



RV TRAVEL IN MEXICO FAQ—FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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What papers do I need to bring for our personal Mexican visas?

1. Valid US or Canadian Passport or US Passport Card is the ONLY valid travel document to return to the US.
2. A Mexican tourist permit or visa (FMM). Available ONLY at the border (Migración) needs to be filled out by you and stamped by the official on duty. A valid US or Canadian passport is required. Citizens of other countries should check with a Mexican Consulate or Mex. Govt. website. Ask for the visa to be good for 180 days (the maximum). The fee (approx. \$30 US or \$500 pesos in 2017) needs to be paid within 72 hours at a Mexican commercial bank or most border stations have a “banjercito” where you pay for the FMM. If you are traveling with children or grandchildren, you **must have** a notarized letter of permission signed by the parents, or in case of only one parent traveling with them, by the other parent. You must also have the child’s passport. Your tourist permit must be turned in after your final visit within the 180 days, at any border station’s Migración office.

What documentation do I need for the Mexican vehicle(s) permit?

Vehicle permits are not required for travel only in the 2 states of Baja California and the NW part of Sonora until San Carlos. Any motorized vehicle going to mainland Mexico needs a car permit aka “Temporary Vehicle Import Permit” that consists of an official printed form and a “holograma” for your windshield. You get this at the “Banjercito” at the border. You need a photocopy of the registration (you’ll have to show the original document) and photocopy of the title of your motorhome, car (s), motorcycle, 5th wheel and/or trailer, copy of the photo page of your passport, copy of your current state driver’s license & copy of Mexican tourist permit. If any vehicle is financed, you must have a notarized letter (and a copy) from that bank authorizing use in Mexico. Payment is by credit card (MC, Visa, AmEx, and Diners Club only) and the permit is good for 180 days with multiple entries permitted. (Approx.\$60 US) **10-year permits are issued for motorhomes and also for trailers and fifth wheels (US\$60) -- (NOT the toads or tow vehicles, those are still 6 months).** There will be a hold up to \$400 on your Credit Card which is removed when you return the holograma leaving Mexico. *Make 2-3 copies of all these papers at home, so you only have to get the copy of the tourist permit at the border* If traveling with motorhome and toad, **THE EASIEST WAY to get permits for both is to have one or both vehicles registered in both your names, so you can do 2 transactions, with different names on credit card & license.**

The “holograma” **MUST** be returned at a Banjercito, before returning to the US (unless going back to Mexico before the expiration date). Not all Mexican border stations have a Banjercito-- check where you will return! (Church’s Mexico Camping book has this info). The Mexican officials will take the holograma off your windshield-- do not do this yourself! Be sure to keep the receipt they give you until your next trip. That proves your vehicle(s) left Mexico and your permit was cancelled.

**** If you are not sure you will travel to Mexico again, or if you are planning to sell your rig when back in the US, it is recommended to also return the 10-year permit. The actual vehicle has to return to the Mexican border for the officials to remove the holograma as the permit has the VIN# on it**.**

If taking the ferry from Baja to the mainland, the vehicle permit has to be acquired at the Baja ferry departure terminal in Santa Rosalía or La Paz. (“Sonora Only” permits are NOT available for RVs.)

Do I need Mexican Vehicle Insurance?

YES! Mexican liability insurance is mandatory, written by a Mexican company (through a US agent OK). Your US or Canadian policy does NOT cover liability in Mexico. It is recommended to also buy comprehensive insurance for your car(s) and rig including legal help & Medevac. Some US carriers will cover collision in Mexico, but only if it can be fixed in the US, so if your car is undriveable, it will not be covered to be fixed in Mexico by your US insurance company. Watch the small print, some Mexican insurance companies will ONLY pay for repairs in Mexico, at Mexican labor rates. Find one which will allow you to claim the accident or collision in Mexico, but if not possible to fix in Mexico, let you repair it in the US. For a list of reputable Mexican insurance companies, check the Chapter 8 website. Get your Mexican insurance well before you leave. You can specify start/end dates and have your policy before you go. Agents can fax your policy or email a PDF file. Rates are different depending which Mexican states you will visit since the liability for fatalities is now depending on the prevailing wages in a state, but make sure that you are covered for the time and the states you may visit by yourself after the rally. Since the price difference is minimal, leave enough time to travel back to the US. Also, daily rates beyond 3 weeks time are more expensive than a 6 month policy—check!

Do I need a CB Radio?

When traveling in a Caravan or Chapter 8 Group, CB radio and a good antenna are required for safety and comfort. Your group leader will advise you of road conditions, checkpoints, traffic problems & points of interest by CB radio. Handheld CB units have less power than an installed unit and often prove unsatisfactory.

Measurements etc. in Mexico

Mexico uses the metric system: 1km=0.62 mile 1 mile=1.61km 1 meter=3.28 feet 1ft=0.3meter
1 liter= .26 US gall. 1 US gall.=3.79 liter 1 kilogram=2.21 pounds 1 pound=0.45 kilograms
convert °F to °C by subtracting 32 and multiplying by 5/9 °C to °F : x 1.8+32

Can I bring my pet?

YES! Have at least a current US vet’s rabies shot certificate for your dog/cat--even better a USDA Certificate of Health from your US veterinarian (for returning to the US-not entering Mexico). Bring your pet’s favorite food, cat litter, medications, including anti-flea/tick medication, heartworm etc. **You cannot bring pet birds/reptiles back into the US.** The US sometimes frowns on pet food coming back into the US, even when bought in the US, so don’t have a lot left over when you cross the border.

Can I bring plants?

Mexican customs often do not care but plants will be taken away from you when you return to the US.



How are the roads in Mexico?	Roads can be anything from very good to very bad. The toll roads (cuota) are 4 lane highways, or 2 lane with wide shoulders. The “libre” (free) roads are narrow, no shoulders and often a drop-off. Mexican trucks and buses hug the middle line of the road, so be careful. Do NOT go over the speed limit. Speed limits are in Kilometers (1KM=0.6Mile). 90KM= 55 MPH.
Any more suggestions for driving in Mexico?	A left turn signal flashing on the truck in front of you on a road without intersections <u>probably</u> means: it is <i>safe for you to pass</i> . Usually does NOT mean: <i>I am making a left turn</i> . On roads with no left turn or U-turn (retorno) lane, for making a left turn, go as far to the right as you can, let all traffic pass and then turn left or make a U-turn. Be aware of “open range cattle” in Mexico. <i>DO NOT drive at night!</i>
Traffic signs	Mexico uses international traffic signs. Make yourself familiar with the road signs in AAA Mexico map, or Church’s book. Traffic lights (semaforos) are often difficult to spot and Mexicans often ignore them. YOU DO NOT!! When green starts flashing = our yellow light: STOP! The lights are very short yellow and then turn red. The local policia love to stop gringos for going through yellow lights!
What about the dreaded “topes”?	Topes (“TOE-pays”) are “sleeping police” or speed bumps, and they can be 6-12 inches high and can cause RVs severe damage---SLOW DOWN! They are not always painted or marked with signs. Some towns have a large number of topes! Watch the traffic in front of you--GO SLOW! “Vibradores” are several rows of corrugated concrete topes which can vibrate your rig apart. GO SLOW! Turn on emergency flashers. Roads may have long stretches of topes in curves and topes do appear outside the urban areas as well!
What about “check points”?	You will find roadblocks or military checkpoints anywhere in Mexico. Drive very slowly—these detours can be rough! They may ask what you carry and sometimes they will want to inspect inside your car or rig. They are mainly interested if you carry guns or drugs (“armas” or “drogas”), the answer to which of course is “NO.” <u>They usually ask where you came from and where you are going.</u> Agricultural checkpoints are frequently not open, but if open, they often wave RVers through. At some state border crossings are agricultural checks (mainly they will take citrus, potatoes, avocados etc.) and sometimes spray under your rig for a small fee (mandatory). <u>ABSOLUTELY NO GUNS OR AMMO IN MEXICO!!</u>
Do I have to know Spanish?	It is not necessary to be fluent in Spanish when traveling in Mexico. Bring a phrase book, and/or dictionary and learn the numbers, and learn the basic expressions for “Hi”, “Good day”, “Thank You”, “Please” etc.
What about my health?	Bring all prescription drugs you are currently using (in labeled pharmacy Rx bottles), vitamins etc. Bring an anti-diarrhea medication (eg: Imodium), general first-aid kit etc. Many prescription drugs are available over the counter at Mexican farmacias (drugstores) for less money than in US. Doctors and dentists are good, emergency clinics (Cruz Roja) and hospitals are good and comparatively inexpensive. Check with your US health insurance if they cover medical emergencies in Mexico (Medicare alone does not) and how to claim. Skymed or other medevac organizations optional with Mexican car insurance are a good idea.
Money	Mexico is primarily a cash economy so bring plenty of U.S. dollars to exchange to pesos, the Mexican currency. The currency sign is \$ or sometimes MN\$ (Moneda Nacional). It comes in denominations of 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000 (paper) and coins 1, 5, 10, 20 pesos and 50 or less centavos. In March 2017 the official bank exchange rate was 19.07 pesos = 1US\$. It is recommended when exchanging money to get smaller bills (50/100/200pesos and less) since at small stores, cafes etc. it is often difficult to make change. Credit cards are only accepted in the larger towns, major tourist areas, large hotels/restaurants and large super markets. Most Pemex stations, <u>do not take credit cards</u> ; CASH ONLY. This is changing- in major towns and tourist areas Pemex takes credit cards. You can exchange up to \$500 at Casas de Cambio (Exchange kiosks). ATM machines in Mexico dispense pesos and require your 4-digit PIN code and usually have the best rate.
Can I drink the water?	For drinking purposes only, bring or buy bottled water. Superchlorinate all water going into your RV tank--add approx.1 teaspoon unscented Clorox per 10 gal. Reverse osmosis water is always available at Mexican supermercados (supermarkets). Every town has 1 or more reverse osmosis water stores that can fill your bottles. “Microden” is for sale in Mexican markets to use in water to wash vegetables; a combination of vinegar and water will work too.
Is it safe to eat out?	Get bottled water in restaurants and ask for purified ice cubes or drink Mexican cerveza! Watch out for street vendors (at topes or lights) selling fruit juice in plastic baggies; they may have a cooler somewhere, but the drink has been out for a while in the heat & can make you sick. Eat typical Mexican food! Most restaurants are excellent. Even the roadside stands have great tacos etc. The meat is always thoroughly cooked. Use lots of lime on fresh vegetables and other food too. Avoid sushi and other types of raw fish (ceviche). Eating garlic or garlic pills is known to prevent the “turistas”.
Can I buy food in Mexico?	The Mexican supermarkets have most of everything you want. But prices of certain things (for example peanut butter) can be higher, so bring favorite foods you can’t live without! Go to the local Panadería for bread, rolls, cookies, croissants and sweet rolls, the Tortillería for fresh tortillas (cheap by the kilo!) and the local Mercado for fresh vegetables and fruit. Remember: Wash/Peel and/or Cook! Milk is not always available fresh; the alternative available all over Mexico is ultra-pasteurized milk which comes in cartons, it does not need refrigeration unopened. There is a law on the books in Mexico that you cannot bring ANY fresh vegetables/fruit into the country <u>nor ANY meat products</u> . This is seldom enforced, but at some border stations fresh fruit and vegetables and uncooked meat will be taken away. Be prepared.

How do I communicate with Home

E-mail is the easiest and cheapest way to communicate. There are internet cafes and many campgrounds and restaurants have WiFi and is free or very inexpensive. For phone calls, if your cellphone carrier offers a Mexico plan, you can use your phone, but cell coverage is not available or spotty in many places. US 1-800 numbers do not work on Mexican phones. *It is recommended to get **non-800 phone numbers** for US companies you might want to call (parts, warranty).* You can also buy in Mexico a Mexican cell phone with prepaid minutes or a SIM card if your cell phone will accept a card not from your carrier; it is unlocked or made for international travel. Do not dial without a phone card direct or through operator in Mexico—it is very expensive! Mexican post office mail is very slow, not recommended to receive mail, most areas with many expats have mailing services; if you must mail something or receive mail find a local resident and locate the mailing service in the area you are in.

TURN DATA SERVICE ON YOUR SMART PHONES OFF – VERY EXPENSIVE!

Are the police corrupt in Mexico?

In spite of what you hear, the police are very polite and helpful. They will give you directions when lost or help you get out of town. Mexico has several types of police: Federal Highway Police + there are State Police, Judicial Police and local police. Obey the rules and you will not have a problem. Beware of a few big towns (especially Veracruz and Tampico!) where city police look for gringos to stop and try to collect a fine on the spot. Don't pay if you can avoid it! Write down their badge number and say you want to pay at the police station.

Are there any good maps?

The annual Guía Roji is the best Mexican road map *book* available. Approx. \$20 US. Be sure to get the current year edition! In Mexico Office Depot, Walmart or Sanborn's sell it. It has city maps too for the larger cities. Church's 2 Mexico camping books have excellent maps and descriptions to find campgrounds. Avoid driving through large cities in your rig. The roads are too narrow, and there is no parking. Take your tow vehicle or load or even better take the local bus (cheap and fun). You can use GPS although most units do not have detailed maps of the Mexican countryside or towns. Mexican GPS maps can be bought (downloaded).

What about other references?

AAA Mexico map – free to members Some AAA offices still have Baja maps, but they are discontinued. RV info-Mike and Terri Church's "*Traveler's Guide to Mexican Camping*" and "*Traveler's Guide to Camping Mexico's Baja*" are the best for RVers. Their website is www.rollinghomes.com has current pricing. Other recommended reading: Lonely Planet *Mexico*, Frommer's, Moon books Mexican Govt. website www.visitmexico.com or 1-800-4MEXICO. Or.: www.mexonline.com **There is a LOT of information on line! Many Mexican states and towns have websites in English!** States and larger towns have Tourist Offices, where you can pick up maps and brochures on local events and attractions. Not always available in English, but ask.

Electronic devices:

A reasonable number of electronic devices for personal use is permitted. Do not volunteer unless asked. It is not advisable to carry equipment in the original boxes, so it looks like it is for sale. Cover your desktop and put laptops/netbooks/tablets away in a closet or case.

Is gas and/or diesel readily available?

Pemex (Petroleos Mexicanos) is the only gas station brand and is owned by the Mexican government. Price is similar everywhere. All stations have Regular (Magna Sin), Super, and most have Diesel. Diesel pumps are BLACK, Gas pumps are GREEN! All gasoline is unleaded in Mexico. In early 2016 gas and diesel were priced higher than in the US. Price is in liters (1 US gallon= 3.8 liters). It is not self-serve. Stay close; be sure the pump is reset to "0" before pumping. In Baja, there is a 200+ mile "Gas Gap" (no stations) between El Rosario & Guerrero Negro. Top off at any possibility. In stations that have diesel (always shown on the large street Pemex sign), the diesel pumps are usually a separate part of the station. *Ultra Low Sulfur Diesel:* Mexico is at least several years away of converting to ULSD. It appears that Baja Norte has limited stations with ULSD, but at this time we do not advise people with diesel vehicles 2007 models up to travel in Mexico without thoroughly checking ULSD availability. Check your engine instruction book.

What if I have a flat tire or need other car repair?

Places to get a tire fixed are everywhere. Generally an old big tire on the side of the road, with "llantas" or "vulcanizadora" or "desponchado" painted on it, is a place where they fix flats. Mexican mechanics are good and very resourceful. Have some useful spare parts with you, such as belts, filters, special oil, wheel bearings & grease etc. If you need new tires, buy at home before Mexico! Leave home with good **heavy duty tires** on all your vehicles and your spares. **Have your car and rig serviced before you go.** For emergency road service, Mexico has the *Green Angels*, a free service of the Mexican Government. They are terrific and patrol most major roadways with 2 people in their recognizable green/white trucks. No charge for labor but they will charge for parts (they either have with them or get for you) and often one of them will speak at least some English.

Where can I do laundry?

There are self-service Laundromats in the larger towns or better campgrounds, and you can leave your laundry to be washed, folded and pick it up later or the next day. Look for the "lavandería" or "Lavamatica."

Is it safe in Mexico?

It is as safe/unsafe in Mexico as anywhere else. In large cities, be aware of your surroundings. Don't flash expensive cameras, jewelry etc. Don't have expensive items in view in your car and/or rig. The locals are generally very honest and polite. Don't go into areas where you wouldn't go at home either. Avoid crowds and have a sixth sense. Border Cities are generally a bit more dangerous.

Time Zones

Baja Norte is on Pacific time; Baja Sur (Guerrero Negro south) and West Coast of mainland Mexico to Puerto Vallarta is Mountain Time. Central Mexico and East Coast is on Central Time.

Is the electric OK at Campgrounds?

If campgrounds have utilities, many are only 15 Amp. Bring a tester and **always check the voltage and polarity and ground.** Have surge protectors in your rig for sensitive equipment such as computers. Don't expect to use microwaves and/or air conditioners unless you have a generator or powerful inverter. Bring 12v clip-on fans! Mexican voltage has been known to vary between 90 and 150 VAC! **If voltage too high, use a long extension cord to reduce the voltage.**

Is propane available?

It is readily available everywhere in Mexico, often at the outskirts of towns. **Butane** is sold in Mexico, which is fine, unless you will travel back to areas in the US or Canada where it is very cold--butane liquefies at below freezing temps. Mexico has many trucks running on butane. Some service stations sell butane for cars only, and they can fill motorhomes but not individual RV tanks. *Start your trip into Mexico with full propane tanks!*

What about dumping?

Dumpsites at older Mexican campgrounds are sometimes primitive and not always working. Many have only one dump. Be conservative, especially with black water. Grey water is sometimes OK to dump when parked in grassy or gravel areas, but be discrete. Bring a lot of "baby wipes", they are perfect for a wash-up when you are in areas where there is no dumping for several days. Don't throw TP in your toilet in your rig--use trash can.

A word about "baños", the Mexican bathrooms

You will notice in all Mexican bathrooms (even big hotels/restaurants) a waste basket for toilet paper. **Do not throw toilet paper into toilets!** Gross though it might sound, use the trash can in the stall. Mexican sewer pipes are narrow and old and cannot handle large amounts of paper or anything else not consumed first! It is a good habit in your rig too! Many Mexican public restrooms have an attendant who keeps the facility clean and a small fee of a couple pesos is required for use.

What if we are in an accident?

Your Mexican vehicle liability insurance policy will protect you! It is advisable to have "legal assistance and guaranteed bail" included in your insurance policy. If possible, always go to the police station for paying a ticket or other fees. For minor accidents, if you were at fault, pay the damages directly with the owner of the other vehicle and don't get the police involved. Keep in mind: in Mexico YOU are responsible for your actions. If you trip on an uneven sidewalk, it is your fault for not watching where you walk. No frivolous lawsuits here!

How is the weather?

The winter months are the best in Mexico. Coastal areas (both coasts) are hot and humid in the summer, except Pacific side of Baja is mild to chilly. The Desert areas in Baja are very hot in the summer months. Central Mexico is on a plateau 4-7000' high and it can be chilly. Dress in layers. Mexico does have a hurricane season!

Are there poisonous animals?

Be aware when hiking the rainforests of tropical Mexico, there are poisonous insects and snakes. Around water and the ocean there can be stinging flies, mosquitoes, no-see-ums etc. In Baja's desert, like our Southwest, be aware of rattlesnakes, scorpions, centipedes, etc. Shake out your clothes and shoes before putting on. Beaches—wear beach shoes in the water & watch out for stepping on sting rays in shallow water (do "the shuffle" walk!) and encountering jellyfish in deeper water. Bring bug repellent and sunblock!

Should I bring my fishing gear?

Fishing is excellent in Mexico. There are many areas where you can rent a boat and go fishing. A Mexican fishing permit is required for each person in the boat. Get a boat permit for your own boat; bring a copy of your boat title/registration. Mexican Department of Fisheries in San Diego (619-233-6956) has information on fishing and boat permits or contact Mexican travel clubs like Discover Baja (800-727-BAJA) and Vagabundos del Mar (800-474-BAJA)

Any other sports I can do while in Mexico?

Hiking and swimming possibilities are endless. In Baja, especially Sea of Cortez, you can go kayaking, snorkeling and scuba diving. On the Pacific side, there are surfing beaches. 4WD exploring is popular! Bring your kite! The large tourist resorts may offer tennis, golf, horseback riding etc.

What about guns?



DO NOT TAKE GUNS, AMMO, OF ANY TYPE, PEPPER SPRAY, ETC. INTO MEXICO! If found, **YOU WILL BE ARRESTED & PUT IN JAIL.** Leave guns and all ammo at home or at a gun shop in US for safekeeping.

Can I boondock in Mexico?

There are many places in Mexico where you can boondock, sometimes it is the only way! Many of the beaches, especially in Baja, allow camping. There is often a small charge for someone who acts as "vigilancia" (security guard). Eat at roadside restaurants and ask if you can stay the night, if there is room! Boondocking just by yourself is not recommended, but with 2 or 3 rigs it shouldn't be a problem. Use common sense. Watch for deep sand and don't get stuck!

Should I take my "towed"?

Your towed vehicle can be very useful in exploring the towns and countryside from your campsite. If you want to go off road you need high clearance and/or 4-wheel drive & heavy duty off road tires. Some of the most interesting places are off the main drag and great to visit, so take your towed vehicle along!

Are the Mexican people friendly?

Si! The Mexican people are very friendly and helpful. They are proud of their country, towns, churches, their homes & enjoy showing you around and helping you find what you need. Treat the Mexican people with respect and it will be reciprocated!

IN MEXICO EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED AND GO WITH THE FLOW!!

