



Mexico

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HISTORY



A country rich in history, tradition and culture, Mexico is made up of 31 states and one federal district. It is the third largest country in Latin America and has one of the largest populations—more than 100-million—making it the home of more Spanish speakers than any other nation in the world. Despite the political and social changes that have occurred over the centuries, evidence of past cultures and events are apparent everywhere in Mexico.

Many of Mexico's rural areas are still inhabited by indigenous people whose lifestyles are quite similar to those of their ancestors. In addition, many pre-Columbian ruins still exist throughout Mexico, including the ancient city of Teotihuacán and the Mayan pyramids at Chichén Itzá and Tulum. Reminders of the colonial past are evident in the architecture of towns like Taxco and Querétaro.

IN THE BEGINNING

Somewhere around 1000 BC, the first of Mexico's ancient civilizations, the Olmecs, established themselves in what are now the states of Veracruz and Tabasco. They worshipped a jaguar God, built cities, constructed massive stone head carvings, and spread throughout central and southern Mexico until their civilization mysteriously vanished around 400 BC. Though the Olmecs left behind relatively few artifacts, their influence on later cultures was profound. In their wake came the Teotihuacan, the Zapotecs and Mixtecs of Monte Alban, the Maya of Yucatan, the Toltecs, Aztecs, and dozens of smaller, cited groups.

To balance the spiritual and earthly realms and appease their pantheons of gods, many of these civilizations practiced human sacrifice, a fact that often overshadows their great achievements in the realms of mathematics, astronomy, architecture, textile weaving, art, and pottery. The Maya, for example, were so advanced in mathematics and astronomy that their calendar was the world's most accurate until this century. They could also predict solar and lunar eclipses. None of Mexico's pre-Columbian civilizations is more storied, however, than the Aztecs. Though it is arguable that other civilizations in Mexico achieved greater artistic and scientific feats, none advanced as quickly or ruled with as much territory.

BENITO JUAREZ

Benito Juarez is considered one of Mexico's greatest and most beloved leaders. During his political career he helped to institute a series of liberal reforms that were embodied into the new constitution of 1857. During the French occupation of Mexico, Juarez refused to accept the rule of the Monarchy or any other foreign nation, and helped to establish Mexico as a constitutional democracy. He also promoted equal rights for the Indian population, better access to health care and education, lessening the political and financial power of the Roman Catholic church, and championed the raising of the living standards for the rural poor.

STRUGGLE FOR MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE

The Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, ended dictatorship in Mexico and established a constitutional republic. A number of groups, led by revolutionaries including Francisco Madero, Pascual Orozco, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, participated in the long and costly conflict. Though a constitution drafted in 1917 formalized many of the reforms sought by rebel groups, periodic violence continued into the 1930s.



MONEY



Mexico's currency is the Mexican Peso. There are one hundred Mexican cents (centavos) to every peso.

The symbol for the the Mexican Peso is \$. To distinguish this from the Dollar, you sometimes see it presented as MX\$ or the value with the letters "MN" after it, e.g. \$100 MN. The MN stands for Moneda Nacional, meaning National Currency. Mexican Bank notes are printed in denominations of 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1,000 pesos. The most commonly seen and used are the 50, 100 and 200 peso notes.

CREDIT CARDS

Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are the most commonly accepted credit cards in Mexico. You shouldn't have a problem using any of these major cards, especially in larger cities or tourist destinations.

DEBIT CARDS

Major debit cards are accepted at millions of retail establishments across Mexico. Your purchases will be charged in Mexican pesos, and your bank will convert the amount back to the equivalent in the local currency where your account is held and charge it to your account.



VISITORS FROM THE USA

Many establishments that deal with tourists, especially in coastal resort areas, quote prices in U.S. dollars. To avoid confusion, they use the abbreviations DLLS. for dollars and M.N. (moneda nacional, or national currency) or M.X.P. for Mexican Pesos. Note that establishments that quote their prices primarily in U.S. dollars are listed in this guide with U.S. dollars. Getting change is a problem. Small-denomination bills and coins are hard to come by, so start collecting them early in your trip. Shopkeepers and taxi drivers everywhere always seem to be out of change and small bills; that's doubly true in markets. There seems to be an expectation that the customer should provide appropriate change, rather than the other way around.

ATM

ATMs are all around Mexico, but use one at the bank rather than a kiosk on the street or at a convenience store. Doing so ensures that the ATM is monitored and secure, and you will be less likely to accidentally withdraw counterfeit money, which does happen. Each bank charges a different rate to withdraw pesos on a foreign card, but generally, the fee is around \$5. To avoid this fee, consider getting an account at HSBC or Santander, banks with branches in Mexico that don't charge a fee upon withdrawal.

HELPFUL INFO

CLIMATE

The climate in Mexico is tropical with a rainy and dry season and little temperature fluctuation from season to season. The temperature in all areas of Mexico typically ranges between 50°F and 90°F throughout the year. Average annual humidity is around 70%. Mountainous regions and any area above sea level may experience cooler temperatures and lower humidity. To explore the northern regions of Mexico (coasts and deserts), October is a good month, and in general spring and autumn are the most advisable (March-April and September-October).

ELECTRICITY

In Mexico the power sockets are of type A and B. The standard voltage is 1270-V and the standard frequency is 60-Hz.



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ESTACION 249

TECHNOLOGY & COMMUNICATION

Mexico offers a whole range of telephone services from simple landline telephone services to high-speed internet services as well as the latest 3rd Generation (“3G”), 4th Generation (“4G”) and LTE (Long Term Evolution) mobile technologies. Mexico’s telephone network is one of the most well-developed in Latin America.

Penetration of land-lines never reached those of the US or western Europe, and are now never likely to as the introduction of mass-market mobile telephones in the mid 1990’s meant that people turned to wireless connections and demand for land-lines declined, especially in more remote areas. High Speed internet lines are now widely available in most towns and cities in Mexico, which is making Internet access ubiquitous in many offices, homes and other public spaces.

INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORT

Road transport remains a strategically vital component of Mexico's economy. Accounting for 57% of freight transport in the country, it relies on a network of 370,000-km of roads that link the country from north to south and between its two oceanic coastlines. Some of the most important road connections link the capital with border crossings to the US. A key road takes freight from Mexico City to Nuevo Laredo, linking with the state of Texas. Also heading north is the connection between the capital and Nogales, which links to Arizona. Routes to the larger commercial ports are helping to grow intermodal transport, such as the highway between Mexico City and the port of Veracruz, or the link from Guadalajara to the port of Manzanillo.



IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY

Mexico is finally getting a single, nationwide emergency number like the U.S. has, and the number is 911.

LANGUAGE

In Mexico City, the official and widely spoken language is Spanish. Owing to the presence of a large population of indigenous people, Nahuatl, Otomi, Mixtec, Zapotec and Mazahua are some of the commonly spoken indigenous languages. English is usually understood in Mexico. The expat population consists of speakers of English, German, French, Japanese, and Korean amongst others.



LGBT TRAVEL

As a Latin American country, it might not be the first place that the phrase “LGBT+ travel destination” makes spring to mind, and of course, the Catholic church exerts a conservative influence, but legislatively it’s a different story. Same-sex sexual activity has been legal here since 1871; same-sex marriage has been legal in Mexico City since 2010 and many states since; discrimination is outlawed.

RELIGION

Catholic Christianity is the dominant religion in Mexico, representing about 83% of the total population as of 2010.

In recent decades the number of Catholics has been declining, due to the growth of other Christian denominations – especially various Protestant churches and Mormonism – which now constitute 10% of the population, and non-Christian religions. Conversion to non-Catholic denominations has been considerably slower than in Central America, and central Mexico remains one of the most Catholic areas in the world.

Frida Kahlo



GETTING THERE

The quickest and easiest way to get to Mexico is to fly. If you're willing to have your journey take a little longer, it is also possible to travel overland from the US via train, bus or car, or by water – several cruise lines stop along the country's Pacific and (to a lesser extent) Caribbean coasts. Major airports are Cancun International Airport, Guadalajara Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla International Airport, Mexico City Benito Juarez International Airport and Monterrey General Mariano.

DRIVING

Drivers crossing the border into Mexico in private cars or US hire cars must present originals and photocopies of the current car registration and a current driving licence to obtain an automobile permit, valid for the length of stay specified on their tourist card (maximum of 180 days). The cost of this should be charged to a credit card to avoid leaving a large cash deposit. Mexican car insurance is also compulsory - extensions to US policies are not valid.

THE EXPERIENCE

CULTURE

Mexico's culture is rich, colourful and vibrant, influenced by its ancient civilisations such as the Aztec and Maya as well as European colonisation. It is unique and probably one of the most fascinating cultures in the world. The traditions and customs of the Mexican people are varied and diverse. They are proud of their native heritage and each region has its own cultural practices and celebrations. Many of the ancient traditions of their ancestors have been preserved making it a fascinating destination to explore. Music and dance feature heavily in Mexican culture. Mariachi music dates back to the 18th century and is well-known and loved. Traditionally mariachi bands consist of 5 musicians wearing 'charro' suits. Festivals and fiestas are extremely important in Mexico and celebrated even in the smallest villages. Every community has its own patron saint who is honoured with celebrations and processions every year.

BUCKET LIST

Dive along Banco Chinchorro

Experience Dia de Los Muertos

Be in awe of El Tajin

Hike through Copper Canyon

Ride through Sumidero Canyon

Ride a trajinera in Xochimilco

FAMILY TRAVEL HIGHLIGHTS

Explore the Teotihuacan ruins

Take a tour at Planetario Luis Enrique Erro

Play around Parque Bicentenario

Enjoy the rides at Six Flags México

Visit Papalote Museo del Niño

Go ice skating at La Pista, San Jerónimo

TOURISM AUTHORITY

The Mexico Tourism Board (MTB) is the organization entrusted to coordinate, design and develop the national and international strategies of touristic promotion for Mexico. Furthermore, the Mexico Tourism Board is also in charge of promoting the numerous destinations and activities that Mexico has to offer, as well as Mexico's many natural and cultural locations.



FOODS TO TRY

Chilaquiles

Pozole

Tacos al pastor

Tostadas

Chiles en nogada

Elote

Enchiladas

Mole

Guacamole

DRINKS TO TRY

Agua Frescas

Non-Alcoholic Horchata

Arroz con Leche

Café de Olla

Ponche de Frutas

Atole de Elote

Champurrado (Atole de Cocoa)

Licuados

Chilate



PHOTOGRAPHY HOT SPOTS

Cenote Dzitnup

Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City

Xcaret Park, Cancun

The Marieta Islands

The pyramids of Teotihuacan

The underwater river in Cenote Angelita

San Miguel de Allende

Isla Mujeres

Agua Azul Waterfalls

The “Frozen Waterfalls” of Hierve El Agua

SOUVENIRS TO BUY

Molinillo

Mexican Chocolate

Huipil

Taxco silver

Lucha libre mask

Authentic mezcal

Pottery

Handwoven textiles

