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## TIPS FOR TRAVELERS TO MEXICO

### October 2006

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

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

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

### Have a Safe and Healthy Trip

#### Before You Go

**Registration at U.S. Embassies or Consulates** Before you travel abroad, register with the Embassy or Consulate. This can be done on the web at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. You need to provide your itinerary, passport information and the name, address and phone number of an emergency contact.

After you arrive at your destination, you can either use the web site to register or register in person at the nearest Embassy or Consulate. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare or whereabouts may not be released to inquirers without your expressed written authorization. If you register in person, you should bring your U.S. passport with you. Your passport data will be recorded, thereby making it easier for you to apply for a replacement passport should it be lost or stolen.

Registration will make your presence and location known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency. Also, remember to leave a detailed itinerary and photocopies of your passport data page or other citizenship documents with a friend or relative in the United States.

#### Other useful precautions:

Leave a detailed itinerary and the numbers of your passport or other citizenship documents with a friend or relative in the United States.

Carry your photo identification and the name of a person to contact with you in the event of serious illness or other emergency.

Keep photocopies of your airline or other tickets and your list of traveler's checks with you in a separate location from the originals and leave copies with someone at home.

Leave things like unnecessary credit cards and expensive jewelry at home.

Take travelers checks, not cash.

Use a money belt or concealed pouch for passport, cash and other valuables.

Do not bring firearms or ammunition into Mexico without written permission from the

Mexican government.

### **Travel Safety Information**

Consular Information Sheets are available for every country of the world. They describe entry requirements, currency regulations, unusual health conditions, the crime and security situation, political disturbances, areas of instability, and special information about driving and road conditions. They also provide addresses and emergency telephone numbers for U.S. embassies and consulates. In general, the sheets do not give advice. Instead, they describe conditions so travelers can make informed decisions about their trips.

In some dangerous situations, however, the Department of State recommends that Americans defer travel to a country. In such a case, a Travel Warning is issued for the country in addition to its Consular Information Sheet.

Public Announcements are a means to disseminate information about relatively short-term and/or trans-national conditions posing significant risks to the security of American travelers. They are issued when there is a perceived threat, even if it does not involve Americans as a particular target group. In the past, Public Announcements have been issued to deal with short-term coups, pre-election disturbances, terrorist violence and anniversary dates of specific terrorist events.

You can obtain Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements in several ways.

### **Internet**

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

### **Telephone**

The Overseas Citizens Services call center can be reached at 1-888-407-4747 from a touchtone phone, from overseas the number is 202-501-4444.

From U.S. Passport Agencies & U.S. Embassies

Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements are available at any of the regional passport agencies and U.S. embassies and consulates abroad.

### **Visas and Travel Documents**

#### **Getting Into Mexico**

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

**New Requirements for Travelers Between the United States and Mexico:** Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) effective **January 23, 2007**, all U.S. citizens traveling by **air** to and from Mexico are required to have a valid passport to enter the United States. As early as January 1, 2008,

U.S. citizens traveling between the United States and Mexico by **land** or **sea** (including ferries), may be required to present a valid U.S. passport or other documents as determined by the Department of Homeland Security. Ample advance notice will be provided to enable the public to obtain passports or passport cards for land/sea entries. American citizen travelers are encouraged to apply for a U.S. passport or the passport card when it becomes available, well in advance of anticipated travel. American citizens can visit [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) or call 1-877-4USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778) for information on applying for a passport.

### **Tourist Cards**

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

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

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

Tourists wishing to travel beyond the border zone with their car must obtain a temporary import permit or risk having their car confiscated by Mexican customs officials. To acquire a permit, one must submit evidence of citizenship, title for the car, a car registration certificate, a driver's license, and a processing fee to either a Banjercito branch located at a Mexican Customs office at the port of entry, or at one of the Mexican Consulates located in Austin, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Bernardino, or San Francisco. Mexican law also requires the posting of a bond at a Banjercito (Mexican Army Bank) office to guarantee the departure of the car from Mexico within a time period determined at the time of the application. For this purpose, American Express, Visa or MasterCard credit card holders will be asked to provide credit card information; others will need to make a cash deposit of between \$200 and \$400, depending on the age of the car. In order to recover this bond or avoid credit card charges, travelers must go to any Mexican Customs office immediately prior to departing Mexico. Disregard any advice, official or unofficial, that vehicle permits can be obtained at checkpoints in the interior of Mexico. Avoid individuals outside vehicle permit offices offering to obtain the permits without waiting in line. If the proper permit cannot be obtained at the Banjercito branch at the port of entry, do not proceed to the interior where travelers may be incarcerated, fined and/or have their vehicle seized at immigration/customs checkpoints. For further information, contact Mexican Customs about appropriate vehicle permits.

Upon arrival in Mexico, business travelers must complete and submit a form (Form FM-N 30 days) authorizing the conduct of business, but not employment, for a 30-day period. Travelers entering Mexico for purposes other than tourism or business, or for stays of longer than 180 days, require a visa and must carry a valid U.S. passport. U.S. citizens planning to work or live in Mexico should apply for the appropriate Mexican visa at the Mexican Embassy in Washington, DC or nearest Mexican consulate in the United States.

Mexican law requires that any non-Mexican under the age of 18 departing Mexico must carry

notarized written permission from any parent or guardian not traveling with the child. This permission must include the name of the parent, the name of the child, the name of anyone traveling with the child, and the notarized signature(s) of the absent parent(s). The child must be carrying the original letter – not a faxed or scanned copy – as well as proof of the parent/child relationship (usually a birth certificate) – and an original custody decree, if applicable.

Travelers should contact the Mexican Embassy or closest Mexican Consulate for the most current information. You can visit the Embassy of Mexico web site at <http://portal.sre.gob.mx/usa/> or call the Embassy of Mexico at 202-736-1000. You can also call the closest Mexican consulate in the United States for assistance. (A list of Mexican consulates in the U.S. can be found on the Mexican Embassy web site.)

### **Dual Nationality**

Mexican law recognizes dual nationality for Mexicans by birth, meaning those born in Mexico or born abroad to Mexican parents. U.S. citizens who are also Mexican nationals are considered to be Mexican by local authorities. Dual-nationality status could hamper U.S. Government efforts to provide consular protection. Dual nationals are not subject to compulsory military service in Mexico. Travelers possessing both U.S. and Mexican nationalities must carry with them proof of their citizenship of both countries. Under Mexican law, dual nationals entering or departing Mexico must identify themselves as Mexican. Under U.S. law, U.S. citizens must enter U.S. territory with documents proving U.S. citizenship.

### **Residing or Retiring in Mexico**

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

If you wish to register in person, bring your passport or other identification with you. Registration makes it easier to contact you in an emergency. Again, information on your welfare or location may not be released to anyone without your expressed written authorization.

For further information, travelers may contact the Embassy of Mexico at (202) 736-1000, or see the web site at <http://portal.sre.gob.mx/usa/>.

### **Returning to the United States – Caution!**

Make sure that you can return to the United States with the proof of citizenship that you take with you. Although you may be allowed to enter Mexico with only a birth certificate, U.S. law requires that you document both your U.S. citizenship and identity when you re-enter the United States.

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

The following documents are NOT sufficient proof to enter the United States: U.S. driver's license alone, Social Security Card, U.S. military ID, a photocopy of a U.S. birth certificate, a notarized Affidavit of Citizenship signed at the airport in the U.S., or a voter's registration card. Travelers with these documents may not be able to get back into the U.S.

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

### **Health**

Health problems sometimes affect visitors to Mexico. Detailed information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747), or via the CDC's Internet site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad consult the World Health Organization web site at <http://www.who.int/en>. Further health information for travelers is available at <http://www.who.int/ith>.

### **Immunizations**

Immunizations are recommended against hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid. Booster shots for tetanus-diphtheria and measles are also recommended. For visitors coming directly from the United States, no immunization certification is required to enter Mexico. If you are traveling from a part of the world infected with yellow fever, a vaccination certificate is required. If you will participate in outdoor activities in rural areas, such as camping, hiking, or bicycling where you might come into contact with animals, you may want to consider a rabies vaccine.

### **Malaria**

Malaria is always a serious disease and can be a deadly illness. Malaria is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected female Anopheles mosquito. Symptoms may include fever and flu-like illness, including chills, headache, muscle aches and fatigue. Malaria can cause anemia and jaundice, and, if not immediately treated, can cause kidney failure, coma, and death. If you become ill with a fever or flu-like illness either while traveling in a malaria-risk area or after you return home (for up to 1 year), you should seek immediate medical attention and inform your physician of your travel history.

Malaria is found in Mexico in certain rural areas, including resorts, in the following states: Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Michoacán, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa and Tabasco. In addition, risk exists in the mountainous northern area of Jalisco State. Risk also exists in an area between 24° north and 28° north latitude and 106° west and 110° west longitude that lies in parts of the states of Sonora, Chihuahua, and Durango.

There is no malaria risk along the U.S.-Mexico border. There is no malaria risk in the major resorts (that is, resorts located in urban areas) along the Pacific and Gulf coasts, although tourists should use insect repellent and other anti-mosquito measures.

Travelers to malarial areas should consult their physician. The recommended anti-malarial drug for Mexico is chloroquine. Although this preventative drug is not considered necessary for travelers to the major resort areas on the Pacific and Gulf coasts, travelers to those areas should use insect repellent and take other personal protection measures to reduce contact with mosquitoes, particularly from dusk to dawn when mosquitoes are active. To avoid being bitten, remain indoors in a screened or air-conditioned area during the peak biting period. If you go outdoors, wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and hats, and, use insect repellents containing DEET. Use a flying insect spray to help clear rooms of mosquitoes. The product should contain a pyrethroid insecticide; these insecticides quickly kill flying insects, including mosquitoes. Travelers not staying in well-screened or air-

conditioned rooms should sleep under bed nets (mosquito nets), preferably nets treated with the insecticide permethrin. Permethrin both repels and kills mosquitoes as well as other biting insects and ticks. In the United States, permethrin is available as a spray or a liquid (e.g. Permanone™). Pretreated nets, permethrin or another insecticide deltamethrin, are available overseas. Clothing, shoes, and camping gear, can also be treated with permethrin. Treated clothing can be repeatedly washed and still repel insects. Some clothing is now available in the United States that has been pretreated with permethrin. Protect infants (especially infants under 2 months of age not wearing insect repellent) by using a carrier draped with mosquito netting with an elastic edge for a tight fit.

### **Air Pollution**

Air pollution in Mexico City and Guadalajara is severe, especially from December to May, and combined with high altitude could affect travelers with underlying respiratory problems.

### **Altitude Sickness**

In high altitude areas such as Mexico City (elevation 7,600 feet or about 1/2 mile higher than Denver), most people need a short adjustment period. Signs to look for include a lack of energy, shortness of breath, dizziness, headache and insomnia. Those with heart problems should consult their doctor before traveling.

### **Food and Drink**

Select food with care. All raw food is subject to contamination. Avoid salads, uncooked vegetables and unpasteurized milk and milk products such as cheese. Eat only food that has been cooked and is still hot. Fruits and vegetables should be washed in a purifying solution and peeled by the traveler personally. Undercooked and raw meat, fish, and shellfish can carry various intestinal pathogens. Cooked food that has been allowed to stand for several hours at room temperature can provide a fertile medium for bacterial growth. Consumption of food and beverages obtained from street vendors has been associated with an increased risk of illness. Diarrhea sufferers may benefit from anti-microbial treatment that may be prescribed or purchased over the counter. Travelers should consult a physician, rather than attempt self-medication, if the diarrhea is severe or persists several days.

### **If you can't peel it or cook it, DON'T eat it!**

Only the following are safe to drink:

Beverages made with boiled water, such as tea and coffee

Canned or bottled beverages, including water, carbonated mineral water, and soft drinks

Beer and wine

It is safer to drink a beverage directly from the can or bottle than from a questionable container. However, water on the outside of beverage cans or bottles may also be contaminated. Therefore, dry off wet cans or bottles before they are opened and wipe clean surfaces with which your mouth will have direct contact. Where water may be contaminated, avoid brushing your teeth with tap water. Beware of ice cubes, as they may not have been made with purified water.

### **Swimming**

A variety of infections have been linked to wading or swimming in the ocean, freshwater lakes and rivers, and swimming pools, particularly if the swimmer's head is submerged. Water may be contaminated by other people and from sewage, animal wastes, and wastewater run-off. Diarrhea and other serious waterborne infections can be spread when disease-causing organisms from human or

animal feces are introduced into the water. If you go swimming, avoid beaches that may be contaminated with human sewage or dog feces.

Accidentally swallowing even small amounts of contaminated water can cause illness. Try to avoid swallowing water while engaging in aquatic activities. Generally, pools that contain chlorinated water can be considered safe places to swim if the disinfectant levels and pH are properly maintained. However, some organisms have moderate to very high resistance to chlorine levels commonly found in swimming pools, so also avoid swallowing pool water. All travelers who have diarrhea should refrain from swimming to avoid contaminating recreational water.

Avoid swimming or wading with open cuts or abrasions that might serve as entry points for pathogens. If you go swimming in warm freshwater lakes or rivers, thermally polluted areas around industrial complexes and hot springs, avoid submerging your head and wear nose plugs when entering untreated water.

### **Medical Care**

Adequate medical care can be found in all major cities. Excellent health facilities are available in Mexico City. Care in more remote areas is limited. Standards of medical training, patient care and business practices vary greatly among medical facilities in beach resorts throughout Mexico. In recent years, some travelers have complained that certain health-care facilities in beach resorts have taken advantage of them by overcharging or providing unnecessary medical care. In addition to other publicly available information, consult the U.S. Embassy web site or the U.S. Embassy, a consulate or consular agency prior to seeking medical attention. The U.S. Embassy, U.S. consulates and U.S. consular agencies maintain lists of doctors and medical facilities that are available to assist U.S. citizens in need of medical care.

### **Health Insurance**

Review your health insurance policy before you travel.

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

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

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

The U.S. government cannot pay to have you medically evacuated to the United States.

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs are listed

in our publication, Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad, accessible on the web at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\\_1185.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html).

## **What You May Bring Into Mexico**

### **Customs Regulations**

You should enter Mexico with only the items you need for your trip. Entering with large quantities of an item a tourist might not normally be expected to have, particularly expensive appliances, such as televisions, stereos or other items, may lead to suspicion of smuggling and possible confiscation of the items and arrest of the individual.

All U.S. citizens bringing gifts to friends and relatives in Mexico should be prepared to demonstrate to Mexican customs officials the origin and the value of the gifts. U.S. citizens entering Mexico by the land border can bring in gifts totaling up to \$50.00 duty-free, except for alcohol and tobacco products. Those entering Mexico by air or sea can bring in gifts totaling up to \$300.00 duty-free.

Tourists are allowed to bring in personal effects duty-free. According to Mexican customs regulations, in addition to clothing, personal effects may include one camera, one video cassette player, one personal computer, one CD player, 5 DVDs, 20 music CDs or audio cassettes, 12 rolls of unused film, and one mobile phone. Any tourist carrying such items, even if duty-free, is advised to enter the "Merchandise to Declare" lane at the first customs checkpoint. Be prepared to pay any assessed duty. Failure to declare personal effects routinely results in the seizure of the goods as contraband, plus the seizure of the vehicle in which the goods are traveling for attempted smuggling. The recovery of the seized vehicle involves the payment of substantial fines and attorney's fees.

Mexican customs authorities enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from Mexico of items such as trucks and autos, trailers, antiques, medications, medical equipment, business equipment, etc. It is advisable to contact the Mexican Embassy or one of the Mexican consulates in the United States for specific information regarding customs requirements.

If you are traveling to Mexico with goods intended for donation within Mexico, or traveling through Mexico with goods intended for donation in another country, should be aware of Mexican Customs regulations prohibiting importation of used clothing, textiles, and other used goods into Mexico. These regulations apply even to charitable donations. Individuals or groups wishing to make such donations should check with Mexican Customs for the list of prohibited items, and should hire an experienced customs broker in the U.S. to ensure compliance with Mexican law. The charitable individual or group, not the customs broker, will be held responsible for large fines or confiscation of goods if the documentation is incorrect. The web site for Mexican Customs, or "Aduanas," is in Spanish only at <http://www.aduanas.sat.gob.mx/webadunet/body.htm>. Mexican authorities require that all international transit through Mexico of persons and merchandise destined for Central or South America be handled only at the Los Indios Bridge located south of Harlingen, Texas on Route 509. The American Consulate in Matamoros is the closest consulate to Los Indios Bridge and may be contacted for up-to-date information by calling 011-52-868-812-4402, ext. 273 or 280, or by checking their web site, <http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov/matamoros-esp/>, which lists in English the most common items prohibited from entry into Mexico.

### **Currency**

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



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

### **Pets**

U.S. visitors to Mexico may bring dogs or cats by presenting the following certificates at the border:

1. A pet health certificate signed by a registered veterinarian in the United States and issued not more than 72 hours before the animal enters Mexico; and
2. a pet vaccination certificate showing that the animal has been treated for rabies, hepatitis, pip and leptospirosis.

As you may bring pet birds into Mexico, but, have difficulty returning to the U.S. with them, you may want to consider leaving your bird(s) at home.

Certification by Mexican consular authorities is not required for the health or vaccination certificate. There is no quarantine for healthy pets. A permit fee is charged at the time of entry into Mexico.

### **Safety**

General information on personal safety abroad can be found in our brochure, A Safe Trip Abroad, on our home page at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_1747.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html).

Avoid demonstrations and other activities that might be deemed political by the Mexican authorities. The Mexican Constitution prohibits political activities by foreigners, and such actions may result in detention and/or deportation.

Exercise caution in traveling to the southern state of Chiapas. Armed rebels and armed civilian groups are present in some areas of the state, and there is often no effective law enforcement or police protection. Violent criminal gang activity along the State's southern border – mostly aimed at illegal migrants – continues to be a concern. U.S. citizens traveling to Chiapas are encouraged to contact the U.S. Embassy for further security information prior to traveling to the region.

Sporadic outbursts of politically motivated violence occur from time to time in certain parts of the country, particularly in the southern states of Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca.

Crime in Mexico continues at high levels, and it is often violent, especially in Mexico City, Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, and the state of Sinaloa. Other metropolitan areas have lower, but still serious, levels of crime. Low apprehension and conviction rates of criminals contribute to the high crime rate. Travelers should leave valuables and irreplaceable items in a safe place, or leave them at home. All visitors are encouraged to make use of hotel safes when available, avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing, and carry only the cash or credit cards that will be needed on each outing. There are a significant number of pick-pocketing incidents, purse snatchings and hotel-room thefts. Public transportation is a particularly popular place for pickpockets. Be vigilant in bus and train stations and on public transport. All U.S. citizen victims of crime in Mexico are encouraged to report incidents to the nearest police headquarters and to the nearest U.S. consular office.

Visitors should be aware of their surroundings at all times, even when in areas generally considered safe. Women traveling alone are especially vulnerable and should exercise caution, particularly at night. Victims, who are almost always unaccompanied, have been raped, robbed of personal

property, or abducted and then held while their credit cards were used at various businesses and Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs). Armed street crime is a serious problem in all of the major cities. Some bars and nightclubs, especially in resort cities such as Cancun, Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlan, and Acapulco, can be havens for drug dealers and petty criminals. Some establishments may contaminate or drug drinks to gain control over the patron.

U.S. citizens should be very cautious in general when using ATMs in Mexico. If an ATM must be used, it should be accessed only during the business day at large protected facilities (preferably inside commercial establishments, rather than at glass-enclosed, highly visible ATMs on streets). U.S. and Mexican citizens are sometimes accosted on the street and forced to withdraw money from their accounts using their ATM cards.

A number of Americans have been arrested for passing on counterfeit currency they had earlier received in change. If you receive what you believe to be a counterfeit bank note, bring it to the attention of Mexican law enforcement.

Kidnapping, including the kidnapping of non-Mexicans, continues at alarming rates. So-called "express" kidnappings, an attempt to get quick cash in exchange for the release of an individual, have occurred in almost all the large cities in Mexico and appear to target not only the wealthy, but also middle class persons. U.S. businesses with offices in Mexico or concerned U.S. citizens may contact the U.S. Embassy or any U.S. consulate to discuss precautions they should take.

Criminal assaults occur on highways throughout Mexico; travelers should exercise extreme caution at all times, avoid traveling at night, and may wish to use toll ("cuota") roads rather than the less secure "free" ("libre") roads whenever possible. In addition, U.S. citizens should not hitchhike with, accept rides from or offer rides to, strangers anywhere in Mexico. Tourists should not hike alone in backcountry areas, nor walk alone on lightly frequented beaches, ruins or trails.

All bus travel should be during daylight hours and on first-class conveyances. Although there have been several reports of bus hijackings and robberies on toll roads, buses on toll roads still have a markedly lower rate of incidents than buses (second and third class) that travel the less secure "free" highways. The Embassy advises caution when traveling by bus from Acapulco toward Ixtapa or Huatulco. Although the police have made some progress in bringing this problem under control, armed robberies of entire busloads of passengers still occur.

In some instances, Americans have become victims of harassment, mistreatment and extortion by Mexican law enforcement and other officials. Mexican authorities have cooperated in investigating such cases, but one must have the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number to pursue a complaint effectively. Please note this information if you ever have a problem with police or other officials. In addition, tourists should be wary of persons representing themselves as police officers or other officials. When in doubt, ask for identification. Be aware that offering a bribe to a public official to avoid a ticket or other penalty is a crime in Mexico.

It is increasingly common for extortionists to call prospective victims on the telephone, often posing as police officers, and demand payments in return for the release of an arrested family member, or to forestall a kidnapping. These calls are often placed by prison inmates using smuggled mobile phones. Persons receiving such calls should be extremely skeptical; most such demands or threats are baseless. Persons receiving such calls should contact the U.S. Embassy or closest U.S. Consulate, or the Department of State, for assistance.

### **Crime in Mexico City**

In Mexico City, the most frequently reported crimes involving tourists are taxi robbery (see below),

armed robbery, pick-pocketing and purse-snatching. In several cases, tourists have reported that men in uniforms perpetrated the crime, stopping vehicles and seeking money, or assaulting and robbing tourists walking late at night. As in any large city, individuals should exercise caution and be aware of their surroundings, especially when walking anywhere in the city.

Business travelers should be aware that thefts occur even in what appear to be secure locations. Thefts of such items as briefcases and laptops occur frequently at the Benito Juarez International Airport and at business-class hotels. Arriving travelers who need to obtain pesos at the airport should use the exchange counters or ATMs in the arrival/departure gate area, where access is restricted, rather than changing money after passing through Customs, where they can be observed by criminals.

Metro (subway) robberies are frequent in Mexico City. If riding the Metro or on the city bus system, U.S. citizens should take extreme care with valuables and belongings. Avoid using Metro during busy commuting hours in the morning or afternoon. Tourists and residents alike should avoid driving alone at night anywhere in Mexico City.

### **Taxicab Crime**

Robbery and assaults on passengers in taxis are frequent and violent in Mexico City, with passengers subjected to beatings, shootings and sexual assault. U.S. citizens visiting Mexico City should avoid taking any taxi not summoned by telephone or contacted in advance. When in need of a taxi, please telephone a radio taxi or "sitio" (regulated taxi stand – pronounced "C-T-O"), and ask the dispatcher for the driver's name and the cab's license plate number. Ask the hotel concierge or other responsible individual calling on your behalf to write down the license plate number of the cab that you entered.

Passengers arriving at Mexico City's Benito Juarez International Airport should take only airport taxis (which are white with a yellow stripe and a black airplane symbol) after pre-paying the fare at one of the special booths inside the airport.

### **Crime in Border Cities**

Visitors to the U.S. - Mexico border region, including the cities of Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Nogales, Reynosa and Matamoros, should remain alert and be aware of their surroundings at all times.

Drug-related violence has increased dramatically in recent months, and shows no sign of abating. While U.S. citizens not involved in criminal activities are generally not targeted, innocent bystanders are at risk from the increase in violence in the streets of border cities. In Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo and Tijuana, shootings have taken place at busy intersections and at popular restaurants during daylight hours. The wave of violence has been aimed primarily at members of drug trafficking organizations, criminal justice officials and journalists. However, foreign visitors and residents, including Americans, have been among the victims of homicides and kidnappings in the border region. In recent months, the worst violence has been centered in the city of Nuevo Laredo in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, where more than 45 U.S. citizens were kidnapped and/or murdered between August 2004 and July 2005. U.S. citizens are urged to be especially aware of safety and security concerns when visiting the border region and exercise common-sense precautions such as visiting only legitimate business and tourist areas of border towns during daylight hours.

Mexican authorities have failed to prosecute numerous crimes committed against American citizens, including murder and kidnapping. Local police forces suffer from a lack of funds and training, and the judicial system is weak, overworked, and inefficient. Criminals, armed with an impressive array of weapons, know there is little chance they will be caught and punished. In some cases, assailants

have been wearing full or partial police uniforms and have used vehicles that resemble police vehicles, indicating some elements of the police might be involved.

Visitors are very vulnerable when visiting local "red light districts," particularly if they are departing alone in the early hours of the morning. In Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, there has also been a rise in automobile accidents in which municipal police extort money from U.S. citizen victims.

### **Cancun and Other Resort Areas**

Over 3 million Americans travel to Cancun and other Mexican beach resorts each year, including as many as 120,000 during "spring break" season, which normally begins in mid-February and runs about two months. Excessive alcohol consumption, especially by Americans under the legal U.S. drinking age, is a significant problem. The legal drinking age in Mexico is 18, but it is not uniformly enforced. Alcohol is implicated in the majority of arrests, violent crimes, accidents and deaths suffered by American tourists.

There have been a significant number of rapes reported in Cancun. Many of these have occurred at night or in the early morning. Attacks have also occurred on deserted beaches and in hotel rooms. Acquaintance rape is a serious problem. In other cases, hotel workers, taxi drivers, and even security personnel have been implicated. Anyone who is a victim of a sexual assault or other crime should report it immediately to the nearest U.S. consular office and should endeavor to make a report to Mexican authorities. Do not rely on hotel/restaurant/tour company management to make the report for you.

Under the best of circumstances, prosecution is very difficult (a fact some assailants appear to knowingly exploit), but no criminal investigation is possible without a formal complaint to Mexican authorities.

In recent years, moped rentals have become very widespread in Cancun and Cozumel, and the number of serious moped accidents has risen accordingly. Most operators carry no insurance and do not conduct safety checks. Some have been known to demand fees many times in excess of damages caused to the vehicles, even if renters have purchased insurance in advance. Vacationers at other beach resorts have encountered similar problems after accidents involving rented jet-skis.

There have been cases of mobs gathering to prevent tourists from departing the scene and to help intimidate them into paying exorbitant damage claims.

### **Water Sports**

Visitors to Mexican resorts should carefully assess the potential risk of recreational activities. Sports and aquatic equipment that you rent may not meet U.S. safety standards nor be covered by any accident insurance. Scuba diving equipment may be substandard or defective due to frequent use. Inexperienced scuba divers in particular should beware of dive shops that promise to "certify" you after a few hours' instruction. Parasailing has killed American tourists who were dragged through palm trees or were slammed into hotel walls. Jet-ski accidents have killed American tourists, especially in group outings when inexperienced guides allowed their clients to follow each other too closely.

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

Warning flags on the beach should be taken seriously. If black flags are up, do not enter the water. In Cancun, there is often a very strong undertow along the beach from the Hyatt Regency all the way south to the Sol y Mar. Several drownings and near-drownings have been reported on the east coast

of Cozumel, particularly in the Playa San Martin-Chen Rio area. In Acapulco, avoid swimming outside the bay area. Several American citizens have died while swimming in rough surf at the Revolcadero Beach near Acapulco. Beaches on the pacific side of the Baja California Peninsula at Cabo San Lucas are dangerous due to rip tides and rogue waves; hazardous beaches in this area are clearly marked in English and Spanish. Recreational facilities such as pools may not meet U.S. safety or sanitation standards. Do not swim in pools or at beaches without lifeguards. If you do, exercise extreme caution. Do not dive into unknown bodies of water, because hidden rocks or shallow depths can cause serious injury or death.

### **Mountain Climbing and Hiking**

Travelers who wish to climb Pico de Orizaba in Veracruz should be aware that summer droughts in recent years have removed much of the snow coating and turned the Jamapa Glacier into a high-speed ice chute, increasing the risk of death or serious injury. At least seventeen climbers have died on the mountain and 39 have been injured in recent years, including Americans. Rescue teams operate without the benefit of sophisticated equipment, and any medical treatment provided in local hospitals or clinics must be paid in cash. While regulation of the ascent is minimal and guides are not required, the U.S. Embassy recommends hiring an experienced guide.

The Colima Volcano, located approximately 20 miles north-northeast of Colima city, is active and erupted several times in 2005. Travelers should not enter the prohibited area within a 4.5-mile radius of the volcano.

When departing on an outing to backcountry areas to hike or climb, it is prudent to leave a detailed itinerary, including route information and expected time/date of return with your hotel clerk or a friend or family member. Similarly, mariners preparing to depart from a Mexican harbor should visit the harbormaster and leave a detailed trip plan, including intended destination and crew and passenger information.

### **Driving and Traffic Safety**

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death among American citizens in Mexico. Motorists should exercise special caution on the heavily traveled expressway south of Cancun, particularly between Playa del Carmen and Tulum, where the road narrows from 4 divided lanes to two-way traffic on a narrower and poorly maintained road.

**While in a foreign country**, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning Mexico is provided for general reference only, and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

**Public transportation vehicles**, specifically taxis and city buses, often do not comply with traffic regulations, including observing speed limits and stopping at red lights.

**U.S. driver's licenses are valid in Mexico.** The Government of Mexico strictly regulates the entry of vehicles into Mexico. Mexican law requires that vehicles be driven only by their owners, or that the owner be inside the vehicle. If not, the vehicle may be seized by Mexican customs and will not be returned under any circumstances.

Mexican insurance is required for all vehicles, including rental vehicles. Mexican auto insurance is sold in most cities and towns on both sides of the border. U.S. automobile liability insurance is not valid in Mexico, nor is most collision and comprehensive coverage issued by U.S. companies. Motor vehicle insurance is considered invalid in Mexico if the driver is found to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.