way.

Quite a lot of accommodations have internet-connected computers for guests to use (they receive an  icon in this book), a service for which they may or may not charge. For travelers with laptops, a growing number of accommodations provide wi-fi (*internet inalámbrico*) access – usually free – as do a few cafés, bars and airports.

For lots of useful stuff on connecting to the web while traveling, visit www.kropla.com. See p35 for some great websites to start your Mexico surfing.

LEGAL MATTERS

Mexican Law

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

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

It's against Mexican law to take any firearm or ammunition into the country (even unintentionally) without a permit from a Mexican embassy or consulate.

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

See p994 for information on the legal aspects of road accidents.

While the legal age for marriage is 12, sex with someone under 18 is illegal if their consent was obtained by deception, such as a false promise of marriage.

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

Getting Legal Help

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

or friends – but they can't get you out of jail. By Mexican law, the longest a person can be detained by police without a specific accusation is 72 hours.

Tourist offices in Mexico, especially those run by state governments, can often help you with legal problems such as complaints and reporting crimes or lost articles. The national tourism ministry, **Sectur** (☎ 078, 800-987-82-24), has two toll-free numbers offering 24-hour telephone advice.

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

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

MAPS

GeoCenter, Nelles, ITM and the AAA (American Automobile Association) all produce good country maps of Mexico, suitable for travel planning, and available internationally for between US\$6 and US\$15. The GeoCenter map is recommended for its combination of relief (terrain) shading, archaeological sites, national parks, roads (graded by quality) and settlements (graded by size). ITM publishes good 1:1,000,000 (1cm:10km) maps of some Mexican regions (including the Yucatán Peninsula and the Pacific coast). For information on road atlases, see p994.

Tourist offices in Mexico provide free city, town and regional maps of varying quality.

Bookstores and newsstands sell commercially published ones. **Inegi** (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática; ☎ 800-490-42-00; www.inegi.gob.mx) publishes two large-scale map series covering all of Mexico at 1:50,000 (1cm:500m) and 1:250,000 (1cm:2.5km), plus state maps at 1:700,000 (1cm:7km). Most of these maps have been updated within the past decade, and they are well worth having if you plan to do any hiking or back-country exploring. Inegi's Centros de Información in every Mexican state capital (listed on the website), and at least three outlets in Mexico City (see p124), sell these maps for M\$40 to M\$70 each.

A good internet source is **Maps of Mexico** (www.maps-of-mexico.com), with detailed maps of all the states and of 90 cities.

MONEY

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

For exchange rates, see inside the front cover. For information on costs, see p32.

The most convenient form of money in Mexico is a major international credit card or debit card – preferably two if you have them. Visa, MasterCard and American Express cards can be used to obtain cash easily from ATMs in Mexico, and are accepted for payment by most airlines, car-rental companies and travel agents, plus many upper midrange and top-end hotels, and some restaurants and stores. Occasionally there's a surcharge for paying by card, or a discount for paying cash. Making a purchase by credit card normally gives you a more favorable exchange rate than exchanging money at a bank, and isn't subject to commission, but you'll normally have to pay your card issuer a 'foreign exchange' transaction fee of around 2.5%.

As a backup to credit or debit cards, it's a good idea to take a little cash and a few traveler's checks. US dollars are easily the most exchangeable foreign currency in Mexico. In tourist areas and many Mexican cities along the US border, you can often make some purchases in US dollars, though the exchange rate used will probably not be in your favor. Euros, British pounds and Canadian dollars, in cash

or as traveler's checks, are accepted by most banks and some *casas de cambio* (exchange houses), but acceptance is less certain if you're away from main cities and tourist centers. Traveler's checks should be a major brand, such as American Express or Visa.

For tips on keeping your money safe while traveling, see p968.

ATMs

ATMs (*caja permanente* or *cajero automático*) are plentiful in Mexico, and are the easiest source of cash. You can use major credit cards and some bank cards, such as those on the Cirrus and Plus systems, to withdraw pesos from ATMs. The exchange rate that banks use for ATM withdrawals is normally better than the 'tourist rate' for currency exchange, though that advantage may be negated by extra handling fees, interest charges and other methods that banks have of taking your money away from you.

To avoid the risk of 'card cloning,' use ATMs only in secure indoor locations, not those in stand-alone booths. Card cloners obtain your card number and PIN by means of hidden cameras, then make a copy of your card and use it to withdraw cash from your account.

Banks & Casas de Cambio

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

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

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

International Transfers

Should you need money wired to you in Mexico, an easy method is the 'Dinero en Minutos' service of **Western Union** (☎ in the US

800-325-6000; www.westernunion.com). It's offered by thousands of bank branches and other businesses around Mexico, identified by black-and-yellow signs proclaiming 'Western Union Dinero en Minutos.' Your sender pays the money online or at a Western Union branch, along with a fee, and gives the details on who is to receive it and where. When you pick it up, take along photo identification. Western Union has offices worldwide.

US post offices (☎ 800-275-8777; www.usps.com) offer reasonably cheap money transfers to branches of Bancomer bank in Mexico. The service is called Dinero Seguro.

Taxes

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

Hotel rooms are also subject to the *impuesto sobre hospedaje* (ISH, lodging tax). Each Mexican state sets its own rate, but in most it's 2%. See p959 for further information on taxes on hotel rooms.

Tippling & Bargaining

In general, workers in small, cheap restaurants don't expect much in the way of tips, while those in expensive resorts expect you to be lavish in your largesse. Workers in the tourism and hospitality industries often depend on tips to supplement miserable basic wages. In resorts frequented by foreigners (such as Cancún, Acapulco and Puerto Vallarta) tipping is up to US levels of 15%; elsewhere 10% is usually plenty. If you stay a few days in one place, you should leave up to 10% of your room costs for the people who have kept your room clean (assuming they have). A porter in a midrange hotel will be happy with M\$10 a bag. Taxi drivers don't generally expect tips unless they provide some special service. Car parking attendants expect a tip of M\$3 to M\$5, and the same is standard for gas-station attendants.

Room rates are pretty firm, though it can be worth asking if any discounts are available, especially if it's low season or you are going to stay a few nights. In markets bargaining is the rule, and you may pay much more than

the going rate if you accept the first price quoted. You can also bargain with drivers of unmetered taxis.

POST

An airmail letter or postcard weighing up to 20g costs M\$10.50 to the US or Canada, M\$13 to Europe or South America, and M\$14.50 to the rest of the world. Items between 20g and 50g cost M\$18, M\$21 and M\$23. *Certificado* (registered) service costs an extra M\$20. Mark airmail items 'Vía Aérea.' Delivery times (outbound and inbound) are variable. An airmail letter from Mexico to the US or Canada (or vice-versa) should take somewhere between four and 14 days to arrive. Mail to or from Europe takes between one and two weeks.

Post offices (*oficinas de correos*) are typically open from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1pm Saturday. You can receive letters and packages care of a post office if they're addressed to the post office's *lista de correos* (mail list), as follows:

Dolores ABRAM (last name in capitals)
 Lista de Correos
 Correo Central
 Acapulco
 Guerrero 00000 (post code)
 MEXICO

When the letter reaches the post office, the name of the addressee is placed on an alphabetical list that is updated daily and often pinned up on the wall. To claim your mail, present your passport or other identification. There's no charge, but many post offices only hold *lista* mail for 10 days before returning it to the sender. If you think you might pick mail up more than 10 days after it has arrived, have it sent to *Poste Restante*, instead of *Lista de Correos*. *Poste Restante* may hold mail for up to a month, though no list of what has been received is posted up.

If you're sending a package internationally from Mexico, be prepared to open it for customs inspection at the post office; it's better to take packing materials with you, or not seal it until you get there. For assured and speedy delivery, you can use one of the more expensive international courier services, such as **UPS** (☎ 800-902-92-00; www.ups.com), **Federal Express** (☎ 800-900-11-00; www.fedex.com) or Mexico's **Estafeta** (☎ 800-903-35-00; www.estafeta.com). Packages up to 500g cost up to about M\$350 to the US or Canada, or M\$450 to Europe.

SHOPPING

Mexico's star buys are the wonderful and amazingly varied regional handicrafts made in all parts of the country, predominantly by indigenous people. You can buy these *artesanías* in the villages where they are produced, or in stores and markets in urban centers. *Artesanías* stores in cities will give you a good overview of what's available and a basis for price comparisons. Places such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, San Miguel de Allende, Puerto Vallarta, Puebla and Oaxaca have stores selling quality handicrafts from all over Mexico. A few cities have special markets devoted to crafts, but ordinary daily or weekly markets always sell crafts too (including everyday pots and baskets as well as more artistic products). The quality and price of market goods may be lower than in stores. Bargaining is expected in markets, whereas stores generally have fixed prices. Traveling to craft-making villages gives you a chance to see artisans at work, and if you buy there you'll know that more of your money is likely to go to the artisans themselves and less to entrepreneurs.

For everyday purchases and consumer goods, middle-class Mexicans like to shop in glitzy suburban malls, supermarkets, hypermarkets and department stores. In city centers you're more likely to find smaller, older shops and markets with more character.

See p88 for an introduction to many Mexican handicrafts: ceramics, masks, woodwork, jewelry, metalwork, lacquerware, indigenous textiles, bark paintings and *retablos* (also called *exvotos*). Following are some other fine products and good buys.

Bags Come in all shapes and sizes, many incorporating indigenous designs. Those made by the Huichol people are among the most authentic and original.

Baskets Handmade baskets of multifarious shapes, sizes and patterns, made of materials like cane, bamboo, wicker, or rush or palm-leaf strips, are common in Mexican markets. They can be useful for carrying other purchases home as well as being appealing in themselves.

Clothes Commercially produced clothing, whether based on traditional designs or with a Mexican take on international fashion trends, can be attractive and good value, including surfwear made by Mexican brands such as Squalo.

Hammocks Usually made of cotton or nylon, hammocks come in a variety of sizes and an infinite number of color patterns – easy to buy in Mérida, Palenque, Acapulco, Puerto Escondido, Zipolite, Mitla and Juchitán.

Leather goods León is Mexico's shoe capital, and has dozens of stores, though every other sizable city has plenty of good ones, too. Finely crafted belts, bags, *huaraches* (sandals), boots, clothes and saddles are available in northern and central ranching towns such as Zacatecas, Chihuahua, Durango, Jerez, Hermosillo, Monterrey, Saltillo and Guadalajara.

Musical Instruments Paracho, Michoacán, is the guitar capital of Mexico, and also produces violins, cellos and other instruments. Elsewhere you'll come across maracas, tambourines, whistles, scrape boards and a variety of drums. Keep an eye open for tongue drums, often-cylindrical hollowed-out pieces of wood attractively carved or decorated, with two central tongues of wood each giving a different note when struck.

SOLO TRAVELERS

A single room normally costs well over half the price of a double room, but budget travelers can cut accommodation costs in many places by staying in hostels. Hostels have the additional advantage of providing ready-made company, full of helpful travel tips, and are often a lot of fun. Lone travelers don't need to remain alone when traveling in Mexico unless they choose to. It's very easy to team up with others as there's a steady stream of people following similar routes around the country. Local tours are a good way to meet people and get more out of a place.

Solo travelers should be especially watchful of their luggage when on the road and should stay in places with good security for their valuables, so they don't have to be burdened with them when out and about. One big drag of traveling alone can be when you want to take a quick dip in the ocean – you're stuck with your possessions and there's no one to watch out for them.

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

TELEPHONE

Local calls are cheap; international calls can be expensive, but with widely available discount cards they needn't be. Calling from your hotel can be expensive as hotels charge what they like for this service. Following are the most common ways to make calls in Mexico.

Cell Phones

Like other Mexican phone numbers, every Mexican cell phone (*teléfono celular*) has an area code (usually the code of the city it was bought in). The area code and the phone's number total 10 digits. When calling a cell phone from a landline, you dial ☎ 044 before the 10 digits if the cell phone's area code is the same as the area code you are dialing from, or ☎ 045 if the cell phone has a different area code. From cell phone to cell phone, just dial the 10-digit number. To call a Mexican cell phone from another country, dial your international access code, followed by the Mexican country code (☎ 52), then 1, then the 10-digit number.

If you want to use a cell phone in Mexico, the three main operators – **Telcel** (www.telcel.com), **IUSACell** (www.iusacell.com.mx) and **Movistar** (www.movistar.com.mx) – all sell phones for around M\$400 to M\$800 including a charger and some call credit. For further credit you can buy top-up cards for M\$100 or more. Telcel is the most widespread network, with many sales outlets (including one at Mexico City airport) and coverage almost everywhere that has a significant population. Telcel top-up cards are widely available from newsstands and minimarts. Mexican cell phones generally cannot be used in other countries.

Roaming with your own cell phone from home in Mexico is possible if you have a GSM phone but it is generally very expensive. Much cheaper is to buy a local SIM card or 'chip' from a Telcel or Movistar outlet. You can usually top these up online.

A good source for further information on international mobile phone use is www.kropla.com.

Collect Calls

A *llamada por cobrar* (collect call) can cost the receiving party much more than if they call you, so you may prefer to pay for a quick call to the other party to ask them to call you back. If you do need to make a collect call, you can do so from card phones without a card. Call an operator on ☎ 020 for domestic calls, or ☎ 090 for international calls, or use a 'home country direct' service, through which you make an international collect call via an operator in the country you're calling. The Mexican term for 'home country direct' is *pais directo*. Mexican international operators may know the access numbers for some countries,

but it's best to get this information from your home country before you leave.

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

Internet Telephony

For this you need access to high-speed internet, available at most internet cafés and also at hotels, cafés and other places with wi-fi access. You also need an appropriate headset and microphone. Many internet cafés have these; some have telephone service installed and they'll usually advertise this with very low per-minute costs. Travelers who have accounts with internet phone services such as **Skype** (www.skype.com) can use these at internet cafés, and also on their own laptops in places with wi-fi access. Can be the cheapest option if you have an account.

Locutorios & Casetas de Teléfono

These are call offices where an on-the-spot operator connects the call for you. Costs in *casetas* and *locutorios* are often lower than those for Telmex card phones, and their advantages are that they eliminate street noise and you don't need a phone card to use them. They often have a telephone symbol outside, or signs saying 'teléfono,' 'Lada' or 'Larga Distancia.' In Baja California *casetas* are known as *cabinas*.

Long-Distance Discount Cards

Available from kiosks and some minimarts, usually in denominations of M\$100, M\$200 and M\$500, these cards marketed by alternative telephone carriers offer substantial savings on Mexican long-distance calls and international calls when compared with Telmex card phones, *locutorios* and often even private phones. There are many brands – just ask for a *tarjeta para llamadas de larga distancia de descuento* (card for discount long-distance calls). To use them, you call a local or toll-free access number, then dial in the scratch-off code from the card, then dial the number you want in the normal way. You don't put the discount card into the phone and you can use them from hotel-room phones, private phones and Telmex card phones.

Prefixes & Codes

If you're calling a landline number in the town or city you're in, simply dial the local number

(eight digits in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey, seven digits everywhere else).

To call a landline number in another town or city in Mexico, you need to dial the long-distance prefix ☎01, followed by the area code (two digits for Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey; three digits for everywhere else) and then the local number. For example, to call from Mexico City to Oaxaca, dial ☎01, then the Oaxaca area code ☎951, then the seven-digit local number. You'll find area codes listed under city and town headings through this book.

To make an international call, dial the international prefix ☎00, followed by the country code, area code and local number. For example, to call New York City from Mexico, dial ☎00, then the US country code ☎1, then the New York City area code ☎212, then the local number.

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

See opposite for information on prefixes for calls to cell phones.

Public Card Phones

These are common in towns and cities, and you'll usually find some at airports, bus stations and around the main plaza. By far the most common, and most reliable on costs, are those marked with the name of the country's main, almost monopolistic, phone operator, **Telmex** (www.telmex.com). To use a Telmex card phone you need a phone card known as a *tarjeta Ladatel*. These are sold at kiosks and shops everywhere – look for the blue-and-yellow 'Ladatel' signs. The cards come in denominations of M\$30, M\$50 and M\$100.

Calls from Telmex card phones cost M\$1 per minute for local calls; M\$4 per minute long-distance within Mexico; M\$5 per minute to the US (except Alaska and Hawaii) or Canada; M\$10 per minute to Central America; and M\$20 to M\$25 per minute to the rest of the world. Calls to cell phones are M\$3.12 per minute (local) or M\$6.12 per minute (long-distance).

Toll-Free & Operator Numbers

Toll-free numbers in Mexico (☎800 followed by seven digits) always require the ☎01 prefix. You can call most of these numbers, and emergency, numbers from

Telmex pay phones without inserting a telephone card.

US and Canadian toll-free numbers are ☎ 800 or ☎ 888 followed by seven digits. Some of these can be reached from Mexico (dial ☎ 001 before the 800), but you may have to pay a charge for the call.

For a domestic operator in Mexico, dial ☎ 020; for an international operator, dial ☎ 090. For Mexican directory information, dial ☎ 040.

TIME

Most of the country is on Hora del Centro, the same as US Central Time (that's GMT minus six hours in winter, and GMT minus five hours during daylight saving). Five northern and western states – Chihuahua, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California Sur – are on Hora de las Montañas, the same as US Mountain Time (GMT minus seven hours in winter, GMT minus six hours during daylight saving). Baja California (Norte) observes Hora del Pacífico, the same as US Pacific Time (GMT minus eight hours in winter, GMT minus seven hours during daylight saving).

Daylight saving time (*'horario de verano,'* summer time) runs from the first Sunday in April to the last Sunday in October. Clocks go forward one hour in April and back one hour in October. The northwestern state of Sonora ignores daylight saving (like its US neighbor Arizona), so remains on GMT minus seven hours all year. Daylight saving is also ignored by a few remote rural zones, such as the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca and the Marqués de Comillas area of eastern Chiapas (to the perdition of bus schedules from nearby towns such as Oaxaca and Palenque).

See the World Map at the back of this book if you need international time zone information.

TOILETS

Public toilets are not common, so take advantage of facilities in places such as hotels, restaurants, bus stations and museums. When out and about, it's a good idea to carry some toilet paper with you, because it may not be provided. If there's a bin beside the toilet, put paper in it because the drains can't cope otherwise.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Just about every town of interest to tourists in Mexico has a state or municipal tourist office. They are generally helpful with maps, brochures and questions, and usually some staff members speak English.

You can call the Mexico City office of the national tourism ministry **Sectur** (☎ 078, 800-987-82-24, in the US 888-401-3880, from Europe 00-52-55-5089-7500; www.visitmexico.com, www.sectur.gob.mx) at any time – 24 hours a day, seven days a week – for information or help in English or Spanish.

Following are the contact details for the head tourism offices of each Mexican state (some websites are in Spanish only).

Aguascalientes (☎ 449-915-95-04; www.aguascalientes.gob.mx/turismo)

Baja California (☎ 078, 664-682-33-67; www.discoverbajacalifornia.com)

Baja California Sur (☎ 612-124-01-00; www.bcs.gob.mx)

Campeche (☎ 981-811-92-29, 800-900-22-67; www.campechetravel.com)

Chiapas (☎ 961-617-05-50, 800-280-35-00; www.turismochiapas.gob.mx)

Chihuahua (☎ 614-429-35-96, 800-508-01-11; www.ah-chihuahua.com, www.chihuahua.gob.mx/turismoweb)

Coahuila (☎ 800-718-42-20; www.secturcoahuila.gob.mx)

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

Durango (☎ 618-811-11-07, 800-624-65-67; www.durangoturismo.com, www.durango.gob.mx)

Guanajuato (☎ 473-732-15-74, 800-714-10-86; www.guanajuato-travel.com)

Guerrero (☎ 747-471-97-00; www.guerrero.gob.mx)

Hidalgo (☎ 771-718-39-37; www.turismo.hidalgo.gob.mx)

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

Mexico City (☎ 800-008-90-90; www.mexicocity.gob.mx)

México State (☎ 722-212-59-98; turismo.edomexico.gob.mx)

Michoacán (☎ 443-317-23-71, 800-450-23-00; www.turismomichoacan.gob.mx)

Morelos (☎ 717-314-39-20; www.morelostravel.com)

Nayarit (☎ 311-214-80-71; www.turnay.gob.mx)

Nuevo León (☎ 81-2020-6789, 800-832-22-00; www.nl.gob.mx)

Oaxaca (☎ 951-516-01-23; www.oaxaca.travel)

Puebla (☎ 800-326-86-56; www.puebla.com.mx)

Querétaro (☎ 442-238-50-67, 800-715-17-42, in the US 888-811-6130; www.venaqueretaro.com)

Quintana Roo (☎ 983-835-08-60; <http://sedetur.qroo.gob.mx>)

San Luis Potosí (☎ 444-814-14-16, 800-343-38-87; www.descubresanluispotosi.com)

Sinaloa (☎ 669-981-88-86; www.sinaloa-travel.com)

Sonora (☎ 662-289-58-00, in the US 800-476-6672; www.gotosonora.com)

Tabasco (☎ 800-216-08-42; www.visitetabasco.com, www.tabasco.gob.mx/turismo)

Tamaulipas (☎ 834-315-61-36, 800-710-65-32, in the US 888-580-5968; turismo.tamaulipas.gob.mx)

Tlaxcala (☎ 246-465-09-60 ext 1519, 800-509-65-57; www.tlaxcala.gob.mx/turismo)

Veracruz (☎ 800-837-28-87; www.veracruzturismo.com.mx)

Yucatán (☎ 999-930-37-60; www.mayayucatan.com.mx)

Zacatecas (☎ 492-922-67-51, 800-712-40-78; www.turismozacatecas.gob.mx)

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Mexico is not yet very disabled-friendly, though some hotels and restaurants (mostly toward the top end of the market) and some public buildings and archaeological sites provide wheelchair access. Very few sidewalks have wheelchair ramps. Mobility is easiest in the major tourist resorts and the more expensive hotels. Bus transportation can be difficult; flying or taking a taxi is easier. The absence of formal facilities is partly compensated by Mexicans' helpful attitudes toward others, and special arrangements are gladly improvised.

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

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

Three further good sources for disabled travelers are **MossRehab ResourceNet** (www.mossresourcenet.org), **Access-able Travel Source** (www.access-able.com) and **Disability Travel and Recreation Resources** (www.makoa.org/travel.htm).

VISAS

Every tourist must have an easily obtainable Mexican-government tourist card. Some nationalities also need to obtain visas. Because the regulations sometimes change, it's wise to confirm them with a Mexican embassy or consulate before you go. The websites of some Mexican consulates, including the **London consulate** (portal.sre.gob.mx/conreinounido) and

the **Los Angeles consulate** (www.sre.gob.mx/losangeles) give useful information on visas and similar matters. The rules are also summarized on the website of Mexico's **Instituto Nacional de Migración** (INM, National Migration Institute; www.inami.gob.mx). The **Lonely Planet website** (www.lonelyplanet.com) has links to updated visa information.

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

For information on passport requirements, see p983. Non-US citizens passing (even in transit) through the US on the way to or from Mexico, or visiting Mexico from the US, should also check the passport and visa requirements for the US.

Tourist Card & Tourist Fee

The Mexican tourist card – officially the *forma migratoria para turista* (FMT) – is a brief card document that you must fill out and get stamped by Mexican immigration when you enter Mexico, and keep till you leave. It's available at official border crossings, international airports and ports, and often from airlines, travel agencies and Mexican consulates.

At the US–Mexico border you won't usually be given one automatically – you have to ask for it. And at many crossings here you don't have to get the card stamped at the actual border, as the INM has control points on the highways into the interior where it's also possible to do it. But it's preferable to get it done at the border itself, in case there are complications elsewhere.

One section of the card deals with the length of your stay in Mexico, and this section is filled out by the immigration officer. The maximum possible is 180 days, but immigration officers sometimes put a lower number (as little as 15 or 30 days in some cases) unless you tell them specifically what you need. It's advisable to ask for more days than you think you'll need, in case you are delayed or change your plans.

Though the tourist card itself is free of charge, it brings with it the obligation to pay

the tourist fee of US\$22, called the *derecho para no inmigrante* (DNI, nonimmigrant fee). The exact amount of the fee in pesos fluctuates with exchange rates. If you enter Mexico by air, the fee is included in your airfare. If you enter by land, you must pay the fee at a bank in Mexico at any time before you reenter the frontier zone on your way out of Mexico (or before you check in at an airport to fly out of Mexico). The frontier zone is the territory between the border itself and the INM's control points on the highways leading into the Mexican interior (usually 20km to 30km from the border). Most Mexican border posts have on-the-spot bank offices where you can pay the DNI fee immediately. When you pay at a bank, your tourist card will be stamped to prove that you have paid.

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

Tourist cards (and fees) are not necessary for visits shorter than 72 hours within the frontier zones along Mexico's northern and southern borders, but be sure to confirm details when you cross the border.

A tourist card only permits you to engage in what are considered to be tourist activities (including sports, health, artistic and cultural activities). If the purpose of your visit is to work (even as a volunteer), report or study, or to participate in humanitarian aid or human-rights observation, you may well need a visa. If you're unsure, check with a Mexican embassy or consulate.

EXTENSIONS & LOST CARDS

If the number of days given on your tourist card is less than the maximum 180 days, its validity may be extended, one or more times, up to the maximum. To get a card extended you have to apply to the INM, which has offices in many towns and cities: they're listed on the **INM website** (www.inm.gob.mx) under 'Servicios Migratorios.' The procedure costs around M\$200 and should take between half an hour and three hours, depending on the office. You'll need your passport, tourist card, photocopies of the important pages of these documents and, at some offices, evidence of 'sufficient funds.' A major credit card is usually OK for the latter, or an amount in traveler's checks anywhere from M\$100 to M\$1000 depending on the office.

Most INM offices will not extend a card until a few days before it is due to expire; don't bother trying earlier.

If you lose your card or need further information, contact your nearest tourist office, or the **Sectur tourist office** (☎ 078, 800-987-82-24) in Mexico City, or your embassy or consulate. Any of these should be able to give you an official note to take to your local INM office, which will issue a replacement for a cost of about M\$450.

VOLUNTEERING

A great way to engage with Mexican communities and contribute something other than tourist dollars to the country is to do some volunteer work. Many organizations and projects can use your services for periods from a few hours to a year or more. Work ranges from protecting sea turtles to helping disadvantaged children. Some are looking for people with relevant experience and/or Spanish language skills; others can use almost any willing hand. Longer-term volunteers will often be offered some kind of accommodation. If you arrange volunteer work in Mexico through an organization that specializes in bringing people from other countries, you will often have to pay a significant sum of money for the opportunity. If you can make direct personal contact with a project on the ground in Mexico, your costs are likely to be much lower. You may just be asked to contribute a small amount to the project's running costs.

Many language schools (p966) offer part-time local volunteering opportunities to complement the classes you take.

Volunteer Directories

These sources are good places to start looking for Mexican volunteer opportunities:

Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organizations (www.alliance-network.org)

Coordinating Committee for International Volunteer Service (www.unesco.org/ccivs)

Idealist.org (www.idealist.org)

Transitions Abroad (www.transitionsabroad.com)

Volunteer Abroad (www.volunteerabroad.com)

Mexico-Based Programs

Cuernavaca-based **Por Un Mejor Hoy** (www.hoycommunity.org) is specifically geared to travelers who want to combine volunteer work in varied community projects with cultural immersion and sightseeing. A one-week stay including

accommodation and breakfast costs US\$300. Oaxaca's Centro de Esperanza Infantil (p723) welcomes volunteers at its center for street kids, and Piña Palmera (p769) at Zipolite on the Oaxaca coast needs volunteers with reasonable Spanish for a minimum three months to help in its work with handicapped kids.

In Chiapas, Na Bolom (p813) accepts volunteers on programs to promote indigenous culture. Tapachula's Albergue Jesús El Buen Pastor (boxed text, p858) can use Spanish-speaking volunteers in its work with injured and destitute migrants from Central America. In western Mexico, you can volunteer at the Centro de Integración (p548), a school for special-needs kids in Tapalpa, Jalisco.

Several of the sea-turtle protection projects along Mexico's beaches – including at La Pesca (boxed text, p421), Tecolutla (p674) and Puerto Arista (p855) – use volunteers at least some of the year. **Pronatura** (www.pronatura.org.mx) is a Mexican environmental NGO that seeks volunteers to work at sea-turtle nesting areas in the Yucatán and in other projects.

Other openings for environmental volunteering are with Pulmo Amigos (p308), which helps protect the Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park on the Sea of Cortez, and **Servicios Ecoturísticos La Ventanilla** (p774), conserving crocodiles, mangroves and tropical dry forest on the Oaxaca coast.

Organizations Based Outside Mexico

Adelante Abroad (www.adelanteabroad.com) Combines language-learning with varied volunteer opportunities in Oaxaca. Charges around US\$2000/2500/3000 for one/two/three months including accommodation but not flights.

AmeriSpan (www.amerispan.com) Can set you up with a wide range of volunteer placements in Mexico, from orphanages and women's shelters to nature reserves. Volunteering can be combined with language study. Charges fees of at least several hundred dollars.

Amigos de las Américas (www.amigoslink.org) Sends paying volunteers from the US to work on summer health, community and youth projects in Latin America; volunteers receive prior training. Costs around US\$4000 including flights.

Council on International Educational Exchange (www.ciee.org) Arranges volunteer trips.

Earthwatch (www.earthwatch.org) With offices in the US, Britain, Australia and Japan, Earthwatch runs environmental projects in Mexico (volunteers usually pay around US\$1500 to US\$2500 per week, plus flights).

Global Vision International (www.gviusa.com) Work on marine conservation, sustainable tourism and English-

teaching in the Yucatán Peninsula. Costs from US\$2500 for five weeks or more.

Los Médicos Voladores (www.flyingdocs.org) Based in California and Nevada, LMV runs weekend clinics in northern Mexican areas with poor medical service; needs medical volunteers, translators, pilots and general volunteers.

Sipaz (www.sipaz.org) An international peace group, Sipaz needs Spanish-speaking volunteers to work for a year or more in Chiapas, especially in the fields of information and human rights observation.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Women usually have a great time in Mexico whether traveling with companions or solo, but it's wise to remember that many Mexicans are still believers in the difference (rather than the equality) between the sexes. Gender equality has come a long way in a few decades, and Mexicans are generally a very polite people, but lone women must expect a few catcalls and attempts to chat them up. Often these men only want to talk to you, but you can discourage unwanted attention by avoiding eye contact (wear sunglasses), dressing modestly, moving confidently and speaking coolly but politely if you are addressed and feel that you must respond. Wearing a wedding ring can prove helpful too. Don't put yourself in peril by doing things that Mexican women would not do, such as challenging a man's masculinity, drinking alone in a cantina, hitchhiking, walking alone through empty streets at night, or going alone to isolated places. Keep a clear head. Excessive alcohol will make you vulnerable. For moral support, and company if you want it, head for accommodations where you're likely to meet other travelers (such as backpacker hostels and popular hotels), and join group excursions and activities.

In beach resorts many Mexican women dress in shorts, skimpy tops or dresses, and swimsuits of all sizes, though others bow to modesty and swim in shorts and a T-shirt. Lone women, and even pairs of women, should be cautious about going to remote beach spots.

On the streets of cities and towns you'll notice that women cover up and don't display too much leg, or even shoulder.

On local transportation it's best to don long or mid-calf-length trousers and a top that meets the top of your pants, with sleeves of some sort. You'll feel most comfortable, and

you can also keep your valuables out of sight more easily.

Most of all, appear self-assured.

WORK

Mexicans themselves need jobs, and people who enter Mexico as tourists are not legally allowed to take employment. The many expats working in Mexico have usually been posted there by their companies or organizations with all the necessary papers.

English speakers (and a few German or French speakers) may find teaching jobs in language schools, *preparatorias* (high schools) or universities, or can offer personal tutoring. Mexico City is the best place to get English-teaching work, and Guadalajara is also good. It's possible in other major cities. The pay is low, but you can live on it.

Press ads (especially in local English-language papers and magazines) and telephone yellow pages are sources of job opportunities. Pay rates for personal tutoring are rarely more than M\$150 an hour. Positions in high schools

or universities are more likely to become available at the beginning of each new term; contact institutions that offer bilingual programs or classes in English. For universities, ask for an appointment with the director of the language department. Language schools tend to offer short courses, so teaching opportunities with them may come up more often.

A foreigner working in Mexico normally needs a permit or government license, but a school will often pay a foreign teacher in the form of a *beca* (scholarship), and thus circumvent the law, or the school's administration will procure the appropriate papers.

It's helpful to know at least a little Spanish, even though only English may be spoken in class.

Apart from teaching, you might find a little bar or restaurant work in tourist areas. It's likely to be part time and short term.

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

Transportation

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THINGS CHANGE...

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

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Immigration officers won't generally keep you waiting any longer than it takes them to flick through your passport and enter your length of stay on your tourist card (p979). All you have to do is remain patient and polite, even if procedures are slow. Anyone traveling to Mexico via the US should be sure to check current US visa and passport requirements.

Passport

US and Canadian tourists can enter Mexico without a passport if they have official photo identification, such as a driver's license, plus some proof of their citizenship such as an original birth certificate. But to return to or transit the US by air, a passport or other secure travel document such as a Nexus card is required. To return to or transit the US by land or sea, Americans and Canadians must present either a passport, or other documents proving identity and citizenship (for example driver's license and birth certificate), or the recently introduced US passport card, or a Nexus or other 'trusted traveler' card. Canadians flying back from Mexico to Canada are advised to carry a

passport. Further information is available on the websites of the US State Department (www.travel.state.gov), US Customs & Border Protection (www.cbp.gov), the US Department of Homeland Security (www.dhs.gov) and Canada's Foreign Affairs Ministry (www.voyage.gc.ca).

In any case it's much better to travel to Mexico with a passport because officials of all countries are used to passports and may delay people who have other documents. In Mexico you will often need your passport if you change money and when you check into hotels.

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

Travelers under 18 who are not accompanied by both their parents may need special documentation (see p965).

For information on Mexican visa requirements and the tourist card, see p979.

AIR Airports & Airlines

The following Mexican airports receive direct international flights. All have flights from the US (some from several US cities, some from only one or two). Only Mexico City and Cancún receive direct scheduled flights from Europe, Canada, Central and South America and Havana, Cuba.

Mexico City, Cancún, Guadalajara and Monterrey have the most international flights.

Acapulco (ACA; ☎ 744-466-94-34; www.oma.bz)
Aguascalientes (AGU; ☎ 449-915-28-06; aguascalientes.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Bajío (El Bajío, León; BJX; ☎ 477-713-64-06; guanajuato.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Cancún (CUN; ☎ 998-886-00-47; www.cancun-airport.com)
Chihuahua (CUU; ☎ 614-446-82-33; www.oma.bz)
Cozumel (CZM; ☎ 987-872-20-81; www.asur.com.mx)
Durango (DGO; ☎ 618-817-88-98; www.oma.bz)
Guadalajara (GDL; ☎ 33-3688-5504; guadalajara.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Guaymas (GYM; ☎ 622-221-05-11; guaymas.asa.gob.mx)
Hermosillo (HMO; ☎ 662-261-00-00; hermosillo.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Huatulco (Bahías de Huatulco; HUX; ☎ 958-581-90-04; www.asur.com.mx)
Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo (ZIH; ☎ 755-554-20-70; www.oma.bz)
La Paz (LAP; ☎ 614-124-63-36; lapaz.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Loreto (LTO; ☎ 613-135-04-54; loreto.asa.gob.mx)
Los Cabos (SJD; ☎ 624-146-50-13; loscabos.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Manzanillo (Playa de Oro; ZLO; ☎ 314-333-11-19; manzanillo.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Mazatlán (MZT; ☎ 669-928-04-38; www.oma.bz)
Merida (MID; ☎ 999-946-15-30; www.asur.com.mx)
Mexico City (MEX; ☎ 55-2482-2424; www.aicm.com.mx)

Monterrey (MTY; ☎ 81-8030-9090; www.adelhortecom.mx)
Morelia (MLM; ☎ 443-317-14-11; morelia.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Oaxaca (OAX; ☎ 951-511-50-88; www.asur.com.mx)
Puebla (PBC; ☎ 222-232-00-32; www.aeropuerto.puebla.com)
Puerto Vallarta (PVR; ☎ 322-221-12-98; vallarta.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Querétaro (QRO; ☎ 442-192-55-00; www.aiq.com.mx)
San Luis Potosí (SLP; ☎ 444-822-00-95; www.oma.bz)
Tampico (TAM; ☎ 833-224-48-00; www.oma.bz)
Tijuana (TIJ; ☎ 664-683-24-18; tijuana.aeropuertogap.com.mx)
Toluca (TLC; ☎ 721-213-15-44; www.aeropuerto.internacionaldetoluca.com)
Torreón (TRC; ☎ 871-712-82-39; www.oma.bz)
Veracruz (VER; ☎ 229-934-90-08; www.asur.com.mx)
Villahermosa (VSA; ☎ 993-356-01-57; www.asur.com.mx)
Zacatecas (ZCL; ☎ 492-985-02-23; www.oma.bz)

Mexico's two flag airlines are Mexicana and Aeroméxico, both formerly state-controlled. Mexicana was bought by Grupo Posadas, Mexico's biggest hotel company, in 2005, and Aeroméxico was sold to a consortium led by Banamex in 2007. Their safety

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motorized travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travelers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

records are comparable to major US and European airlines.

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM MEXICO

Aero California (code JR; ☎ 800-237-62-25; www.aerocalifornia.com; hub Tijuana)
Aerolíneas Argentinas (code AR; ☎ 800-123-85-88; www.aerolineas.com.ar; hub Buenos Aires)
Aeromar (code VV; ☎ 800-237-66-27; www.aeromar.com.mx; hub Mexico City)
Aeroméxico (code AM; ☎ 800-021-40-10; www.aeromexico.com; hub Mexico City)
Air Canada (code AC; ☎ 800-719-28-27; www.aircanada.ca; hub Toronto)
Air Europa (code UX; ☎ 998-898-22-55; www.air.europa.com; hub Madrid)
Air France (code AF; ☎ 800-123-46-60; www.airfrance.com; hub Paris)
Aladia (code AYD; ☎ 800-252-3421; www.aladia.com; hub Cancún)
Alaska Airlines (code AS; ☎ 800-252-75-22; www.alaskaair.com; hub Seattle)
American Airlines (code AA; ☎ 800-904-60-00; www.aa.com; hub Dallas)
America West (code HP; ☎ 800-428-43-22; www.americawest.com; hub Phoenix)
ATA Airlines (code TZ; ☎ 800-435-92-82; www.ata.com; hub Chicago)
Aviaca (code 6A; ☎ 800-284-22-72; www.aviaca.com; hub Mexico City)
Avianca (code AV; ☎ 800-123-31-20; www.avianca.com; hub Bogotá)
British Airways (code BA; ☎ 55-5387-0321; www.britishairways.com; hub Heathrow Airport, London)
Click Mexicana (code QA; ☎ 800-122-54-25; www.click.com.mx; hubs Cancún, Mexico City)
Continental Airlines (code CO; ☎ 800-900-50-00; www.continental.com; hub Houston)
Copa Airlines (code CM; ☎ 800-265-26-72; www.copaair.com; hub Panama City)
Cubana (code CU; ☎ 52-5250-6355; www.cubana.co.cu; hub Havana)
Delta Air Lines (code DL; ☎ 800-123-47-10; www.delta.com; hub Atlanta)
Frontier Airlines (code F9; ☎ in the US 800-432-1359; www.frontierairlines.com; hub Denver)
Iberia (code IB; ☎ 55-1101-1515; www.iberia.com; hub Madrid)
Interjet (code 40 ☎ 800-011-23-45; www.interjet.com.mx; hub Toluca)
Japan Airlines (code JL; ☎ 55-5242-0150; www.ar.jal.com; hub Tokyo)
KLM (code KL; ☎ 55-5279-5390; www.klm.com; hub Amsterdam)

Lan Airlines (code LA; ☎ 800-700-67-00; plane.lan.com; hub Santiago)

LTU (code LT; ☎ 998-887-24-07; www.ltu.de; hub Dusseldorf)

Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 55-5230-0000; www.lufthansa.com; hub Frankfurt)

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

Northwest Airlines (code NW; ☎ 55-5279-5390; www.nwa.com; hubs Detroit, Minneapolis/St Paul, Memphis)

Spirit Airlines (code NK; ☎ in the US 800-772-7117; www.spiritair.com; hub Fort Lauderdale)

Sun Country Airlines (code SY; ☎ in the US 800-800-6557; www.suncountry.com; hub Minneapolis/St Paul)

TACA Airlines (code TA; ☎ 800-400-8222; www.taca.com; hub San Salvador)

Ted (code UA; ☎ 800-003-07-77; www.flyted.com; hub Denver)

United Airlines (code UA; ☎ 800-003-07-77; www.united.com; hub Los Angeles)

US Airways (code US; ☎ 800-428-43-22; www.usairways.com; hub Philadelphia)

Varig (code RG; ☎ 55-5280-9192; www.varig.com.br; hub São Paulo)

VivaAerobus (code VB; ☎ 81-8215-0150; www.vivaerobus.com; hub Monterrey)

Tickets

The cost of flying to Mexico is usually higher around Christmas and New Year, and during July and August. Weekends can be more costly than weekdays. In addition to air-ticket websites and travel agencies, it's often worth checking airlines' own websites for special deals. Newspapers, magazines and websites serving Mexican communities in other countries are also good sources. The **Lonely Planet website** (www.lonelyplanet.com) has good links too.

If Mexico is part of a bigger trip encompassing other countries in Latin America or elsewhere, the best ticket for you may be an open-jaw (where you fly into one place and out of another, covering the intervening distance by land), or a round-the-world ticket (these can cost as little as UK£900 or A\$2100), or a Circle Pacific ticket which uses a combination of airlines to travel around the Pacific region. **Airtreks** (www.airtreks.com) is one good source for multistop tickets.

International online booking agencies worth a look include **CheapTickets** (www.cheaptickets.com) and, for students and travelers under the age of 26, **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com).

Asia

You normally have to make a connection in the US or Canada (often Los Angeles, San Francisco or Vancouver), and maybe one in Asia as well. From more westerly Asian points such as Bangkok, routes via Europe are also an option. For online bookings try www.zuji.com.

Australia & New Zealand

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

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

Canada

Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver all have direct flights to Mexico, though better deals are often available with a change of flight in the US. Round-trip fares from Toronto start at around C\$900 to Mexico City, Cancún or Puerto Vallarta. For online bookings try www.kayak.com, www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

Central & South America & the Caribbean

You can fly direct to Mexico City from at least eight cities in South America, and from Panama City, San José (Costa Rica), San Salvador, Guatemala City, Havana (Cuba) and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic). There are also direct flights to Cancún from São Paulo, Panama City, Havana, Guatemala City and Flores (Guatemala). Round-trip fares to Mexico City start at around US\$500 from Guatemala City and US\$800 to US\$1000 from South America. **Viajo.com** (www.viajo.com) is an online source of air tickets from several countries.

Europe

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

Round-trip fares to Mexico City or Cancún normally start at around UK£500 to UK£600 from London, or €600 to €700 from Frankfurt, Paris or Madrid. For online bookings throughout Europe, try www.opodo.com or www.ebookers.com.

The USA

You can fly to Mexico without changing planes from around 30 US cities. There are one-stop connecting flights from many others. Continental (from Houston), Aeroméxico and Mexicana all offer large numbers of Mexican destinations.

US budget airlines such as ATA, Spirit Air, America West, Frontier Airlines and Ted all offer flights to Mexico, and economical fares are also available on Mexico's Aero California and Aviacsa. If you're lucky you can get round-trip fares from the US to Mexico for US\$250. If you're not lucky, 'budget' operators can cost as much as other airlines. Low-season discounted round-trip fares are typically in the US\$350 to US\$500 range. In high season you may have to pay US\$100 to US\$200 more.

For current bargain offers, check **Airfare Watchdog** (www.airfarewatchdog.com). Online tickets are offered by www.cheaptickets.com, www.expedia.com, www.kayak.com, www.lowestfare.com, www.orbitz.com and www.travelocity.com.

LAND

Border Crossings

There are over 40 official crossing points on the US–Mexico border. There are about 10 between Guatemala and Mexico, and two between Belize and Mexico. You'll find more information on the most important crossings in this book's regional chapters. Most Mexican border towns are not places where many travelers have much reason to linger.

Car & Motorcycle

The rules for taking a vehicle into Mexico change from time to time. You can check with a Mexican consulate, **Sanborn's** (☎ 800-222-01-58; www.sanbornsinsurance.com) or, in the US and Canada, the free **Mexican tourist information number** (☎ 800-401-3880).

You may not find gasoline or mechanics available at all Mexico's road borders: before crossing the border, make sure you have enough fuel to get to the next sizable town

inside Mexico. For information on driving and motorcycling once you're inside Mexico, see p993.

VEHICLE PERMIT

You will need a *permiso de importación temporal de vehículos* (temporary vehicle import permit) if you want to take a vehicle beyond Baja California, beyond Guaymas in Sonora state, or beyond the border zone that extends 20km to 30km into Mexico along the rest of the US frontier and up to 70km from the Guatemalan and Belize frontiers. Officials at posts of the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM; National Immigration Institute) in the border zones, and at the ferry terminal at La Paz, Baja California, if you are taking a vehicle across from there to mainland Mexico, will want to see your permit. Permits are not needed to take vehicles into Baja California itself, and the state of Sonora does not require them for travel as far south as Guaymas (see p318 for details of the Sonora regulations).

The permits are issued at offices at border crossings or (in some cases) at posts a few kilometers into Mexico, at Ensenada port and Pichilingue (La Paz) ferry terminal in Baja California, and by the Mexican consulates in Chicago, Houston, Dallas, Austin, Fort Worth, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Bernardino, Phoenix, Albuquerque and Denver. Details of all these locations are given at www.banjercito.com.mx (click on 'Red de Módulos IITV'). You can also apply for the permit online at www.banjercito.com.mx ('Application for Temporary Import Permit for Vehicles'), in which case it will be delivered to you by courier.

The fee for the permit is the peso equivalent of US\$29.70 if obtained at or after the border, US\$39.60 from a Mexican consulate, or US\$49.50 online. You can also pre-register online which speeds up the process of actually obtaining the permit at a consulate or the border.

The person importing the vehicle will need to carry the original and one or two photocopies of each of the following documents (people at the office may make photocopies for a small fee), which as a rule must all be in his/her own name (except that you can bring in your spouse's, parent's or child's vehicle if you can show a marriage or birth certificate proving your relationship):

- tourist card (FMT): at the border go to *migración* before you process your vehicle permit.
- certificate of title or registration certificate for the vehicle (note that you should have both of these if you plan to drive through Mexico into either Guatemala or Belize).
- a Visa, MasterCard or American Express credit card, issued by an institution outside of Mexico; if you don't have one you must pay a returnable deposit of between US\$200 and US\$400 (depending on how old the car is) at the border. Your card details or deposit serve as a guarantee that you'll take the car out of Mexico before your tourist card (FMT) expires. Note: for online and consulate applications, only Visa and MasterCard are accepted.
- proof of citizenship or residency, such as a passport, birth certificate or voter's registration card.
- driver's license.
- if the vehicle is not fully paid for, a credit contract from the financing institution or an invoice letter that is less than three months old.
- for a leased or rented vehicle (though few US rental firms allow their vehicles to be taken into Mexico), the contract, in the name of the person importing the vehicle, and a letter from the rental company authorizing you to take it out of the US.
- for a company car, proof of employment by the company and proof of the company's ownership of the vehicle.

One person cannot bring in two vehicles. If you have a motorcycle attached to your car, you'll need another adult traveling with you to obtain a permit for the motorcycle, and he/she will need to have all the right papers for it.

With the permit you will be given a sticker to be displayed on your windshield.

You have the option to take the vehicle in and out of Mexico for the period shown on your tourist card. Ask for a *tarjetón de internación*, a document which you will exchange for a *comprobante de retorno* each time you leave Mexico; when you return to Mexico, you swap the *comprobante* for another *tarjetón*. When you leave Mexico the last time, you must have the import permit canceled by the Mexican authorities. An official may do this

as you enter the border zone, usually 20km to 30km before the border itself. If not, you'll have to find the right official at the border crossing. If you leave Mexico without having the permit canceled, the authorities may assume you've left the vehicle in the country illegally and decide to keep your deposit, charge a fine to your credit card, or deny you permission to bring a vehicle into the country on your next trip.

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

Belize

Around 18 daily buses run by **Novelo's** (in Belize City ☎ 227-20-25) travel between Belize City and Chetumal, Mexico (US\$10, four hours), calling at the Belizean towns of Orange Walk and Corozal en route. See p913 for more details.

Guatemala

The road borders at La Mesilla/Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Ciudad Tecún Umán/Ciudad Hidalgo and El Carmen/Talismán are all linked to Guatemala City, and nearby cities within Guatemala and Mexico, by plentiful buses and/or combis. A few daily buses are run all the way between Guatemala City and Tapachula, Chiapas (six hours) via Escuintla and Mazatenango by **Trans Galgos Inter** (in Guatemala City ☎ 2232-3661; www.transgalgosinter.com.gt; US\$25-35), **Línea Dorada** (in Guatemala City ☎ 2232-5506; www.tikalmayanworld.com; US\$15) and **Tica Bus** (in Guatemala City ☎ 2366-4038; www.ticabus.com; US\$16).

There are a few daily buses between Flores, Guatemala, and Chetumal (US\$28, seven to eight hours), via Belize City, run by **Línea Dorada/Mundo Maya** (in Flores ☎ 7926-0070) and **San Juan Travel** (in Flores ☎ 7926-0041).

For the Río Usumacinta route between Flores and Palenque, Mexico, several daily 2nd-class buses run from Flores to Bethel (US\$4, four hours), on the Guatemalan bank of the Usumacinta. The 40-minute boat trip from Bethel to Frontera Corozal, Mexico, costs US\$7 to US\$13 per person; an alternative is to take a bus from Flores that continues through Bethel to La Técnica (US\$6, five to six hours), from which it's only a US\$1.50, five-minute river crossing to Frontera Corozal. Vans run from Frontera Corozal to Palenque (US\$6, three hours, 13 daily). Travel agen-

cies in Palenque and Flores offer bus-boat-bus packages between the two places from around US\$40, but if you're traveling this route it's well worth detouring to the outstanding Maya ruins at Yaxchilán (see p845), near Frontera Corozal.

The USA

BUS

Cross-border bus services, mainly used by Mexicans working in the US, link many US cities with northern Mexican cities. They're not very well publicized: Spanish-language newspapers in the US have the most ads. The major companies include **Autobuses Americanos** (www.autobusesamericanos.com.mx), operating to northeast Mexico, central north Mexico and central Mexico from Los Angeles, Phoenix, Denver, Albuquerque, Chicago and several Texan cities; **Tufesa** (www.tufesa.com.mx), linking Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix and Tucson with northwest Mexico; **Crucero** (☎ 800-531-5332; www.crucero-usa.com), operating from California, Nevada and Arizona to northwest Mexico; and **Transportes Baldomero Corral** (www.tbconexionphoenix.com), operating between Arizona and northwest Mexico. **Greyhound** (☎ 800-231-2222; www.greyhound.com) has some cross-border routes: it uses Mexican associate companies to actually carry its passengers on many of them.

Some sample cross-border services:

Route	Fare	Duration
Los Angeles-Hermosillo	US\$90	16hr
Los Angeles-Los Mochis	US\$110	24hr
Los Angeles-Mexicali	US\$35	5hr
Phoenix-Álamos	US\$50	12hr
Phoenix-Hermosillo	US\$40	8hr
Dallas-Monterrey	US\$50	12hr
Dallas-Reynosa	US\$46	11hr
Houston-Matamoros	US\$25	9hr
Houston-Monterrey	US\$40	10hr

You can also, often in little or no extra time, make your way to the border on one bus (or train), cross it on foot or by local bus, and then catch an onward bus on the other side. Greyhound serves many US border cities; to reach others, transfer from Greyhound to a smaller bus line. Greyhound's one-way fares to El Paso, for example, are US\$64 from Los Angeles (16 hours), US\$129 to US\$141 from Chicago (34 hours) and US\$128 from New York (52 hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

For information on the procedures for taking a vehicle into Mexico, see p986, and p318 for simpler and cheaper arrangements for much of the state of Sonora.

If you're traveling from Mexico into the US at a busy time of year, have a look at the website of **US Customs & Border Protection** (www.cbp.gov), which posts waiting times at entry points (under 'Travel').

TRAIN

Though there are no regular passenger trains on the Mexican side of the US–Mexico border, it's quite possible to reach the US side of the border by rail. Trains can be quicker and cheaper than buses, or slower and more expensive, depending on the route. **Amtrak** (www.amtrak.com) serves four US cities from which access to Mexico is easy: San Diego, California (opposite Tijuana); El Paso, Texas (opposite Ciudad Juárez); Del Rio, Texas (opposite Ciudad Acuña) and San Antonio, Texas, which is linked by bus to Eagle Pass (opposite Piedras Negras) and Laredo (opposite Nuevo Laredo).

SEA

For those who like to combine snatches of Mexico with a life of ease on the high seas, cruises from the US enable you to enjoy activities and attractions on and near Mexico's coasts without having to worry about the logistics of accommodations, eating or transportation. Mexico is the world's most popular cruise destination, with over six million cruise passengers a year arriving at Mexican ports. Caribbean Mexico is the most popular cruise destination, usually in combination with other Caribbean stops and/or Key West, Florida, and Isla Cozumel is the single busiest stop. Mexico's other Caribbean cruise ports are Puerto Morelos and Calica, just south of Playa del Carmen. The Costa Maya terminal at Mahahual was destroyed by Hurricane Dean in 2007 but there are plans to rebuild it.

On the Pacific route (the Mexican Riviera in cruise parlance), the main ports of call are Ensenada, Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlán, Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco; cruises also call at Manzanillo, Zihuatanejo, Bahías de Huatulco and the new Puerto Chiapas, near Tapachula.

A Caribbean cruise from ports in the southeastern US, or a Mexican Riviera

cruise from California, can cost well under US\$1000 per person for 10 days.

Following are some of the cruise lines visiting Mexico, with US phone numbers:

Carnival Cruise Lines (☎ 888-227-6482; www.carnival.com)

Celebrity Cruises (☎ 800-647-2251; www.celebrity.com)

Crystal Cruises (☎ 888-722-0021; www.crystalcruises.com)

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

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

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

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

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

GETTING AROUND

AIR

All large and many smaller cities in Mexico have airports and passenger services. Depending on the fare you get, flying can be good value on longer journeys, especially considering the long bus trip that is probably the alternative. Domestic flights within Mexico are sometimes cheaper if you book them before you go to Mexico, in conjunction with an international round-trip ticket.

Airlines in Mexico

Aeroméxico and Mexicana are the country's two major airlines. There are also numerous smaller ones, often cheaper and often flying routes between provincial cities ignored by the bigger two. Several low-cost airlines have started operations in recent years, including Alma de México, with its hub at Guadalajara, Avolar (hub: Tijuana), Interjet (hub: Toluca), VivaAerobus (hub: Monterrey), Volaris (hub: Toluca) and Click Mexicana (Mexicana's no-frills subsidiary). At the time of writing the low-cost Líneas Aéreas Azteca had its

DEPARTURE TAX

A departure tax equivalent to about M\$250 is levied on international flights from Mexico. It's usually included in your ticket cost, but if it isn't, you must pay in cash during airport check-in. Ask your travel agent in advance.

MEXICAN DOMESTIC AIRLINES

Airline	Telephone	Website	Areas served
Aéreo Calafia	☎ 624-143-43-02	www.aereocalafia.com.mx	Baja California & northwest
Aero California	☎ 800-237-62-25	www.aerocalifornia.com	La Paz & 18 other cities around the country
Aeromar	☎ 800-237-66-27	www.aeromar.com.mx	Central Mexico, west, northeast, Gulf coast, southeast
Aeroméxico	☎ 800-021-40-00	www.aeromexico.com	over 50 cities nationwide
Aeroméxico Connect	☎ 800-800-23-76	www.amconnect.com	Central Mexico, Baja California, north, west, Gulf coast
Aladia	☎ 800-252-34-21	www.aladia.com	Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Puebla, Acapulco, Cancún
Alma de México	☎ 800-800-25-62	www.alma.com.mx	Guadalajara & 28 other cities around the country
Aviaca	☎ 800-284-22-72	www.aviaca.com	Mexico City & 19 other cities around the country
Avolar	☎ 800-212-86-52	www.avolar.com.mx	Tijuana & 18 other cities in the center, west, northwest & southeast
Click Mexicana	☎ 800-122-54-25	www.click.com.mx	Mexico City & 24 other cities around the country
Interjet	☎ 800-011-23-45	www.interjet.com.mx	Toluca & 14 other cities around the country
Magnicharters	☎ 800-201-14-04	www.magnicharters.com.mx	Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Bajío, Mérida, coastal resorts
Mexicana	☎ 800-502-20-00	www.mexicana.com	over 50 cities nationwide
VivaAerobus	☎ 81-8215-0150	www.vivaerobus.com	Monterrey & 18 other cities around the country
Volaris	☎ 800-786-52-74	www.volaris.com.mx	Toluca & 16 other cities around the city

Note: Aeroméxico Connect and Aeromar are affiliates of Aeroméxico and normally share its booking facilities.

operating license suspended by the Mexican authorities because of safety violations.

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) considers Mexico's Civil Aviation Authority to be in compliance with international aviation safety standards.

Fares

Fares can depend on whether you fly at a busy or quiet time of day, week or year, and how far ahead you book and pay. High season generally corresponds to the Mexican holiday seasons (see p971). You'll often save money if you pay for the ticket a few days ahead or if you fly late in the evening. Round-trip fares are usually simply twice the price of one-way tickets, though some cheaper advance-payment deals do exist.

Typical one-way fares from Mexico City with nonbudget airlines to most Mexican cities are between about M\$1300 and M\$2100 including taxes and charges, depending mainly on distance. Low-cost airlines flying

from Toluca, 50km west of Mexico City, may charge up to 50% less.

BICYCLE

Cycling is not a common way to tour Mexico. The size of the country, reports of highway robbery, poor road surfaces, careless motorists and pedestrians and other road hazards (see p995) are deterrents. However, biking around is certainly possible if you're prepared for the challenges. You should be fit, use the best equipment, and be fully able to handle your own repairs. Take the mountainous topography and hot climate into account when planning your route. Bike lanes are rare.

All cities have bicycle stores: a decent mountain bike suitable for a few weeks' touring costs around M\$5000. Don't expect to get much of that back by selling it afterwards unless you have time on your side.

If you're interested in a long Mexican ride, consider the bring-your-own-bike tours of

the Yucatán Peninsula, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Pacific Mexico and Michoacán, up to a month long, offered by the fun and friendly **!El Tour** (www.bikemexico.com).

BOAT

Vehicle and passenger ferries connecting Baja California with the Mexican mainland sail between Santa Rosalía and Guaymas, La Paz and Mazatlán, and La Paz and Topolobampo. One-way passenger seat fares cost from M\$550 to M\$800; a car up to 5m in length costs between M\$1000 and M\$2500. There are also ferries from the Yucatán Peninsula to the islands of Isla Mujeres (p878), Isla Cozumel (p892) and Isla Holbox (p881).

BUS

Mexico has a good road and bus network, and comfortable, frequent, reasonably priced bus services connect all cities. Most cities and towns have one main bus terminal where all long-distance buses arrive and depart. It may be called the Terminal de Autobuses, Central de Autobuses, Central Camionera or simply La Central (not to be confused with *el centro*, the city center!) If there is no single main terminal, different bus companies will have separate terminals scattered around town.

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

Highway robbery happens very rarely. The risk is higher at night, on isolated stretches of highway far from cities, and in 2nd-class buses.

Classes

DELUXE

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

FIRST CLASS

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

Bring a sweater or jacket to combat overzealous air-conditioning. As with deluxe buses, you buy your ticket in the bus station before boarding.

SECOND CLASS

Segunda (2a) clase buses serve small towns and villages, and provide cheaper, slower travel on some intercity routes. A few are almost as quick, comfortable and direct as 1st-class buses. Others are old, slow and shabby.

Many 2nd-class services have no ticket office; you just pay your fare to the conductor. These buses tend to take slow, non-toll roads in and out of big cities and will stop anywhere to pick up passengers: if you board midroute you might make some of the trip standing. The small amount of money

HOW MANY STOPS?

It's useful to understand the difference between the types of bus service on offer:

Sin escalas Nonstop.

Directo Very few stops.

Semi-directo A few more stops than *directo*.

Ordinario Stops wherever passengers want to get on or off the bus; deluxe and 1st-class buses are never *ordinario*.

Express Nonstop on short to medium-length trips; very few stops on long trips.

Local Bus that starts its journey at the bus station you're in and usually leaves on time; *local* service is preferable to *de paso*.

De paso Bus that started its journey somewhere else but is stopping to let off and take on passengers. If the bus company does not have a computer booking system, you may have to wait until the bus arrives before any tickets are sold. If the bus is full, you have to wait for the next one.

Viaje redondo Round-trip.

MEXICAN BUS COMPANIES

Company	Telephone	Website	Main regions/destinations
ABC	☎ 664-621-24-24	www.abc.com.mx	Baja California
ADO	☎ 800-702-80-00	www.ado.com.mx	Mexico City, Puebla, Gulf coast, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Chiapas, Yucatán Peninsula
ADO GL	☎ 800-702-80-00	www.adogl.com.mx	Mexico City, Puebla, Gulf coast, Tabasco, Oaxaca, Yucatán Peninsula
AU	☎ 800-702-80-00	www.ado.com.mx	Mexico City, Puebla, Gulf coast, Tabasco, Oaxaca, Puebla
Autotransportes Águila	☎ 612-122-78/98	www.abc.com.mx	Southern Baja California
Autovías	☎ 55-5567-4550	N/A	Mexico City, Michoacán, Zihuatanejo
Blancos	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, Gulf coast
Chihuahueses	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, central Mexico, Pacific coast, central north, northwest
Elite	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, central Mexico, Pacific coast, central north, northwest
Estrella Blanca	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, Gulf coast, Pacific coast
Estrella de Oro	☎ 55-5549-8520 (Mexico City), 800-900-01-05 (other cities)	www.autobus.com.mx/edo	Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Taxco, Pacific coast (Guerrero state)
Estrella Roja	☎ 800-712-22-84	www.estrellaroja.com.mx	Mexico City, Puebla
ETN	☎ 800-800-03-86	www.etn.com.mx	Mexico City, northern & western central highlands, Pacific coast, northeast
Flecha Amarilla	☎ 800-849-90-04	N/A	Mexico City, northern & western central highlands, Manzanillo
Futura	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, central Mexico, Pacific coast, northern Mexico
Gacela	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Pacific coast

you save by traveling 2nd-class is not usually worth the discomfort or extra journey time entailed.

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

Microbuses or 'micros' are small, usually fairly new, 2nd-class buses with around 25 seats, usually running short routes between nearby towns.

Costs

First-class buses typically cost around M\$50 to M\$70 per hour of travel (70km to 80km). Deluxe buses may cost just 10% or 20% more than 1st class, or about 60% more for super-deluxe services such as ETN, UNO and Turistar Ejecutivo. Second-class buses cost 10% or 20% less than 1st class.

Reservations

For trips of up to four or five hours on busy routes, you can usually just go to the bus terminal, buy a ticket and head out without much delay. For longer trips, or routes with infrequent service, buy a ticket a day or more in advance. Deluxe and 1st-class bus companies have computerized ticket systems that allow you to select your seat when you buy your ticket. Try to avoid the back of the bus, which is where the toilets are and also tends to give a bumpier ride.

Ticketbus (in Mexico City ☎ 55-5133-2424, 800-702-80-00; www.ticketbus.com.mx) provides tickets and reservations for many bus companies, chiefly on routes in the center, south and southeast of Mexico. You can book via the internet or telephone, or at any of its many offices in 44 cities and towns.

If you pay for a bus ticket in cash, cash refunds of 80% to 100% are available from many bus companies if you return your ticket more than an hour or two before the listed departure time.

MEXICAN BUS COMPANIES (CONTINUED)

Company	Telephone	Website	Main regions/destinations
Herradura de Plata	☎ 55-5567-4550	N/A	Mexico City, northern & western central highlands
OCC	☎ 800-702-80-00	www.ado.com.mx	Mexico City, Puebla, Oaxaca, Chiapas (Ómnibus Cristóbal Colón)
Ómnibus de México	☎ 800-765-66-36	www.odm.com.mx	Mexico City, northern central highlands, central north, northeast, Colima, Guadalajara, Tepic
Oriente	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, central Mexico, northeast
Primera Plus	☎ 800-849-90-04	N/A	Mexico City, northern & western central highlands, Pacific coast
Pullman de Morelos	☎ 800-624-03-60	www.pullman.com.mx	Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Cuautla
TAP	☎ 668-812-57-49	N/A	Mexico City, Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta, northwest
Transportes del Norte	☎ 800-890-90-90	www.gruposenda.com	Mexico City, northeast, San Luis Potosí
Transportes del Pacífico	☎ 55-5587-5310	N/A	Mexico City, Guadalajara, Pacific coast, northwest
Transportes Frontera	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, central Mexico, northeast
Transportes Norte de Sonora	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, Guadalajara, Pacific coast, northwest
Turistar	☎ 800-507-55-00	www.estrellablanca.com.mx	Mexico City, central Mexico, north, Pacific coast
UNO	☎ 800-702-80-00	www.uno.com.mx	Mexico City, Puebla, Gulf coast, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, Yucatán Peninsula

Note: many bus lines are part of multiline groups, which may share ticket desks at bus stations. ADO, ADO GL, AU, OCC and UNO are all part of the ADO group. Blancos, Elite, Estrella Blanca, Futura, Gacela, Oriente, Chihuahueses, Transportes Frontera, Transportes Norte de Sonora and Turistar are all part of Grupo Estrella Blanca.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving in Mexico is not as easy as it is north of the border, and rentals are more expensive, but having a vehicle gives you maximum flexibility and freedom.

Bring Your Own Vehicle

Bringing a car to Mexico is most useful for travelers who:

- have plenty of time
- like to get off the beaten track
- have surfboards, diving equipment or other cumbersome luggage
- will be traveling with at least one companion.

Drivers should know at least a little Spanish and have basic mechanical knowledge, reserves of patience and access to extra cash for emergencies. Good makes of car to take to Mexico are Volkswagen, Nissan, Chrysler, General Motors and Ford, which have plants in Mexico and dealers in most big towns. Very big cars are unwieldy on narrow roads and

use a lot of gasoline. A sedan with a trunk (boot) provides safer storage than a station wagon or hatchback. Mexican mechanics are resourceful, and most repairs can be done quickly and inexpensively, but it still pays to take as many spare parts as you can manage (spare fuel filters are very useful). Tires (including spare), shock absorbers and suspension should be in good condition. For security, have something to immobilize the steering wheel, and consider getting a kill switch installed.

Motorcycling in Mexico is not for the fainthearted. Roads and traffic can be rough, and parts and mechanics hard to come by. The parts you'll most easily find will be for Kawasaki, Honda and Suzuki bikes.

See p986 for information on the paperwork required for bringing a vehicle into Mexico.

Driver's License

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

Gas (Petrol)

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

The gasoline on sale is all *sin plomo* (unleaded). There are two varieties: Magna Sin, roughly equivalent to US regular unleaded, and Premium, roughly equivalent to US super unleaded. At the time of research, Magna Sin cost about M\$7 per liter (US\$2.40 per US gallon), and Premium about M\$8.75. Diesel fuel is widely available at around M\$6 per liter. Regular Mexican diesel has a higher sulfur content than US diesel, but there is a 'Diesel Sin' with less sulfur. If diesel drivers change their oil and filter about every 3500km, they should have no problems.

Gas stations have pump attendants (who appreciate a tip of M\$2 to M\$5).

Insurance

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

protection: it is regarded as a guarantee that restitution will be paid, and will expedite release of the driver.

Mexican law recognizes only Mexican motor insurance (*seguro*), so a US or Canadian policy, even if it provides coverage, is not acceptable to Mexican officialdom. Sanborn's and the **American Automobile Association** (AAA; www.aaa.com) are worth looking into for Mexico motor insurance. Mexican insurance is also sold in US border towns; as you approach the border from the US you will see billboards advertising offices selling Mexican policies. At the busier border crossings, such as those to Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Agua Prieta, Ciudad Juárez, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa and Matamoros, there are insurance offices open 24 hours a day. Some deals are better than others.

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

Insurance is considered invalid if the driver is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Maps

Mexican signposting can be poor, and decent road maps are essential. A Mexican road atlas such as Guía Roji's *Por Las Carreteras de México* (M\$175) is a worthwhile investment. It's sold at bookstores and some newsstands in Mexico, and is available from internet booksellers for a little more. A new edition is published annually and includes most new highways. Also useful are Quimera publisher's regional road maps.

Rental

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

Renters must provide a valid driver's license (your home license is OK), passport and major credit card, and are usually required to be at least 21 (sometimes 25, or if you're aged 21 to 24 you may have to pay a surcharge). Read the small print of the rental agreement. In addition to the basic rental rate, you pay tax and insurance costs to the rental

THE GREEN ANGELS

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

company. Note: comprehensive insurance can almost double the basic cost quoted in some internet bookings: you'll usually have the option of taking liability-only insurance at a lower rate. Ask exactly what the insurance options cover: theft and damage insurance may only cover a percentage of costs, or the insurance might not be valid for travel on rough country tracks. It's best to have plenty of liability coverage: Mexican law permits the jailing of drivers after an accident until they have met their obligations to third parties. The complimentary car-rental insurance offered with some US credit cards does not usually cover Mexico.

Most agencies offer a choice between a per-kilometer deal or unlimited kilometers. Local firms may or may not be cheaper than the big international ones. In most places the cheapest car available costs M\$500 to M\$600 a day including unlimited kilometers, insurance and tax. If you rent by the week or month, the per-day cost can come down by 20% to 40%. You can also cut costs by avoiding airport pickups and drop-offs, for which 10% can be added to your total check. The extra charge for drop-off in another city, when available, is usually about M\$4 per kilometer.

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

Alamo (☎ 800-849-80-01; www.alamo.com)

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

Budget (☎ 800-700-17-00; www.budget.com.mx)

Dollar (☎ 998-886-02-22; www.dollar.com)

Europcar (☎ 800-201-20-84; www.europcar.com.mx)

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

National (☎ 800-716-66-25; www.nationalcar.com.mx)

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

Motorbikes or scooters are available to rent in a few tourist centers. You're usually required to have a driver's license and credit card. It's advisable to look particularly carefully into insurance arrangements here: some renters do not offer any insurance at all. Note that a locally acquired motorcycle license is not valid under some travel-insurance policies.

Road Conditions

Many Mexican highways, even some toll highways, are not up to the standards of US, Canadian or European ones. Still, the main roads are serviceable and fairly fast when

traffic is not heavy. Mexicans on the whole drive as cautiously and sensibly as people anywhere. Traffic density, poor surfaces and frequent hazards (potholes, speed bumps, animals, bicycles, children) all help to keep speeds down.

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

In towns and cities and on rural roads, be especially wary of *Alto* (Stop) signs, *topes* (speed bumps) and holes in the road. They are often not where you'd expect, and missing one can cost you in traffic fines or car damage. Speed bumps are also used to slow traffic on highways that pass through built-up areas. 'Tope' or 'Vibradores' signs give you a warning about most speed bumps: the deadly ones are the ones with no warning signs – and if you hit them at any speed, you and your car will get quite a shock.

There is always the chance that you will be pulled over by Mexican traffic police for an imaginary infraction. If this happens, stay calm and polite and don't be in a hurry. You don't have to pay a bribe, and acting dumb and not understanding Spanish may eventually make the cop give up. You can also ask to see documentation about the law you have supposedly broken, ask for the officer's identification, ask to speak to a superior, and/or note the officer's name, badge number, vehicle number and department (federal, state or municipal). Pay any traffic fines at a police station and get a receipt, then if you wish to make a complaint head for a state tourist office.

CITY PARKING

It's not usually a good idea to park on the street overnight. If your hotel doesn't have parking, it's best to find a commercial *estacionamiento* (parking lot). These usually cost around M\$50 overnight and M\$10 to M\$15 per hour during the day.

MOTORCYCLE HAZARDS

Certain aspects of Mexican roads make them particularly hazardous for motorcyclists:

- poor signage of road and lane closures
- lots of dogs on the roads
- debris and deep potholes
- vehicles without taillights
- lack of highway lighting

HELPFUL (?) SIGNALS

Mexican drivers have a couple of signaling conventions that drivers from other countries may not immediately understand – and need to be treated with caution in any case.

Drivers often warn each other of hazards on the road ahead – a police checkpoint, a tailback, a rock or cow in the road – by a flash of the headlights or hazard-warning lights. Of course you may get round the next few bends and find there's nothing to worry about. Maybe the other driver touched their switch by mistake.

Slow-moving vehicles often flash their left indicators to indicate that the road ahead is clear for a following vehicle to overtake. You should never take their word for it, of course – and remember that they might also be flashing left because they are about to turn left!

TOLL ROADS

Mexico has more than 6000km of autopistas (toll roads), usually four-lane. They are generally in much better condition and a lot quicker than the alternative free roads. *Cuotas* (tolls) average about M\$1 per km. Toll information is available at www.sct.gob.mx: click on 'Traza Tu Ruta.'

Road Rules

Drive on the right-hand side of the road.

Speed limits range between 80km and 120km per hour on open highways (less when highways pass through built-up areas), and between 30km and 50km per hour in towns and cities. Seat belts are obligatory for all occupants of a car, and children under five must be strapped into safety seats in the rear. Obeying speed limits, traffic rules and traffic signs will avoid giving police excuses to demand 'fines' payable on the spot.

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

Antipollution rules in Mexico City ban most vehicles from the city's roads on one day each week (see p200).

COLECTIVOS & OTHER VEHICLES

In some areas a variety of small vehicles provide alternatives to buses. *Colectivo* (collective) taxis, Volkswagen minibuses (combi) and more comfortable passenger-carrying vans, such as Chevrolet Suburbans, operate shuttle services between some towns, usually leaving whenever they have a full load

of passengers. Fares are typically a little less than 1st-class buses. Microbuses or 'micros' are small, usually fairly new, 2nd-class buses with around 25 seats, usually running short routes between nearby towns. More primitive are passenger-carrying *camionetas* (pickups) and *camiones* (trucks) with fares similar to 2nd-class bus fares. Standing in the back of a lurching truck with a couple of dozen *campesinos* (land workers) and their machetes and animals is always an experience to remember!

HITCHHIKING

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

However, hitching is not an uncommon way of getting to some off-the-beaten-track places poorly served by bus. Always be alert to possible dangers wherever you are. If the driver is another tourist or a private motorist, you may get the ride for free. If it is a work or commercial vehicle, you should offer to pay, something equivalent to the bus fare.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION**Bicycle**

Most Mexican towns and cities are flat enough to make cycling an option. Seek out the less traffic-infested routes and you should enjoy it. Even Mexico City has its biking enthusiasts. You can rent bikes in several towns and cities for M\$100 to M\$150 per day.

Boat

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

Bus

Generally known as *camiones*, local buses are often the cheapest way to get around cities and out to nearby towns and villages. They run frequently and are cheap. Fares in cities are rarely more than M\$5. In many cities, fleets of small, modern *microbuses* have replaced the noisy, dirty and crowded older buses.

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

Colectivo, Combi, Minibus & Pesero

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

Metro

Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey all have metro (subway, underground railway) systems. Mexico City's, in particular, is a quick, cheap and useful way of getting around. With 175 stations and used by over four million people every weekday, it's the world's third-busiest subway.

Taxi

Taxis are common in towns and cities, and surprisingly economical. City rides cost around M\$10 per kilometer, and in some cities there's a fixed rate for journeys within defined central areas. (See p141 for a warning on taxi crime in Mexico City.) If a taxi has a meter, you can ask the driver if it's working ('¿Funciona el taxímetro?'). If it's not, or if the taxi doesn't have a meter, establish the price of the ride before getting in (this may involve a bit of haggling).

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

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

Renting a taxi for a day's out-of-town outing generally costs something similar to a cheap rental car – around M\$500 or M\$600.

TRAIN

The spectacular Ferrocarril Chihuahua al Pacífico that runs between Los Mochis and Chihuahua (p341), known in English as the Copper Canyon Railway, is one of the highlights of traveling in Mexico. But the remainder of Mexico's regular passenger train system effectively ceased to exist after the railroads were privatized in the 1990s. The very few services remaining operate on routes that are of no interest to travelers or are special tourist excursion services. Most prominent among the latter group is the **Tequila Express** (www.tequilaexpress.com.mx) running between Guadalajara and the tequila-distilling town of Amatitán (see p543).

Health

Dr David Goldberg

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Travelers to Mexico need to be concerned chiefly about food-borne diseases, though mosquito-borne infections can also be a problem. Most of these illnesses are not life threatening, but they can ruin your trip. Besides getting the proper vaccinations, it's important that you bring along a good insect repellent and exercise great care in what you eat and drink.

BEFORE YOU GO

Bring medications in their original containers, clearly labeled. A signed, dated letter from your physician describing all medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

Mexican medical treatment is generally inexpensive for common diseases and minor treatment, but if you suffer some serious medical problem, you may want to find a private hospital or fly out for treatment. Travel insurance can typically cover the costs. Some US health-insurance policies stay in effect (at least for a limited time) if you travel abroad, but it's worth checking exactly what you'll be covered for in Mexico. For people whose

medical insurance or national health systems don't extend to Mexico – which includes most non-Americans – a travel policy is advisable. US travelers can find links to information on medical evacuation and travel insurance companies on the Mexico page of the **Bureau of Consular Affairs website** (www.travel.state.gov).

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly, rather than requiring you to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call collect to a center in your home country, where an assessment of your problem is made. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home. Some policies offer different medical-expense options; the higher ones are chiefly for countries such as the USA, which have extremely high medical costs. There is a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, be sure to visit a physician four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an international certificate of vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for countries that require proof of yellow fever vaccination upon entry, but it's a good idea to carry it wherever you travel.

A number of vaccines are recommended; see the table on the next page.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

- acetaminophen/paracetamol (Tylenol) or aspirin
- adhesive or paper tape
- antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- antibiotics
- antidiarrheal drugs (eg loperamide)
- anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- steroid cream or cortisone (for poison ivy and other allergic rashes)
- bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- scissors, safety pins, tweezers

Vaccine	Recommended for	Dosage	Side effects
hepatitis A	all travelers	1 dose before trip; booster 6-12 months later	soreness at injection site; headaches; body aches
typhoid	all travelers	4 capsules by mouth, 1 taken every other day	abdominal pain; nausea; rash
hepatitis B	long-term travelers in close contact with the local population	3 doses over 6-month period	soreness at injection site; low-grade fever
rabies	travelers who may have contact with animals and may not have access to medical care	3 doses over 3-4 week period	soreness at injection site; headaches; body aches
tetanus-diphtheria	all travelers who haven't had booster within 10 years	1 dose lasts 10 years	soreness at injection site
measles	travelers born after 1956 who've had only 1 measles vaccination	1 dose	fever; rash; joint pains; allergic reactions
chickenpox	travelers who've never had chickenpox	2 doses, 1 month apart	fever; mild case of chickenpox

- thermometer
- pocket knife
- DEET-containing insect repellent
- permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- sunblock
- oral rehydration salts
- iodine tablets (for water purification)
- syringes and sterile needles

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com) provides complete travel health recommendations for every country and is updated daily. The World Health Organization publishes a superb book, **International Travel and Health** (www.who.int/ith/), which is revised annually and is available free online.

It's also a good idea to consult government travel health websites before departure:

Australia www.dfat.gov.au/travel/

Canada <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

UK www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/

United States www.cdc.gov/travel/

FURTHER READING

For further information, see *Healthy Travel Central & South America*, also from Lonely Planet. If you're traveling with children, *Lonely Planet's Travel with Children* may be useful. The *ABC of Healthy Travel*, by E Walker et al, and *Medicine for the Outdoors*, by Paul S Auerbach, are other valuable resources.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots may form in the legs (deep vein thrombosis) during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they could cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travelers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones, resulting in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag, try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. An herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN MEXICO

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

There are a number of first-rate hospitals in Mexico City (p131). In general, private facilities offer better care, though at greater cost, than public hospitals.

Adequate medical care is available in other major cities, but facilities in rural areas may be limited. In many areas, the US consulate provides an online directory to local physicians and hospitals, such as the following:

Ciudad Juarez <http://ciudadjuarez.usconsulate.gov/physicians-and-dentists.html>

Guadalajara www.usembassy-mexico.gov/guadalajara/GeDoctors.htm

Merida <http://merida.usconsulate.gov/merida/doctorlist.html>

Nogales <http://nogales.usconsulate.gov/doctors.html>

Many doctors and hospitals expect payment in cash, regardless of whether you have travel health insurance. If you develop a medical problem that's life threatening, you'll probably want to be evacuated to a country with state-of-the-art medical care. Since this may cost tens of thousands of dollars, be sure you have insurance to cover this before you depart.

Pharmacies are identified by a green cross and a 'Farmacia' sign. Most are well supplied and the pharmacists well trained. Reliable pharmacy chains include Sanborns, Farmacia Guadalajara, Benavides and Farmacia Fenix. Some medications requiring a prescription in the US may be dispensed in Mexico without one. To find an after-hours pharmacy, you can look in the local newspaper, ask your hotel concierge, or check the front door of a local pharmacy, which will often post the name of a nearby pharmacy that is open for the night.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Malaria

Malaria occurs in every country in Central America, including parts of Mexico. It's transmitted by mosquito bites, usually between

dusk and dawn. The main symptom is high spiking fevers, which may be accompanied by chills, sweats, headache, body aches, weakness, vomiting or diarrhea. Severe cases may involve the central nervous system and lead to seizures, confusion, coma and death.

Taking malaria pills is strongly recommended when visiting rural areas in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Tabasco and Quintana Roo, and for an area between 24° and 28° north latitude and 106° and 110° west longitude, which includes parts of the states of Sonora, Chihuahua and Durango.

For Mexico, the first-choice malaria pill is chloroquine, taken once weekly in a dosage of 500mg, starting one to two weeks before arrival and continuing through the trip and for four weeks after departure. Chloroquine is safe, inexpensive and highly effective. Side effects are typically mild and may include nausea, abdominal discomfort, headache, dizziness, blurred vision or itching. Severe reactions are uncommon.

Protecting yourself against mosquito bites is just as important as taking malaria pills, since no pills are 100% effective.

If it's possible that you may not have access to medical care while traveling, bring along additional pills for emergency self-treatment, which you should take if you can't reach a doctor and develop symptoms that suggest malaria, such as high spiking fevers. One option is to take four tablets of Malarone once daily for three days. If you start self-medication, you should try to see a doctor at the earliest possible opportunity.

If you develop a fever after returning home, see a physician, as malaria symptoms may not occur for months.

Malaria pills are not recommended for the major resorts along the Pacific and Gulf Coasts.

Dengue Fever

Dengue fever is a viral infection found in most parts of Mexico. An outbreak in 2007 resulted in at least 67,000 cases. Dengue is transmitted by aedes mosquitoes, which usually bite during the day and are usually found close to human habitations, often indoors. They breed primarily in artificial water containers, such as jars, barrels, cans, cisterns, metal drums, plastic containers and discarded tires. As a result, dengue is especially common in densely populated, urban environments.

Dengue usually causes flu-like symptoms including fever, muscle aches, joint pains, headaches, nausea and vomiting, often followed by a rash. The body aches may be quite uncomfortable, but most cases resolve uneventfully in a few days. Severe cases usually occur in children under age 15 who are experiencing their second dengue infection.

There's no treatment for dengue fever except to take analgesics such as acetaminophen/paracetamol (Tylenol) and drink plenty of fluids. Severe cases may require hospitalization for intravenous fluids and supportive care. There is no vaccine. The cornerstone of prevention is insect protection measures (see p1005).

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A occurs throughout Central America. It's a viral liver infection usually acquired by ingestion of contaminated water, food or ice, though it may also be acquired by direct contact with infected persons. The illness occurs worldwide, but the incidence is higher in developing nations. Symptoms may include fever, malaise, jaundice, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Most cases resolve uneventfully, though it occasionally causes severe liver damage. There is no treatment.

The vaccine for hepatitis A is extremely safe and highly effective. If you get a booster six to 12 months later, it lasts for at least 10 years. You really should get it before you go to Mexico or any other developing nation. Because the safety of hepatitis A vaccine has not been established for pregnant women or children under age two, they should instead be given a gamma-globulin injection.

Hepatitis B

Like hepatitis A, hepatitis B is a liver infection that occurs worldwide but is more common in developing nations. Unlike hepatitis A, the disease is usually acquired by sexual contact or by exposure to infected blood, generally through blood transfusions or contaminated needles. The vaccine is recommended only for long-term travelers (on the road more than six months) who expect to live in rural areas or have close physical contact with the local population. Additionally, the vaccine is recommended for anyone who anticipates sexual contact with the local inhabitants or a possible need for medical, dental or other treatments while abroad, especially if a need for transfusions or injections is expected.

Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and highly effective. However, a total of three injections is necessary to establish full immunity. Several countries added hepatitis B vaccine to the list of routine childhood immunizations in the 1980s, so many young adults are already protected.

Typhoid Fever

Typhoid fever is common throughout Central America. The infection is acquired by ingestion of food or water contaminated by a species of *Salmonella* known as *Salmonella typhi*. Fever occurs in virtually all cases. Other symptoms may include headache, malaise, muscle aches, dizziness, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain. Either diarrhea or constipation may occur. Possible complications include intestinal perforation, intestinal bleeding, confusion, delirium or (rarely) coma.

Unless you expect to take all your meals in major hotels and restaurants, a typhoid vaccine is a good idea. It's usually given orally, but is also available as an injection. Neither vaccine is approved for use in children under age two.

The drug of choice for typhoid fever is usually a quinolone antibiotic such as ciprofloxacin (Cipro) or levofloxacin (Levaquin), which many travelers carry for treatment of travelers' diarrhea. However, if you self-treat for typhoid fever, you may also need to self-treat for malaria, since the symptoms of the two diseases can be indistinguishable.

Rabies

Rabies is a viral infection of the brain and spinal cord that is almost always fatal. The rabies virus is carried in the saliva of infected animals and is typically transmitted through an animal bite, though contamination of any break in the skin with infected saliva may result in rabies. Rabies occurs in all Central American countries. Most cases in Mexico are related to dog bites, but bats and other wild species also remain sources of infection.

Rabies vaccine is safe, but a full series requires three injections and is quite expensive. Those at high risk for rabies, such as animal handlers and spelunkers (cave explorers), should certainly get the vaccine. In addition, those at lower risk for animal bites should consider asking for the vaccine if they are traveling to remote areas and might not have access to appropriate medical care if needed.

The treatment for a possibly rabid bite consists of rabies vaccine with rabies immune globulin. It's effective, but must be given promptly. Most travelers don't need rabies vaccine.

All animal bites and scratches must be promptly and thoroughly cleansed with large amounts of soap and water, and local health authorities should be contacted to determine whether or not further treatment is necessary (see p1006).

Cholera

Cholera is an intestinal infection acquired through ingestion of contaminated food or water. The main symptom is profuse, watery diarrhea, which may be so severe that it causes life-threatening dehydration. The key treatment is drinking oral rehydration solution. Antibiotics are also given, usually tetracycline or doxycycline, though quinolone antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin and levofloxacin are also effective.

Only a handful of cases have been reported in Mexico over the last few years. Cholera vaccine is no longer recommended.

Other Infections

GNATHOSTOMIASIS

Gnathostomiasis is a parasite acquired by eating raw or undercooked freshwater fish, including ceviche, a popular lime-marinated fish salad. Cases have been reported from Acapulco and other parts of Mexico. The chief symptom is intermittent, migratory swellings under the skin, sometimes associated with joint pains, muscle pains or gastrointestinal problems. The symptoms may not begin until many months after exposure.

LEISHMANIASIS

Leishmaniasis occurs in the mountains and jungles of all Central American countries. The infection is transmitted by sand flies, which are about one-third the size of mosquitoes. Leishmaniasis may be limited to the skin, causing slowly-growing ulcers over exposed parts of the body, or (less commonly) may disseminate to the bone marrow, liver and spleen. The disease may be particularly severe in those with HIV. The disseminated form is rare in Mexico and is limited chiefly to the Balsas River basin in the southern states of Guerrero and Puebla. There is no vaccine for leishmaniasis. To protect yourself from sand flies, follow the same precautions as

for mosquitoes (p1005), except that netting must be finer mesh (at least 18 holes to the linear inch).

CHAGAS' DISEASE

Chagas' disease is a parasitic infection transmitted by triatomine insects (reduviid bugs), which inhabit crevices in the walls and roofs of substandard housing in South and Central America. In Mexico, most cases occur in southern and coastal areas. The triatomine insect lays its feces on human skin as it bites, usually at night. A person becomes infected when he or she unknowingly rubs the feces into the bite wound or any other open sore. Chagas' disease is extremely rare in travelers. However, if you sleep in a poorly constructed house, especially one made of mud, adobe or thatch, you should be sure to protect yourself with a bed net and good insecticide.

HISTOPLASMOSIS

Histoplasmosis is caused by a soil-based fungus and is acquired by inhalation, often when soil has been disrupted. Initial symptoms may include fever, chills, dry cough, chest pain and headache, sometimes leading to pneumonia. An outbreak was recently described among visitors to an Acapulco hotel.

COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS

Coccidioidomycosis, also known as 'valley fever,' is a fungal infection that is restricted to semiarid areas in the American southwest, nearby areas in northern Mexico, and limited foci in Central and South America. Valley fever is acquired by inhaling dust from contaminated soil. It begins as a lung infection, causing fever, chest pain and coughing, and may spread to other organs, particularly the nervous system, skin and bone. Treatment requires high doses of antibiotics for prolonged periods and is not always curative.

BRUCELLOSIS

Brucellosis is an infection occurring in domestic and wild animals that may be transmitted to humans through direct animal contact, or by consumption of unpasteurized dairy products from infected animals. Symptoms may include fever, malaise, depression, loss of appetite, headache, muscle aches and back pain. Complications can include arthritis, hepatitis, meningitis and endocarditis (heart valve infection).

TICK-BORNE RELAPSING FEVER

Tick-borne relapsing fever, transmitted by either ticks or lice, has been reported from the plateau regions in central Mexico. Relapsing fever is caused by bacteria that are closely related to those that cause Lyme disease and syphilis. The illness is characterized by periods of fever, chills, headaches, body aches, muscle aches and cough, alternating with periods when the fever subsides and the person feels relatively well. To minimize the risk of relapsing fever, follow tick precautions as outlined below and practice good personal hygiene.

TULAREMIA

Tularemia, also known as 'rabbit fever,' is a bacterial infection that primarily affects rodents, rabbits and hares. Humans generally become infected through tick or deerfly bites, or by handling the carcass of an infected animal. Occasional cases are caused by inhalation of an infectious aerosol. In Mexico, most cases occur in the northern rural areas. Tularemia may develop as a flu-like illness, pneumonia or cause skin ulcers with swollen glands, depending upon how the infection is acquired. It usually responds well to antibiotics.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN SPOTTED FEVER

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is a tick-borne infection characterized by fever, headache and muscle aches, followed by a rash. Complications may include pneumonia, meningitis, gangrene and kidney failure, and may be life threatening. Cases have been reported from the central part of the country, the Yucatán Peninsula and Jalisco State.

ONCHOCERCIASIS

Onchocerciasis (river blindness) is caused by a roundworm invading the eye, leading to blindness. The infection is transmitted by black flies, which breed along the banks of rapidly flowing rivers and streams. In Mexico, the disease is reported from highland areas in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero.

TYPHUS

Typhus may be transmitted by lice in scattered pockets of the country.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS has been reported from all Central American countries. Be sure to use condoms for all sexual encounters.

TRAVELERS' DIARRHEA

To prevent diarrhea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (eg with iodine tablets); only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled; be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurized milk; and be highly selective when eating food from street vendors.

If you develop diarrhea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing lots of salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an antidiarrheal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS & TREATMENT**Altitude Sickness**

Altitude sickness may develop in travelers who ascend rapidly to altitudes greater than 2500m. Being physically fit does not lessen your risk of altitude sickness. It seems to be chiefly a matter of genetic predisposition. Those who have experienced altitude sickness in the past are prone to future episodes. The risk increases with faster ascents, higher altitudes and greater exertion. Symptoms may include headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, malaise, insomnia and loss of appetite. Severe cases may be complicated by fluid in the lungs (high-altitude pulmonary edema) or swelling of the brain (high-altitude cerebral edema). Most deaths are caused by high-altitude pulmonary edema.

The standard medication to prevent altitude sickness is a mild diuretic called acetazolamide (Diamox), which should be started 24 hours before ascent and continued for 48 hours after arrival at altitude. Possible side effects include increased urination, numbness, tingling, nausea, drowsiness, nearsightedness and temporary impotence. For those who cannot tolerate acetazolamide, most physicians prescribe dexamethasone, which is a type of steroid. A natural alternative is ginkgo, which some people find quite helpful. The usual dosage is 100mg twice daily.

To lessen the chance of altitude sickness, you should also be sure to ascend gradually to higher altitudes, avoid overexertion, eat light meals and avoid alcohol.

Symptoms of altitude sickness develop gradually so, with proper care, serious complications can usually be prevented. If you or a companion show any symptoms of altitude sickness, you should not ascend to a higher altitude until the symptoms have cleared. If the symptoms become worse or if someone shows signs of cerebral or pulmonary edema, such as trouble breathing or mental confusion, you must immediately descend to a lower altitude. A descent of 500m to 1000m is generally adequate except in cases of cerebral edema, which may require a greater descent. Supplemental oxygen is helpful if available. Acetazolamide and dexamethasone may be used to treat altitude sickness as well as prevent it.

Travel to high altitudes is generally not recommended for those with a history of heart disease, lung disease, or sickle-cell disease. It is also not recommended for pregnant women.

Mosquito Bites

To prevent mosquito bites, wear long sleeves, long pants, hats and shoes. Bring along a good insect repellent, preferably one containing DEET. Apply it to exposed skin and clothing, but not to eyes, mouth, cuts, wounds or irritated skin. Products containing lower concentrations of DEET are as effective, but for shorter periods of time. In general, adults and children over 12 should use preparations containing 25% to 35% DEET, which usually lasts about six hours. Children between two and 12 years of age should use preparations containing no more than 10% DEET, applied sparingly, which will usually last about three hours. Neurological toxicity has been reported from DEET, especially in children, but appears to be extremely uncommon and generally related to overuse. Don't use DEET-containing compounds on children under two.

Insect repellents containing certain botanical products, including oil of eucalyptus and soybean oil, are effective but last only 1½ to two hours. Where there is a high risk of malaria or yellow fever, use DEET-containing repellents. Products based on citronella are not effective.

For additional protection, apply permethrin to clothing, shoes, tents and bed nets. Permethrin treatments are safe and remain effective for at least two weeks, even when items are laundered. Permethrin should not be applied directly to skin.

Don't sleep with the window open unless there is a screen. If sleeping outdoors or in ac-

commodations that allow entry of mosquitoes, use a bed net treated with permethrin, with edges tucked in under the mattress. The mesh size should be less than 1.5mm. Alternatively, use a mosquito coil, which will fill the room with insecticide through the night. Repellent-impregnated wristbands are not effective.

Tick Bites

To protect yourself from tick bites, follow the same precautions as for mosquitoes, except that boots are preferable to shoes, with pants tucked in. Be sure to perform a thorough tick check at the end of each day. You'll generally need the assistance of a friend or mirror for a full examination. Remove ticks with tweezers, grasping them firmly by the head. Insect repellents based on botanical products, described above, have not been adequately studied for insects other than mosquitoes and cannot be recommended to prevent tick bites.

Water

Tap water in Mexico is generally not safe to drink. Vigorous boiling for one minute is the most effective means of water purification. At altitudes greater than 2000m, boil for three minutes.

Another option is to disinfect water with iodine pills. Instructions are usually enclosed and should be carefully followed. Or you can add 2% tincture of iodine to one quart or liter of water (five drops to clear water, 10 drops to cloudy water) and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cold, a longer time may be required. The taste of iodinated water can be improved by adding vitamin C (ascorbic acid). Don't consume iodinated water for more than a few weeks. Pregnant women, those with a history of thyroid disease and those allergic to iodine should not drink iodinated water.

A number of water filters are on the market. Those with smaller pores (reverse osmosis filters) provide the broadest protection, but they are relatively large and are easily plugged by debris. Those with larger pores (microstrainer filters) are ineffective against viruses, although they remove other organisms. Manufacturers' instructions must be carefully followed.

Sun

To protect from excessive sun exposure, stay out of the midday sun, wear sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat, and apply sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher, providing both UVA and

UVB protection. Sunscreen should be generously applied to all exposed parts of the body approximately 30 minutes before sun exposure and reapplied after swimming or vigorous activity. Drink plenty of fluids and avoid strenuous exercise in high temperatures.

Air Pollution

Air pollution may be a significant problem, especially in Mexico City and Guadalajara. It is typically most severe from December to May. Travelers with respiratory or cardiac conditions and those who are elderly or very young are at greatest risk for complications from air pollution, including coughing, difficulty breathing, wheezing or chest pain. Minimize the risk by staying indoors, avoiding outdoor exercise and drinking plenty of fluids.

Animal Bites

Do not attempt to pet, handle or feed any animal, with the exception of domestic animals known to be free of any infectious disease. Most animal injuries are directly related to a person's attempt to touch or feed the animal.

Any bite or scratch by a mammal, including bats, should be promptly and thoroughly cleansed with large amounts of soap and water, followed by application of an antiseptic such as iodine or alcohol. Contact local health authorities immediately for possible postexposure treatment, whether or not you've been immunized against rabies. It may also be worth starting an antibiotic – wounds caused by animal bites and scratches often become infected. One of the newer quinolones, such as levofloxacin (Levaquin), which many travelers carry in case of diarrhea, would be appropriate.

Snake & Scorpion Bites

Venomous snakes in Central America include the bushmaster, fer-de-lance, coral snake and various species of rattlesnakes. The fer-de-lance is the most lethal. It generally does not attack without provocation, but may bite humans who accidentally come too close as it lies camouflaged on the forest floor. The bushmaster is the world's largest pit viper, measuring up to 4m in length. Like other pit vipers, the bushmaster has a heat-sensing pit between the eye and nostril on each side of its head, which it uses to detect the presence of warm-blooded prey.

Coral snakes are somewhat retiring and tend not to bite humans. North of Mexico

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Problem	Treatment
jet lag	melatonin
motion sickness	ginger
mosquito bite prevention	oil of eucalyptus, soybean oil

City, all coral snakes have a red, yellow, black, yellow, red banding pattern, with red and yellow touching, in contrast to nonvenomous snakes, where the red and yellow bands are separated by black. South of Mexico City, the banding patterns become more complex and this distinction is not useful.

In the event of a venomous snake bite, place the victim at rest, keep the bitten area immobilized, and move the victim immediately to the nearest medical facility. Avoid tourniquets, which are no longer recommended.

Scorpions are a problem in many states. If stung, you should immediately apply ice or cold packs, immobilize the affected body part and go to the nearest emergency room. To prevent scorpion stings, be sure to inspect and shake out clothing, shoes and sleeping bags before use, and wear gloves and protective clothing when working around piles of wood or leaves.

CHILDREN & PREGNANT WOMEN

In general, it's safe for children and pregnant women to go to Mexico. However, as some of the vaccines listed previously are not approved for children or during pregnancy, these travelers should be particularly careful not to drink tap water or consume any questionable food or beverage. Also, when traveling with children, make sure they're up to date on all routine immunizations. It's sometimes appropriate to give children some of their vaccines a little early before visiting a developing nation. You should discuss this with your pediatrician. If pregnant, bear in mind that should a complication such as premature labor develop while abroad, the quality of medical care may not be comparable to that in your home country.

Since yellow-fever vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women or children less than nine months old, if you are arriving from a country with yellow fever, obtain a waiver letter, preferably written on letterhead stationery and bearing the stamp used by official immunization centers to validate the international certificate of vaccination.

Language

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The predominant language of Mexico is Spanish. Mexican Spanish is unlike Castilian Spanish (the language of much of Spain) in two main respects: in Mexico the Castilian lisp has more or less disappeared, and numerous indigenous words have been adopted. About 50 indigenous languages are spoken as a first language by more than seven million people, and about 15% of these don't speak Spanish.

Travelers in cities, towns and larger villages can almost always find someone who speaks at least some English. All the same, it is advantageous and courteous to know at least a few words and phrases in Spanish. Mexicans will generally respond much more positively if you attempt to speak to them in their own language.

It's easy enough to pick up some basic Spanish, and for those who want to learn the language in greater depth, courses are available in several cities in Mexico (see p966). You can also study books, records and tapes before you leave home. These resources are often available free at public libraries. Evening or college courses are also an excellent way to get started.

For a more comprehensive guide to the Spanish of Mexico, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Mexican Spanish Phrasebook*. For words and phrases that will come in handy when dining, see p100.

PRONUNCIATION

Spanish spelling is phonetically consistent, meaning that there's a clear and consistent relationship between what you see in writing and how it's pronounced. In addition, most Spanish sounds have English equivalents, so English speakers shouldn't have too much trouble being understood.

Vowels

- a** as in 'father'
- e** as in 'met'
- i** as in 'marine'
- o** as in 'or' (without the 'r' sound)
- u** as in 'rule'; the 'u' is not pronounced after **q** and in the letter combinations **gue** and **gui**, unless it's marked with a diaeresis (eg *argüir*), in which case it's pronounced as an English 'w'
- y** at the end of a word or when it stands alone, it's pronounced as the Spanish **i** (eg *ley*); between vowels within a word it's as the 'y' in 'yonder'

Consonants

As a rule, Spanish consonants resemble their English counterparts. The exceptions are listed below.

While the consonants **ch**, **ll** and **ñ** are generally considered distinct letters, **ch** and **ll** are now often listed alphabetically under **c** and **l** respectively. The letter **ñ** is still treated as a separate letter and comes after **n** in dictionaries.

- b** similar to an English 'b,' but softer; referred to as 'b larga'
- c** as in 'celery' before **e** and **i**; otherwise as an English 'k'
- ch** as in 'church'
- d** as in 'dog,' but between vowels and after **l** or **n**, the sound is closer to the 'th' in 'this'
- g** as the 'ch' in the Scottish *loch* before **e** and **i** ('kh' in our guides to pronunciation); elsewhere, as in 'go'
- h** invariably silent. If your name begins with this letter, make sure you listen carefully if you're waiting for public officials to call you.

j	as the 'ch' in Scottish <i>loch</i> (written as 'kh' in our guides to pronunciation)
ll	varies between the 'y' in 'yes' and the 'lli' in 'million'
ñ	as the 'ni' in 'onion'
r	a short r except at the beginning of a word, and after l , n or s , when it's often rolled
rr	very strongly rolled (not reflected in the pronunciation guides)
v	similar to an English 'b,' but softer; referred to as 'b corta'
x	usually pronounced as j above; in some indigenous place names it's pronounced as an 's'; as in 'taxi' in other instances
z	as the 's' in 'sun'

Word Stress

In general, words ending in vowels or the letters **n** or **s** have stress on the next-to-last syllable, while those with other endings have stress on the last syllable. Thus *vaca* (cow) and *caballos* (horses) both carry stress on the next-to-last syllable, while *ciudad* (city) and *infeliz* (unhappy) are both stressed on the last syllable.

Written accents will almost always appear in words that don't follow the rules above, eg *sótano* (basement), *porción* (portion), *América*.

GENDER & PLURALS

In Spanish, nouns are either masculine or feminine, and there are rules to help determine gender (there are of course some exceptions). Feminine nouns generally end with **-a** or with the groups **-ción**, **-sión** or **-dad**. Other endings typically signify a masculine noun. Endings for adjectives also change to agree with the gender of the noun they modify (masculine/feminine **-o/-a**). Where both masculine and feminine forms are included in this language guide, they are separated by a slash, with the masculine form first, eg *perdido/a*.

If a noun or adjective ends in a vowel, the plural is formed by adding **s** to the end. If it ends in a consonant, the plural is formed by adding **es** to the end.

ACCOMMODATIONS

I'm looking for ...

Estoy buscando ... *e-stoy boos-kan-do ...*

Where is ...?

¿Dónde hay ...?

don-de ai ...

a cabin/cabana

una cabaña *oo-na ca-ba-nya*

a camping ground

un área para acampar *oon a-re-a pa-ra a-kam-par*

a guesthouse

una pensión *oo-na pen-syon*

a hotel

un hotel *oon o-tel*

a lodging house

una casa de huéspedes *oo-na ka-sa de wes-pe-des*

a posada

una posada *oo-na po-sa-da*

a youth hostel

un albergue juvenil *oon al-ber-ge khoo-ve-nee*

MAKING A RESERVATION

(for phone or written requests)

To ...

A ...

From ...

De ...

Date

Fecha

I'd like to book ...

Quisiera reservar ... (see under 'Accommodations' for bed and room options)

in the name of ...

en nombre de ...

for the nights of ...

para las noches del ...

credit card ...

tarjeta de crédito ...

number

número

expiry date

fecha de vencimiento

Please confirm ...

Puede confirmar ...

availability

la disponibilidad

price

el precio

Are there any rooms available?

¿Hay habitaciones libres?

ay a-bee-ta-syon-es lee-bres

I'd like a ...

Quisiera una

kee-sye-ra oo-na

room.

habitación ...

a-bee-ta-syon ...

double

doble

do-ble

single

individual

een-dee-vee-dwal

twin

con dos camas

kon dos ka-mas

How much is it

¿Cuánto cuesta

kwan-to kwes-ta

per ...?

por ...?

por ...

night

noche

no-che

person

persona

per-so-na

week

semana

se-ma-na

full board

pensión

pen-syon

completa

kom-ple-ta

private/shared bathroom	<i>baño privado/ compartido</i>	<i>ba-nyo pree-va-do/ kom-par-tee-do</i>
too expensive	<i>demasiado caro</i>	<i>de-ma-sya-do ka-ro</i>
cheaper	<i>más económico</i>	<i>mas e-ko-no-mee-ko</i>
discount	<i>descuento</i>	<i>des-kwen-to</i>

Does it include breakfast?

¿Incluye el desayuno? een-kloo-ye el de-sa-yoo-no

May I see the room?

¿Puedo ver la habitación? pwe-do ver la a-bee-ta-syon

I don't like it.

No me gusta. no me goas-ta

It's fine. I'll take it.

Está bien. La tomo. es-ta byen la to-mo

I'm leaving now.

Me voy ahora. me voy a-o-ra

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

When approaching a stranger for information you should always extend a greeting, and use only the polite form of address, especially with the police and public officials. Young people may be less likely to expect this, but it's best to stick to the polite form unless you're quite sure you won't offend by using the informal mode. The polite form is used in all cases in this guide; where options are given, the form is indicated by the abbreviations 'pol' and 'inf.'

Saying *por favor* (please) and *gracias* (thank you) are second nature to most Mexicans and a recommended tool in your travel kit.

Hi.	<i>Hola.</i>	<i>o-la (inf)</i>
Hello.	<i>Buen día.</i>	<i>bwe-n dee-a</i>
Good morning.	<i>Buenos días.</i>	<i>bwe-nos dee-as</i>
Good afternoon.	<i>Buenas tardes.</i>	<i>bwe-nas tar-des</i>
Good evening/ night.	<i>Buenas noches.</i>	<i>bwe-nas no-ches</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Adiós.</i>	<i>a-dyos</i>
See you soon.	<i>Hasta luego.</i>	<i>as-ta lwe-go</i>
Yes.	<i>Sí.</i>	<i>see</i>
No.	<i>No.</i>	<i>no</i>
Please.	<i>Por favor.</i>	<i>por fa-vor</i>
Thank you.	<i>Gracias.</i>	<i>gra-syas</i>
Many thanks.	<i>Muchas gracias.</i>	<i>moo-chas gra-syas</i>
You're welcome.	<i>De nada.</i>	<i>de na-da</i>
Apologies.	<i>Perdón.</i>	<i>per-don</i>
May I?	<i>Permiso.</i>	<i>per-mee-so</i>
Excuse me.	<i>Disculpe.</i>	<i>dees-kool-pe</i>

(used before a request or when apologizing)

How are things?

¿Qué tal? ke tal

What's your name?

¿Cómo se llama usted? ko-mo se ya-ma oo-sted (pol)

¿Cómo te llamas? ko-mo te ya-mas (inf)

My name is ...

Me llamo ... me ya-mo ...

It's a pleasure to meet you.

Mucho gusto. moo-cho goos-to

The pleasure is mine.

El gusto es mío. el goos-to es mee-o

Where are you from?

¿De dónde es/eres? de don-de es/er-es (pol/inf)

I'm from ...

Soy de ... soy de ...

Where are you staying?

¿Dónde está alojado? don-de es-ta a-lo-kha-do (pol)

¿Dónde estás alojado? don-de es-tas a-lo-kha-do (inf)

May I take a photo?

¿Puedo sacar una foto? pwe-do sa-kar oo-na fo-to

DIRECTIONS**How do I get to ...?**

¿Cómo llego a ...? ko-mo ye-go a ...

Is it far?

¿Está lejos? es-ta le-khos

Go straight ahead.

Siga/Vaya derecho. see-ga/va-ya de-re-cho

Turn left.

Voltee a la izquierda. vol-te-e a la ees-kyer-da

Turn right.

Voltee a la derecha. vol-te-e a la de-re-cha

Can you show me (on the map)?

¿Me lo podría señalar (en el mapa)? me lo po-dree-a se-nya-lar (en el ma-pa)

SIGNS

Entrada	Entrance
Salida	Exit
Información	Information
Abierto	Open
Cerrado	Closed
Prohibido	Prohibited
Comisaría	Police Station
Servicios/Baños	Toilets
Hombres/Varones	Men
Mujeres/Damas	Women

north	<i>norte</i>	<i>nor-te</i>
south	<i>sur</i>	<i>soor</i>
east	<i>este</i>	<i>es-te</i>
west	<i>oeste</i>	<i>o-es-te</i>
here	<i>aquí</i>	<i>a-kee</i>
there	<i>ahí</i>	<i>a-ee</i>
block	<i>cuadra</i>	<i>kwa-dra</i>

MEXICAN SLANG

Pepper your conversations with a few slang expressions! You'll hear many of these slang words and phrases all around Mexico, but others are particular to Mexico City.

¿Qué onda?

What's up?, What's happening?

¿Qué pasión? (Mexico City)

What's up?, What's going on?

¡Qué padre!

How cool!

fregón

really good at something, way cool, awesome

Este club está fregón.

This club is way cool.

El cantante es un fregón.

The singer is really awesome.

ser muy buena onda

to be really cool, nice

Mi novio es muy buena onda.

My boyfriend is really cool.

Eres muy buena onda.

You're really cool (nice).

pisto (in the north)

booze

alipús

booze

echarse un alipús, echarse un trago

to go get a drink

Echamos un alipús/trago.

Let's go have a drink.

tirar la onda

try to pick someone up, flirt

ligar

to flirt

irse de reventón

go partying

¡Vámonos de reventón!

Let's go party!

reven

a 'rave' (huge party with loud music and wild atmosphere)

un desmadre

a mess

Simón.

Yes.

Nel.

No.

No hay tos.

No problem. (literally 'there's no cough.')

¡Órale! (positive)

Sounds great! (responding to an invitation)

¡Órale! (negative)

What the *#&\$!?! (taunting exclamation)

¡Caray!

Shit!

¿Te cae?

Are you serious?

Me late.

Sounds really good to me.

Me vale.

I don't care, Whatever.

Sale y vale.

I agree, Sounds good.

¡Paso sin ver!

I can't stand it!, No thank you!

¡Gúcatelas! ¡Gúcala!

How gross! That's disgusting!

¡Bájale!

Don't exaggerate!, Come on!

¡¿Chale?! (Mexico City)

No way!

¡Te pasas!

That's it! You've gone too far!

¡No manches!

Get outta here!, You must be kidding!

un resto

a lot

lanas

money, dough

carnal

brother

cuate, cuaderno

buddy

chavo

guy, dude

chava

girl, gal

jefe

father

jefa

mother

la tira, la julia

the police

la chota (Mexico City)

the police

EMERGENCIES

Help!	<i>¡Socorro!</i>	so-ko-ro
Fire!	<i>¡Fuego!</i>	fwe-go
I've been robbed.	<i>Me han robado.</i>	me an ro-ba-do
Go away!	<i>¡Déjeme!</i>	de-khe-me
Get lost!	<i>¡Váyase!</i>	va-ya-se
Call ...!	<i>¡Llame a ...!</i>	ya-me a
the police	<i>la policía</i>	la po-lee-see-a
a doctor	<i>un médico</i>	oon me-dee-ko
an ambulance	<i>una ambulancia</i>	oo-na am-boo-lan-sya

It's an emergency.

Es una emergencia. es oo-na e-mer-khen-sya

Could you help me, please?

¿Me puede ayudar, por favor? me pwe-de a-yoo-dar por fa-vor

I'm lost.

Estoy perdido/a. es-toy per-dee-do/a

Where are the toilets?

¿Dónde están los baños? don-de stan los ba-nyos

HEALTH**I'm sick.**

Estoy enfermo/a. es-toy en-fer-mo/a

I need a doctor.

Necesito un doctor. ne-se-see-to oon dok-tor

Where's the hospital?

¿Dónde está el hospital? don-de es-ta el os-pee-tal

I'm pregnant.

Estoy embarazada. es-toy em-ba-ra-sa-da

I've been vaccinated.

Estoy vacunado/a. es-toy va-koo-na-do/a

I have ...

Tengo ... ten-go ...

diarrhea	<i>diarrea</i>	dya-re-a
nausea	<i>náusea</i>	now-se-a
a headache	<i>un dolor de cabeza</i>	oon do-lor de ka-be-sa
a cough	<i>tos</i>	tos

I'm allergic to ...

Soy alérgico/a a ... soy a-ler-khee-ko/a a ...

antibiotics	<i>los antibióticos</i>	los an-tee-byo-tee-kos
nuts	<i>las nueces</i>	las nwe-ses
peanuts	<i>los cacahuates</i>	los ka-ka-khwa-tes

I'm ...

Soy ... soy ...

asthmatic	<i>asmático/a</i>	as-ma-tee-ko/a
diabetic	<i>diabético/a</i>	dya-be-tee-ko/a
epileptic	<i>epiléptico/a</i>	e-pee-lep-tee-ko/a

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES**Do you speak (English)?**

¿Habla/Hablas (inglés)? a-bla/a-blas (een-gles) (pol/inf)

Does anyone here speak English?

¿Hay alguien que hable inglés? ai al-gyen ke a-ble een-gles

I (don't) understand.

(No) Entiendo. (no) en-tyen-do

How do you say ...?

¿Cómo se dice ...? ko-mo se dee-se ...

What does ...mean?

¿Qué significa ...? ke seeg-nee-fee-ka ...

Could you please ...?

¿Puede ..., por favor? pwe-de ... por fa-vor

repeat that

repetirlo re-pe-teer-lo

speak more

hablar más a-blar mas

slowly

despacio des-pa-syo

write it down

escribirlo es-kree-beer-lo

NUMBERS

1	<i>uno</i>	oo-no
2	<i>dos</i>	dos
3	<i>tres</i>	tres
4	<i>cuatro</i>	kwa-tro
5	<i>cinco</i>	seen-ko
6	<i>seis</i>	says
7	<i>siete</i>	sy-te
8	<i>ocho</i>	o-cho
9	<i>nueve</i>	nwe-ve
10	<i>diez</i>	dyes
11	<i>once</i>	on-se
12	<i>doce</i>	do-se
13	<i>trece</i>	tre-se
14	<i>catorce</i>	ka-tor-se
15	<i>quince</i>	keen-se
16	<i>dieciséis</i>	dye-see-says
17	<i>diecisiete</i>	dye-see-sye-te
18	<i>dieciocho</i>	dye-see-o-cho
19	<i>diecinueve</i>	dye-see-nwe-ve
20	<i>veinte</i>	vayn-te
21	<i>veintiuno</i>	vayn-tee-oo-no
30	<i>treinta</i>	trayn-ta
31	<i>treinta y uno</i>	trayn-ta ee oo-no
40	<i>cuarenta</i>	kwa-ren-ta
50	<i>cinquenta</i>	seen-kwen-ta
60	<i>sesenta</i>	se-sen-ta
70	<i>setenta</i>	se-ten-ta
80	<i>ochenta</i>	o-chen-ta
90	<i>noventa</i>	no-ven-ta
100	<i> cien</i>	syen
101	<i> ciento uno</i>	syen-to oo-no
200	<i> doscientos</i>	do-syen-tos
1000	<i> mil</i>	meel
5000	<i> cinco mil</i>	seen-ko meel

PAPERWORK

birth certificate	<i>certificado de nacimiento</i>
border (frontier)	<i>la frontera</i>
car-owner's title	<i>título de propiedad</i>
car registration	<i>registración</i>
customs	<i>aduana</i>
driver's license	<i>licencia de manejar</i>
identification	<i>identificación</i>
immigration	<i>migración</i>
insurance	<i>seguro</i>
passport	<i>pasaporte</i>
temporary vehicle import permit	<i>permiso de importación temporal de vehículo</i>
tourist card	<i>tarjeta de turista</i>
visa	<i>visado</i>

SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'd like to buy ...
Quisiera comprar ... kee-sye-ra kom-prar ...

I'm just looking.
Sólo estoy mirando. so-lo es-toy mee-ran-do

May I look at it?
¿Puedo verlo/la? pwe-do ver-lo/la

How much is it?
¿Cuánto cuesta? kwan-to kwes-ta

That's too expensive for me.
Es demasiado caro para mí. es de-ma-sya-do ka-ro pa-ra mee

Could you lower the price?
¿Podría bajar un poco el precio? po-dree-a ba-khar oon po-ko el pre-syo

I don't like it.
No me gusta. no me goas-ta

I'll take it.
Lo llevo. lo ye-vo

Do you accept ...?
¿Aceptan ...? a-sep-tan ...

American dollars
dólares americanos do-la-res a-me-ree-ka-nos

credit cards
tarjetas de crédito tar-khe-tas de kre-dee-to

traveler's checks
cheques de viajero che-kes de vya-khe-ro

less	<i>menos</i>	<i>me-nos</i>
more	<i>más</i>	<i>mas</i>
large	<i>grande</i>	<i>gran-de</i>
small	<i>pequeño/a</i>	<i>pe-ke-nyo/a</i>

I'm looking for (the) ...
Estoy buscando ... es-toy boos-kan-do

ATM	<i>el cajero automático</i>	<i>el ka-khe-ro ow-to-ma-tee-ko</i>
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bank	<i>el banco</i>	<i>el ban-ko</i>
bookstore	<i>la librería</i>	<i>la lee-bre-ree-a</i>
exchange office	<i>la casa de cambio</i>	<i>la ka-sa de kam-byo</i>

general store	<i>la tienda</i>	<i>la tyen-da</i>
laundry	<i>la lavandería</i>	<i>la la-van-de-ree-a</i>
market	<i>el mercado</i>	<i>el mer-ka-do</i>
pharmacy/chemist	<i>la farmacia</i>	<i>la far-ma-sya</i>

post office	<i>la oficina de correos</i>	<i>la o-fee-see-na de ko-re-os</i>
supermarket	<i>el supermercado</i>	<i>el soo-per-mer-ka-do</i>

tourist office	<i>la oficina de turismo</i>	<i>la o-fee-see-na de too-rees-mo</i>
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What time does it open/close?

¿A qué hora abre/cierra?
a ke o-ra a-bre/sye-ra

I want to change some money/traveler's checks.

Quisiera cambiar dinero/cheques de viajero.
kee-sye-ra kam-byar dee-ne-ro/che-kes de vya-khe-ro

What is the exchange rate?

¿Cuál es el tipo de cambio?
kwal es el tee-po de kam-byo

I want to call ...

Quisiera llamar a ...
kee-sye-ra lya-mar a ...

airmail	<i>correo aéreo</i>	<i>ko-re-o a-e-re-o</i>
letter	<i>carta</i>	<i>kar-ta</i>
registered (mail)	<i>certificado</i>	<i>ser-tee-fee-ka-do</i>
stamps	<i>timbres</i>	<i>teem-bres</i>

TIME & DATES

What time is it?
¿Qué hora es? ke o-ra es

It's one o'clock.
Es la una. es la oo-na

It's seven o'clock.
Son las siete. son las sye-te

Half past two.
Dos y media. dos ee me-dya

midnight	<i>medianoche</i>	<i>me-dya-no-che</i>
noon	<i>mediodía</i>	<i>me-dyo-dee-a</i>
now	<i>ahora</i>	<i>a-o-ra</i>
today	<i>hoy</i>	<i>oy</i>
tonight	<i>esta noche</i>	<i>es-ta no-che</i>
tomorrow	<i>mañana</i>	<i>ma-nya-na</i>
yesterday	<i>ayer</i>	<i>a-yer</i>

Monday	<i>lunes</i>	<i>loo-nes</i>
Tuesday	<i>martes</i>	<i>mar-tes</i>
Wednesday	<i>miércoles</i>	<i>myer-ko-les</i>

Thursday	<i>jueves</i>	<i>khwe-ves</i>
Friday	<i>viernes</i>	<i>vyer-nes</i>
Saturday	<i>sábado</i>	<i>sa-ba-do</i>
Sunday	<i>domingo</i>	<i>do-meen-go</i>

January	<i>enero</i>	<i>e-ne-ro</i>
February	<i>febrero</i>	<i>fe-bre-ro</i>
March	<i>marzo</i>	<i>mar-so</i>
April	<i>abril</i>	<i>a-breel</i>
May	<i>mayo</i>	<i>ma-yo</i>
June	<i>junio</i>	<i>khoo-nyo</i>
July	<i>julio</i>	<i>khoo-lyo</i>
August	<i>agosto</i>	<i>a-gos-to</i>
September	<i>septiembre</i>	<i>sep-tyem-bre</i>
October	<i>octubre</i>	<i>ok-too-bre</i>
November	<i>noviembre</i>	<i>no-vyem-bre</i>
December	<i>diciembre</i>	<i>dee-syem-bre</i>

TRANSPORTATION

Public Transportation

What time does ... leave/arrive?	<i>¿A qué hora ... sale/llega?</i>	<i>a ke o-ra ... sa-le/ye-ga</i>
the boat	<i>el barco</i>	<i>el bar-ko</i>
the bus (city)	<i>el camión</i>	<i>el ka-myon</i>
the bus (intercity)	<i>el autobús</i>	<i>el ow-to-boos</i>
the minibus	<i>el pesero</i>	<i>el pe-se-ro</i>
the plane	<i>el avión</i>	<i>el a-vyon</i>

the airport	<i>el aeropuerto</i>	<i>el a-e-ro-pwer-to</i>
the bus station	<i>la estación de autobuses</i>	<i>la es-ta-syon de ow-to-boos</i>
the bus stop	<i>la parada de autobuses</i>	<i>la pa-ra-da de ow-to-boos</i>
a luggage locker	<i>un casillero</i>	<i>oon ka-see-ye-ro</i>
the ticket office	<i>la taquilla</i>	<i>la ta-kee-ya</i>

A ticket to ..., please.

Un boleto a ..., por favor. oon bo-le-to a ... por fa-vor

What's the fare to ...?

¿Cuánto cuesta hasta ...? kwan-to kwes-ta a-sta ...

student's 1st class	<i>de estudiante primera clase</i>	<i>de es-too-dyan-te pree-me-ra kla-se</i>
2nd class	<i>segunda clase</i>	<i>se-goon-da kla-se</i>
single/one-way round-trip	<i>viaje sencillo redondo</i>	<i>vee-a-khe sen-see-yo re-don-do</i>
taxi	<i>taxi</i>	<i>tak-see</i>

Private Transportation

I'd like to hire a/an ... 4WD	<i>Quisiera rentar ... un cuatro por cuatro</i>	<i>kee-sye-ra ren-tar ... oon kwa-tro por kwa-tro</i>
car motorbike	<i>un coche una moto</i>	<i>oon ko-che oo-na mo-to</i>

ROAD SIGNS

Though Mexico mostly uses the familiar international road signs, you should be prepared to encounter these other signs as well:

Acceso	Entrance
Estacionamiento	Parking
Camino en Reparación	Road Repairs
Ceda el Paso	Give Way
Conserva Su Derecha	Keep to the Right
Curva Peligrosa	Dangerous Curve
Derrumbes	Landslides
Despacio	Slow
Desviación	Detour
Dirección Única	One-Way
Escuela (Zona Escolar)	School (zone)
Hombres Trabajando	Men at Work
Mantenga Su Derecha	Keep to the Right
No Adelantar	No Overtaking
No Hay Paso	Road Closed
Pare/Stop	Stop
Peaje	Toll
Peligro	Danger
Prepare Su Cuota	Have Toll Ready
Prohibido Aparcar/No Estacionar	No Parking
Prohibido el Paso	No Entry
Puente Angosto	Narrow Bridge
Salida de Autopista	Freeway/Highway Exit
Topes/Vibradores	Speed Bumps
Tramo en Reparación	Road Under Repair
Vía Corta	Short Route (often a toll road)
Vía Cuota	Toll Highway

bicycle	<i>bicicleta</i>	<i>bee-see-kle-ta</i>
hitchhike	<i>pedir aventón</i>	<i>pe-deer a-ven-ton</i>
pickup (ute)	<i>pickup</i>	<i>pee-kop</i>
truck	<i>camión</i>	<i>ka-myon</i>

Where's a gas/petrol station?

¿Dónde hay una gasolinera? don-de ai oo-na ga-so-lee-ne-ra

How much is a liter of gasoline/petrol?

¿Cuánto cuesta el litro de gasolina? kwan-to kwes-ta el lee-tro de ga-so-lee-na

Please fill it up.

Lleno, por favor. ye-no por fa-vor

I'd like (100) pesos worth.

Quiero (cien) pesos. kye-ro (syen) pe-sos

diesel	<i>diesel</i>	<i>dee-sel</i>
gas/petrol	<i>gasolina</i>	<i>ga-so-lee-na</i>
unleaded	<i>gasolina sin plomo</i>	<i>ga-so-lee-na seen plo-mo</i>

oil	<i>aceite</i>	a-say-te
tire	<i>llanta</i>	yan-ta
puncture	<i>agujero</i>	a-goo-khe-ro

Is this the road to (...)?*¿Por aquí se va a (...)?*

por a-kee se va a (...)

(How long) Can I park here?*¿(Por cuánto tiempo) Puedo estacionarme aquí?*

(por kwan-to tyem-po) pwe-do ess-ta-syo-nar-me a-kee

Where do I pay?*¿Dónde se paga?*

don-de se pa-ga

I need a mechanic/tow truck.*Necesito un mecánico/remolque.*

ne-se-see-to oon me-ka-nee-ko/re-mol-ke

Is there a garage near here?*¿Hay un garaje cerca de aquí?*

ai oon ga-ra-khe ser-ka de a-kee

The car has broken down (in ...).*El coche se se descompuso (en ...).*

el ko-che se des-kom-poo-so (en ...)

The motorbike won't start.*La moto no arranca.*

la mo-to no a-ran-ka

I have a flat tire.*Tengo una llanta pinchada.*

ten-go oo-na yan-ta pon-cha-da

I've run out of gas/petrol.*Me quedé sin gasolina.*

me ke-de seen ga-so-lee-na

I've had an accident.*Tuve un accidente.*

too-ve oon ak-see-den-te

TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN**I need ...***Necesito ...*

ne-se-see-to ...

Do you have ...?*¿Hay ...?*

ai ...

a car baby seat*un asiento de seguridad para bebés*

oon a-syen-to de se-goo-ree-dad pa-ra be-bes

a child-minding service*oon club para niños*

oon kloob pa-ra nee-nyos

a children's menu*un menú infantil*

oon me-noo een-fan-teel

a daycare*una guardería*

oo-na gwar-de-ree-a

(disposable) diapers/nappies*pañales (de usar y tirar)*

pa-ny-a-les (de oo-sar ee tee-rar)

an (English-speaking) babysitter*una niñera (que habla inglés)*

oo-na nee-nye-ra (ke a-bla een-gles)

formula (milk)*leche en polvo*

le-che en pol-vo

a highchair*una silla para bebé*

oo-na see-ya pa-ra be-be

a potty*una bacinica*

oo-na ba-see-nee-ka

a stroller*una carreola*

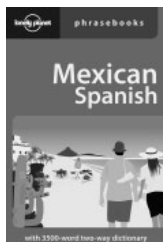
oona ka-re-o-la

Do you mind if I breast-feed here?*¿Le molesta que dé el pecho aquí?*

le mo-les-ta ke de el pe-cho a-kee

Are children allowed?*¿Se admiten niños?*

se ad-mee-ten nee-nyos



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Mexican Spanish Phrasebook

Glossary

For more food and drink terms, also see the Food & Drink Glossary (p100); for transportation terms, see the Transportation chapter (p983); for general terms, see the Language chapter (p1007).

AC – *antes de Cristo* (before Christ); equivalent to BC

adobe – sun-dried mud brick used for building

aduanas – customs

agave – family of plants including the *maguey*

Alameda – name of formal parks in several Mexican cities

albergue de juventud – youth hostel

alebrije – colorful wooden animal figure

alfarería – potters' workshop

alfiz – rectangular frame around a curved arch; an Arabic influence on Spanish and Mexican buildings

Altiplano Central – dry plateau stretching across north central Mexico between the two Sierra Madre ranges

amate – paper made from tree bark

Ángeles Verdes – Green Angels; government-funded mechanics who patrol Mexico's major highways in green vehicles; they help stranded motorists with fuel and spare parts

antro – bar with (often loud) recorded music and usually some space to dance

Apdo – abbreviation for *apartado* (Box) in addresses; hence Apdo Postal means Post Office Box

arroyo – brook, stream

artesánias – handicrafts, folk arts

atlas, atlantes (pl) – sculpted male figure(s) used instead of a pillar to support a roof or frieze; a *telamon*

atrium – churchyard, usually a big one

autopista – expressway, dual carriageway

azulejo – painted ceramic tile

bahía – bay

balneario – bathing place, often a natural hot spring

baluarte – bulwark, defensive wall

barrio – neighborhood of a town or city, often a poor neighborhood

billete – banknote

boleto – ticket

brujo/a – witch doctor, shaman; similar to *curandero/a*

burro – donkey

caballeros – literally 'horsemen,' but corresponds to 'gentlemen' in English; look for it on toilet doors

cabaña – cabin, simple shelter

cabina – Baja Californian term for a *caseta*

cacique – regional warlord; political strongman

calle – street

callejón – alley

callejoneada – originally a Spanish tradition, still enjoyed in such cities as Guanajuato and Zacatecas; musicians lead a crowd of revelers through the streets, singing and telling stories as they go

calzada – grand boulevard or avenue

calzones – long baggy shorts worn by indigenous men

camarín – chapel beside the main altar in a church; contains ceremonial clothing for images of saints or the Virgin

camión – truck or bus

camioneta – pickup truck

campesino/a – country person, peasant

capilla abierta – open chapel; used in early Mexican monasteries for preaching to large crowds of indigenous people

casa de cambio – exchange house; place where currency is exchanged; faster to use than a bank

casa de huéspedes – cheap and congenial accommodations, often a home converted into simple guest lodgings

caseta de larga distancia, caseta de teléfono,

caseta telefónica – public telephone call station

cazuela – clay cooking pot; usually sold in a nested set

cenote – a limestone sinkhole filled with rainwater; often used in Yucatán as a reservoir

central camionera – bus terminal

cerro – hill

Chac – Maya rain god

chac-mool – pre-Hispanic stone sculpture of a hunched-up figure; the stomach may have been used as a sacrificial altar

charreada – Mexican rodeo

charro – Mexican cowboy

chenes – wells (Yucatán Peninsula)

Chilango/a – person from Mexico City

chinampa – Aztec garden built from lake mud and vegetation; versions still exist at Xochimilco, Mexico City

chingar – literally 'to fuck'; it has a wide range of colloquial usages in Mexican Spanish equivalent to those in English

chultún – cement-lined brick cistern found in the *chenes* region in the Puuc hills south of Mérida

Churrigueresque – Spanish late-baroque architectural style; found on many Mexican churches

cigarro – cigarette

clavadistas – cliff divers of Acapulco and Mazatlán

Coatlicue – mother of the Aztec gods

colectivo – minibus or car that picks up and drops off passengers along a predetermined route; can also refer to other types of transportation, such as boats, where passengers share the total fare

coleto/a – citizen of San Cristóbal de Las Casas
colonia – neighborhood of a city, often a wealthy residential area
combi – minibus
comida corrida – set lunch
completo – literally ‘full up’; no vacancy; a sign you may see at hotel desks
conde – count (nobleman)
conquistador – early Spanish explorer–conqueror
cordillera – mountain range
correos – post office
coyote – person who smuggles Mexican immigrants into the US
criollo – Mexican-born person of Spanish parentage; in colonial times considered inferior by *peninsulares*
Cristeros – Roman Catholic rebels of the late 1920s
cuota – toll; a *via cuota* is a toll road
curandero/a – literally ‘curer’; a medicine man or woman who uses herbal and/or magical methods and often emphasizes spiritual aspects of disease

damas – ladies; the sign on toilet doors
danzantes – literally ‘dancers’; stone carvings at Monte Albán
DC – *después de Cristo* (after Christ); equivalent to AD
degustación – tasting session, especially of wine
de lujo – deluxe; often used with some license
de paso – a bus that began its route somewhere else, but stops to let passengers on or off at various points – often arriving late; a *local* bus is preferable
delegación – a large urban governmental subdivision in Mexico City comprising numerous *colonias*
descompuesto – broken, out of order
DF – Distrito Federal (Federal District); about half of Mexico City lies in the DF
dueño/a – owner
dulcería – candy store

edificio – building
ejido – communal landholding
embarcadero – jetty, boat landing
encomienda – a grant of indigenous labor or tribute to a *conquistador*; in return, the *conquistador* was supposed to protect the indigenous people in question and convert them to Catholicism, but in reality they were usually treated as little more than slaves
enramada – bower or shelter; often refers to a thatch-covered, open-air restaurant
enredo – wraparound skirt
entremeses – hors d’oeuvres; also theatrical sketches like those performed during the Cervantino festival in Guanajuato
escuela – school
esq – abbreviation of *esquina* (corner) in addresses
estación de ferrocarril – train station

estípite – long, narrow, pyramid-shaped, upside-down pilaster; the hallmark of Churrigueresque architecture
ex-convento – former convent or monastery
ex-voto – small painting on wood, tin, cardboard, glass etc; placed in a church to give thanks for miracles, answered prayers etc (see also *retablo*)
excusado – toilet

faja – waist sash used in traditional indigenous costume
feria – fair or carnival, typically occurring during a religious holiday
ferrocarril – railway
ficha – a token or counter; you often need one to operate lockers at bus terminals
fiesta mexicana – touristic show of Mexican folkloristic dance and music, often with dinner and drinks included
fonda – inn
fraccionamiento – subdivision, housing development; similar to a *colonia*, often modern
frontera – a border between political entities

gachupines – derogatory term for the colonial *peninsulares*
giro – money order
gringo/a – US or Canadian (and sometimes European, Australasian etc) visitor to Latin America; can be used derogatorily
grito – literally ‘shout’; the Grito de Dolores was the 1810 call to independence by parish priest Miguel Hidalgo, which sparked the struggle for independence from Spain
gruta – cave, grotto
guarache – see *huarache*
guardería de equipaje – room for storing luggage (eg in a bus station)
guayabera – also *guayabarra*; man’s shirt with pockets and appliquéd designs up the front, over the shoulders and down the back; worn in place of a jacket and tie in hot regions
güero/a – fair-haired, fair-complexioned person; a more polite alternative to *gringo/a*

hacendado – *hacienda* owner
hacha – flat, carved-stone object from the Classic Veracruz civilization; connected with the ritual ball game
hacienda – estate; Hacienda (capitalized) is the Treasury Department
hay – there is, there are; you’re also likely to hear *no hay* (there is not, there are not)
henequén – *agave* fiber used to make sisal rope; grown particularly around Mérida
hombres – men; sign on toilet doors
hostal – can mean either a small hotel or a budget hostel
huarache – also *guarache*; woven leather sandal, often with tire tread as the sole
huevos – eggs; also slang for testicles

huipil, huipiles (pl) – indigenous woman's sleeveless tunic, usually highly decorated; can be thigh-length or reach the ankles

Huizilopochtli – Aztec tribal god

iglesia – church

INAH – Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia; the body in charge of most ancient sites and some museums

indígena – indigenous, pertaining to the original inhabitants of Latin America; can also refer to the people themselves

INI – Instituto Nacional Indigenista; set up in 1948 to improve the lot of indigenous Mexicans and to integrate them into society; sometimes accused of paternalism and trying to stifle protest

intercambio – interchange; often used to describe meetings with local people for Spanish and English conversation

internet inalámbrico – wireless internet (wi-fi)

ISH – *impuesto sobre hospedaje*; lodging tax on the price of hotel rooms

isla – island

IVA – *impuesto de valor agregado*, or 'ee-bah'; a sales tax added to the price of many items (15% on hotel rooms)

ixtle – *maguey* fiber

jaguar – panther native to southern Mexico and Central and South America; principal symbol of the Olmec civilization

jai alai – the Basque game *pelota*, brought to Mexico by the Spanish; a bit like squash, played on a long court with curved baskets attached to the arm

jardín – garden

jarcho/a – citizen of Veracruz

jefe – boss or leader, especially a political one

jipijapa – Yucatán name for a Panama hat

jorongo – small poncho worn by men

Kukulcán – Maya name for the plumed serpent god *Quetzalcóatl*

lada – short for *larga distancia*

ladino – person of mixed (usually indigenous and Spanish) ancestry

lancha – fast, open, outboard boat

larga distancia – long-distance; usually refers to telephones

latifundio – large landholding; these sprang up after Mexico's independence from Spain

latifundista – powerful landowner who usurped communally owned land to form a *latifundio*

libramiento – road, highway

licenciado – university graduate; abbreviated as Lic and used as an honorific before a person's name; status claimed by many who don't actually possess a degree

lista de correos – literally 'mail list'; list displayed at a post office of people for whom letters are waiting; similar to General Delivery or Poste Restante

lleno – full, as with a car's fuel tank

local – can mean premises, such as a numbered shop or an office in a mall or block; or can mean local – a *local* bus is one whose route starts from the bus station you are in

locutorio – same as a *caseta telefónica*

machismo – Mexican masculine bravura

madre – literally 'mother'; the term can also be used colloquially with an astonishing array of meanings

maguey – type of *agave*, with thick pointed leaves growing straight out of the ground; *tequila* and *mezcal* are made from its sap

malecón – waterfront street, boulevard or promenade

mañana – literally 'tomorrow' or 'morning'; in some contexts it may just mean 'sometime in the future'

maquiladora – assembly-plant operation importing equipment, raw materials and parts for assembly or processing in Mexico, then exporting the products

mariachi – small ensemble of street musicians playing traditional ballads on guitars and trumpets

marimba – wooden xylophone-like instrument popular in southeastern Mexico

Mayab – the lands of the Maya

mercado – market; often a building near the center of a town, with shops and open-air stalls in the surrounding streets

Mesoamerica – the region inhabited by the ancient Mexican and Maya cultures

mestizaje – 'mixedness,' Mexico's mixed-blood heritage; officially an object of pride

mestizo – person of mixed (usually indigenous and Spanish) ancestry

metate – shallow stone bowl with legs used for grinding maize and other foods

Mexican Hat Dance – a courtship dance in which a girl and boy dance around the boy's hat

Mexican Revolution – 1910 revolution that ended the *Porfiriato*

milpa – peasant's small cornfield, often cultivated using the slash-and-burn method

mirador, miradores (pl) – lookout point(s)

Montezuma's revenge – Mexican version of Delhi-belly or travelers' diarrhea

mordida – literally 'little bite'; a small bribe to keep the wheels of bureaucracy turning

mota – marijuana

Mudéjar – Moorish architectural style imported to Mexico by the Spanish

mujeres – women; seen on toilet doors

municipio – small local government area; Mexico is divided into 2394 of them

na – Maya thatched hut

Nafta – North American Free Trade Agreement

Náhuatl – language of the Nahuatl people, descendants of the Aztecs

nao – Spanish trading galleon

norteamericano – North American, someone from north of the US–Mexican border

Nte – abbreviation for *norte* (north), used in street names

Ote – abbreviation for *oriente* (east), used in street names

pacño/a – person from La Paz, Baja California Sur

palacio de gobierno – state capitol, state government headquarters

palacio municipal – town or city hall, headquarters of the municipal corporation

palapa – thatched-roof shelter, usually on a beach

palma – long, paddle-like, carved-stone object from the Classic Veracruz civilization; connected with the ritual ball game

PAN – Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party); the political party of president Felipe Calderón and his predecessor Vicente Fox

panga – fiberglass skiff for fishing or whale-watching in Baja California

parada – bus stop, usually for city buses

parado – stationary, or standing up, as you often are on 2nd-class buses

parque nacional – national park; an environmentally protected area in which human exploitation is supposed to be banned or restricted

parroquia – parish church

paseo – boulevard, walkway or pedestrian street; the tradition of strolling in a circle around the plaza in the evening, men and women moving in opposite directions

Pemex – government-owned petroleum extraction, refining and retailing monopoly

peña – evening of Latin American folk songs, often with a political protest theme

peninsulares – those born in Spain and sent by the Spanish government to rule the colony in Mexico

periférico – ring road

pesero – Mexico City's word for *colectivo*; can mean bus in the northeast

petate – mat, usually made of palm or reed

peyote – a hallucinogenic cactus

pinacoteca – art gallery

piñata – clay pot or papier-mâché mold decorated to resemble an animal, pineapple, star etc filled with sweets and gifts; smashed open at fiestas

pirata – pirate; used to describe passenger-carrying pickup trucks in some parts of Mexico

playa – beach

plaza de toros – bullring

plazuela – small plaza

poblano/a – person from Puebla; something in the style of Puebla

pollero – same as a *coyote*

Porfiriato – reign of Porfirio Díaz as president–dictator of Mexico for 30 years until the Mexican Revolution

portales – arcades

posada – inn

potosino – from the city or state of San Luis Potosí

presidio – fort or fort's garrison

PRI – Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party); the political party that ruled Mexico for most of the 20th century

primera – first class

propina – tip; different from a *mordida*, which is closer to a bribe

Pte – abbreviation for *poniente* (west), used in street names

puerto – port

pulque – milky, low-alcohol brew made from the *maguey* plant

quechquémitl – indigenous woman's shoulder cape with an opening for the head; usually colorfully embroidered, often diamond-shaped

quetzal – crested bird with brilliant green, red and white plumage native to southern Mexico, Central America and northern South America; quetzal feathers were highly prized in pre-Hispanic Mexico

Quetzalcóatl – plumed serpent god of pre-Hispanic Mexico

rebozo – long woolen or linen shawl covering the head or shoulders

refugio – a very basic cabin for shelter in the mountains

regiomontano/a – person from Monterrey

reja – wrought-iron window grille

reserva de la biosfera – biosphere reserve; an environmentally protected area where human exploitation is steered toward sustainable activities

retablo – altarpiece; small *ex-voto* painting placed in a church to give thanks for miracles, answered prayers etc

rió – river

s/n – *sin número* (without number) used in street addresses

sacbé, sacbeob (pl) – ceremonial avenue(s) between great Maya cities

salvavida – lifeguard

sanatorio – hospital, particularly a small private one

sanitario – literally 'sanitary place'; toilet

sarape – blanket with opening for the head, worn as a cloak

Semana Santa – Holy Week; the week from Palm

Sunday to Easter Sunday; Mexico's major holiday period when accommodations and transportation get very busy

servicios – toilets

sierra – mountain range
sitio – taxi stand
stela/stele, stelae/steles (pl) – standing stone monument, usually carved
supermercado – supermarket; anything from a small corner store to a large, US-style supermarket
Sur – south; often seen in street names

taller – shop or workshop; a *taller mecánico* is a mechanic's shop, usually for cars; a *taller de llantas* is a tire-repair shop

talud-tablero – stepped building style typical of Teotihuacán, with alternating vertical (*tablero*) and sloping (*talud*) sections

tapatio/a – person born in the state of Jalisco

taquilla – ticket window

telamon – statue of a male figure, used instead of a pillar to hold up the roof of a temple; an *atlas*

telar de cintura – backstrap loom; the warp (lengthwise) threads are stretched between two horizontal bars, one of which is attached to a post or tree and the other to a strap around the weaver's lower back, and the weft (crosswise) threads are then woven in

teleférico – cable car

teléfono (celular) – (cell/mobile) telephone

temascal – pre-Hispanic-style steam bath, often used for curative purposes; sometimes spelt *temazcal*

templo – church; anything from a chapel to a cathedral

teocalli – Aztec sacred precinct

Tezcatlipoca – multifaceted pre-Hispanic god; lord of life and death and protector of warriors; as a smoking mirror he could see into hearts, as the sun god he needed the blood of sacrificed warriors to ensure he would rise again

tezontle – light red, porous volcanic rock used for buildings by the Aztecs and *conquistadores*

tianguis – indigenous people's market

tienda – store

típico/a – characteristic of a region; particularly used to describe food

Tláloc – pre-Hispanic rain and water god

TLC – Tratado de Libre Comercio; the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta)

tope – speed bump; found on the outskirts of many towns and villages, they are only sometimes marked by signs

trapiche – mill; in Baja California usually a sugar mill

tzompantli – rack for the skulls of Aztec sacrificial victims

UNAM – Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico)

universidad – university

viajero/a – traveler

villa juvenil – youth sports center, often the location of an *albergue de juventud*

voadores – literally 'fliers'; Totonac ritual in which men, suspended by their ankles, whirl around a tall pole

War of Independence – war for Mexican independence from Spain that lasted from 1810 to 1821 and ended three centuries of Spanish rule

War of the Castes – bloody, 19th-century Maya uprising in the Yucatán Peninsula

were-jaguar – half-human, half-jaguar being portrayed in Olmec art

yácata – ceremonial stone structure of the Tarascan civilization

yugo – U-shaped, carved-stone object from the Classic Veracruz civilization; connected with the ritual ball game

zaguán – vestibule or foyer; sometimes a porch

zócalo – literally 'plinth'; used in some Mexican towns to mean the main plaza or square

Zona Rosa – literally 'Pink Zone'; a formerly glitzy, expensive area of shops, hotels, restaurants and entertainment in Mexico City; by extension, a similar glitzy area in another city

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