

Travel Tips South of the Border

Understanding Mexican Law

The following list contains only a few of the laws that visitors to Mexico should know.

U.S. citizens are subject to Mexico's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Americans who commit illegal acts have no special privileges and are subject to full prosecution under the Mexican judicial system. The following list contains only a few of the laws that visitors to Mexico should know. It is your responsibility to find out any other important visitor information.

1. A person may be held in jail for 48 hours without a charge being filed.
2. There is no difference between possession of drugs and drug trafficking according to Mexican law. The penalty for this offense may be up to 25 years in prison.
3. Fighting is a crime. It could cost you at least one night in jail.
4. The legal drinking age is 18.
5. Open alcohol containers in public are illegal in Mexico. You may face a fine or time in jail.
6. Drinking on public streets is prohibited.
7. Avoid public drunkenness. It is against the law to be drunk in public in Mexico. It is also against the law to drink and drive.
8. Loud cursing, throwing bottles, littering, nudity, and other offensive behavior is not tolerated in Mexico. You can be arrested for disturbing the peace.
9. Stealing and failure to pay for services is illegal and will result in arrest.
10. When hiring a service or buying any product, verify the established conditions and require the corresponding invoice or receipt.
11. Minors (17 years old and under) must be accompanied by their parents to legally enter Mexico. If traveling with only one parent, minors must produce a notarized letter of authorization to travel from the absent parent. Proof of the parent/child relationship is also required; a certified copy of a birth certificate will suffice.
12. As in the United States, the purchase of controlled medication requires a doctor's prescription. The Mexican list of controlled medication differs from that of the United States, and Mexican laws concerning controlled medication are unclear and often enforced selectively.
13. Do NOT take any type of firearm or ammunition into Mexico without prior written authorization from the Mexican authorities. Entering Mexico with a firearm or even a single round of ammunition is illegal, even if the firearm or ammunition is taken into Mexico unintentionally. Once you crossed the border with a firearm or ammunition, it is too late!
14. Don't do things in Mexico that you can't do in your own country.

When in Mexico

Mexico is one of the most frequented travel spots in the Southern California vicinity. Even though the Mexican border is only minutes away from San Diego, travelers must remember this is a foreign country and visitors must abide by all Mexican laws. The following are some tips to consider when traveling south of the border.

Checklist

Create a checklist of things to bring on your trip:

- Drivers license/Passport/Identification
- Emergency contact information
- Road Maps (your cell GPS service may not work in Mexico, check with your cell phone carrier to be sure)
- Bottled Water
- Bring a friend (DO NOT travel alone)
- Money (US or Mexican currency will work)
- Sunscreen/Sun glasses
- Rain gear
- Food/Snacks
- Small first aid kit
- Necessary medications

Traveling Preparations

Remember to do the following before you leave the country:

1. Check current safety conditions - www.state.gov
2. Always leave your travel plans with a roommate, friend, or family member.
3. U.S. citizens must present a U.S. passport or a passport card when re-entering the U.S.
4. Keep emergency phone numbers with you, these numbers include:
 - Roommate/friend*
 - Family member*
 - Health and auto insurance contact*
 - Credit card emergency contact, in case of loss or theft*
5. Leave your valuables at home. If you do bring valuables, like camera or camcorder equipment, do not leave them in the car (or the trunk of the car).
6. Avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing, and carry only the cash or credit cards that will be needed on each outing. Avoid wearing clothing bearing logos of U.S. sports teams or military themed apparel which may identify you as a U.S. citizen.
7. Do not bring any drugs across the border unless they are prescription drugs. Prescription drugs must be in their original container and clearly marked.
8. Bring a first-aid kit that includes aspirin, sterile bandages, antibiotic ointment, diarrhea medicine, etc.
9. Follow all traffic signals and posted signs (some read in kilometers rather than miles per hour) and wear a seatbelt.
10. If driving into Mexico, purchase Mexican auto insurance on the U.S. side of the border. Many policies do not include international coverage.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

11. All U.S. citizens entering by land and traveling farther than 20km into Mexico should stop at an immigration checkpoint to obtain a Formal Migratoria Multiple (FMM). An FMM is needed for vehicle and document inspections by Mexican authorities.
12. Foreign tourists wishing to travel beyond the border zone with their vehicle must obtain a temporary import permit before entering Mexico.
13. International travelers visiting Mexico need a valid passport and a multiple entry visa, visa waiver to re-enter the U.S.

Health & Safety Considerations

Health Care Services

Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for health services and US medical insurance is not always valid outside of the U.S.. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the US can be very costly. Check with your own insurance company to confirm whether your policy applies in Mexico, including provision for medical evacuation.

Drinking Water

In many areas in Mexico, tap water is unsafe and should be avoided. Bottled water and beverages are safe although visitors should be aware that many restaurants and hotels serve tap water unless bottled water is specifically requested. Ice may also come from tap water and should be used with caution. Visitors should exercise caution when buying food or beverages from street vendors. For more information on food and water safety visit www.cdc.gov (Traveler s Health).

Safety Considerations

Criminal assaults occur on highways throughout Mexico. Therefore, travelers should exercise caution when traveling on all highways in Mexico and use “toll” (“cuota”) roads, rather than the less secure “free” (“libre”) highways, whenever possible. Exercise extreme caution when traveling on any highways after dark.

Do not hitchhike or accept rides from or offer rides to strangers anywhere in Mexico.

Kidnapping is common in Mexico and foreigners are especially vulnerable.

Be very cautious when using ATMs. If an ATM must be used, access it only during the day at large protected facilities (preferably inside commercial establishments, rather than at a glass enclosed, highly visible ATM on the street).

If arrested, do not sign anything that you do not understand. It is important that you have an attorney representing you when you give your statement to ensure your rights are fully protected. You are entitled to an interpreter if you do not speak Spanish.

Crime in Mexico continues to occur at a high rate and can often be violent. Street crime, ranging from pick-pocketing to armed robbery is a serious problem in most major cities.

Resources:

In Case of Emergency (instead of dialing 911) dial 066

24-hour Emergency Assistance 078

Note: most emergency lines speak Spanish

Red Cross (Spanish)

Red Cross (Spanish). 066

Red Cross (From U.S. to Tijuana). . . 011-52-644-608-6700

(Resources Continued on page 4)

(Resources Continued from page 3)

Mexican Ministry of Tourism

Within Mexico 55-3002-6300
From the US 011-52-55-3002-6300

U.S. Embassy

Paseo de la Reforma 305, Colonia Cuauhtemoc, Mexico City
From USA 011-52-55-5080-2000
From Mexico City 5080-2000
From outside of Mexico City 01-55-5080-2000

U.S. Consulate (American Consul)

From Tijuana 01-664-977-2000
From USA 011-52-664-622-7400
After-Hours Emergency 001-619-692-2154

**An American Officer is available to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens
24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and may be reached, during non-work hours, at:**

From USA 619-692-2154
From Mexico 001-619-692-2154

Border Crossing Stations

San Ysidro Station 619-690-8800
Otay mesa Station 619-671-8031
Tecate Station 619-938-8300

More Information

<http://travel.state.gov>
<http://www.traveltobaja.net>
<http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov>

For More Information:

Student Health Services 619-594-5281
Health Promotion 619-594-4133
Visit Our Website at shs.sdsu.edu
Facebook/Twitter Facebook.com/aztechealth &
@AZTEChEalth
SDSU Public Safety
Dps.sdsu.edu 619-594-1991