



VISITING MEXICO

INFORMATION FOR MARINES, SAILORS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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INTRODUCTION

Traveling to Mexico can be a rewarding experience. Each year, millions of American citizens cross the border and return without any complications. However, make no mistake about it – when you enter Mexico, you are entering another country. Many of the protections and rights you take for granted every day in the United States are not available to you.

The US and Mexico have not signed a Status of Forces Agreement or other similar arrangement. DoD Personnel who are not assigned or attached to the American Embassy have the same legal status as tourists in Mexico and are subject to all civil and criminal laws. Additionally, DoD personnel traveling to Mexico should be aware that Mexico is a signatory to the treaty creating an International Criminal Court (ICC); therefore, there is a possibility of apprehension, detention, and extradition to a third country of persons who have been indicted by the ICC.

This pamphlet is designed to make you a smarter traveler when in Mexico. It contains information that may save you considerable money and headaches; it can even keep you out of jail, the hospital, or worse. Most of the information in this pamphlet is available online at the U.S. State Department's Travel Website (<http://travel.state.gov/>). You are encouraged to check this website prior to traveling to Mexico for the most current information.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

General: The Government of Mexico requires that all U.S. citizens present proof of citizenship and photo identification for entry into Mexico. While this requirement is not often enforced, it is the law. 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 or facsimile) of a U.S. birth certificate, a Naturalization Certificate, a Consular Report of Birth Abroad, or a Certificate of Citizenship are acceptable. Driver's licenses and permits, voter registration cards, affidavits and similar documents are not sufficient to prove citizenship for readmission into the United States. 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.

Note: Implemented on **January 23, 2007**, **ALL PERSONS** traveling by **air** between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean region are required to present a passport or other valid travel document to enter or re-enter the United States.

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U.S. and Canadian citizens will need to present either a WHTI-compliant document, or a government-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license, plus proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate. DHS also proposes to begin alternative procedures for U.S. and Canadian children at that time.

SUMMER 2008 At a later date, to be determined, the departments will implement the full requirements of the land and sea phase of WHTI. The proposed rules require most U.S. citizens entering the United States at sea or land ports of entry to have either a U.S. passport; a U.S. passport card; a trusted traveler card such as NEXUS, FAST, or SENTRI; a valid Merchant Mariner Document (MMD) when traveling in conjunction with official maritime business; or a valid U.S. Military identification card when traveling on official orders.

The implementation date will be determined based on a number of factors, including the progress of actions undertaken by the Department of Homeland Security to implement the WHTI requirements and the availability of WHTI compliant documents on both sides of the border. DHS and DOS expect the date of full WHTI implementation to be in the summer of 2008. The precise implementation date will be formally announced with at least 60 days notice.

U.S. PASSPORT AND OTHER TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- **U.S. Passport:** U.S. citizens may present a valid U.S. passport when traveling via air, land or sea between the U.S. and the aforementioned Western Hemisphere countries.

- **The Passport Card:** This limited-use, wallet-size passport card is not yet available and is under development. When available it will only be valid for land and sea travel between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean region (includes Bermuda).
- **Other Accepted Travel Documents:** SENTRI, NEXUS, FAST and the U.S. Coast Guard Mariner Document. Members of the U.S. Armed Forces on active duty traveling on orders are exempt from the passport requirement. DHS has more information on these travel documents. This information may be seen at www.dhs.gov.

ABOUT WHTI

The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative is a result of the Intelligence Reform and Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA), requiring all travelers to present a passport or other document that denotes identity and citizenship when entering the U.S.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced on February 22 its intent to propose, as part of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), significant flexibility regarding travel documents required for U.S. and Canadian children as part of WHTI requirements for U.S. land and sea border entry in 2008.

The goal of the initiative is to strengthen U.S. border security while facilitating entry for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors by providing standardized documentation that enables the Department of Homeland Security to quickly and reliably identify a traveler.

Minors: 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 facsimile or scanned copy - as well as proof of the parent/child relationship (usually a birth certificate or court document) - and an original custody decree, if applicable.

Vehicle Permits: With the exception of travel to the Baja Peninsula, 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. Further information is available at the U.S. State Department's Travel Website.

CRIME - GENERAL

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 always leave valuables and irreplaceable items in a safe place, or not bring them. 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. U.S. citizen victims of crime in Mexico are encouraged to report the incident 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 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.

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, or 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.

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.

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.

CRIME IN BORDER CITIES

Visitors to the U.S. - Mexico border region should remain alert and be aware of their surroundings at all times.

Some border posts have seen an increase in violence over the past year and some of it has been directed against U.S. citizens. Local police forces have been ineffective in maintaining security in some regions along the border. Drug-related violence also 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 numerous citizens were kidnapped and/or murdered. 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.

Visitors are very vulnerable when visiting the 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.

DRIVING IN MEXICO

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death of U.S. citizens in Mexico. Avoid driving on Mexican highways at night. Many U.S. citizens have died in recent years as a result of driving at excessive speeds, at night, on roads that are in poor condition or are poorly marked.

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 only owners drive their vehicles, 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.

If you are involved in an automobile accident, you will be taken into police custody until it can be determined who is liable and whether you have the ability to pay any penalty. If you do not have Mexican liability insurance, you may be prevented from departing the country even if you require life-saving medical care, and you are almost certain to spend some time in jail until all parties are satisfied that responsibility has been assigned and adequate financial satisfaction received. Drivers may face criminal charges if injuries or damages are serious.

IF YOU ARE ARRESTED

MEXICAN LEGAL SYSTEM

The trial process in Mexico is different than in the United States, and procedures may vary from state to state. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating Mexican laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs in Mexico are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. The Mexican government is required by international law to notify the U.S. Embassy or the nearest U.S. consulate promptly when an American citizen is arrested, if the arrestee so requests. In practice, however, this notification can be delayed by months or may never occur at all, limiting the assistance the U.S. Government can provide. Americans should promptly identify themselves as such to the arresting officers, and should request that the Embassy or nearest consulate be notified immediately.

Prison conditions in Mexico can be extremely poor. In many facilities food is insufficient in both quantity and quality, and prisoners must pay for adequate nutrition from their own funds. Most Mexican prisons provide poor medical care, and even prisoners with urgent medical conditions receive only a minimum of attention. U.S. citizens who are incarcerated in Mexico are sometimes forced to pay hundreds and even thousands of dollars in "protection money" to fellow prisoners.

Mexican police regularly obtain information through torture and prosecutors use this evidence in courts. The Constitution and the law prohibit torture, and Mexico is party to several international ant-torture conventions, but courts continue to admit as evidence confessions extracted under torture. Authorities rarely punish officials for torture, which continues to occur in large part because confessions are the primary evidence in many criminal convictions. U.S. citizens have been brutalized, beaten, and even raped while in police custody. Since the beginning of 2002, 20 American citizens have died in Mexican prisons, including five apparent homicides.

AMERICAN CITIZENS DETAINED IN MEXICO

While traveling in Mexico, American citizens are subject to Mexican law. An arrest or accident in Mexico can result in a difficult legal or medical situation, sometimes at great expense to the traveler. Mexican law can impose harsh penalties for violations that would be considered minor in the United States, and U.S. citizenship in no way exempts one from full prosecution under the Mexican criminal justice system. If U.S. citizens find themselves in legal trouble, they should contact the closest U.S. Consular Agency, U.S. Consulate, or the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City (see contact information at the end of this pamphlet). U.S. consular officials in Mexico can visit detained American citizens in prison, provide information about the Mexican legal system, and furnish a list of Mexican attorneys, among other assistance. U.S. Consular officials cannot arrange for Mexican officials to release arrested American citizens.

SERVICE MEMBERS DETAINED IN MEXICO

When a Marine or Sailor is detained in Mexico, immediate steps must be taken to get the service member out of Mexico as quickly as possible.

Upon notification that a member of your command is being held by Mexican authorities, immediate action should be taken to ascertain the information listed below. The responsible Yuma command should not immediately dispatch Marines to attempt to effect the release of the Marine. It is not advisable to enter Mexico to effect a release unless the terms of such release have been coordinated with the Mexican authorities responsible for the detained Marine or Sailor. Assistance in this regard should immediately be sought from the Navy Region Southwest Border Shore Patrol. Additionally; no unauthorized representations or promises should be made on behalf of the United States Government, or any agency within, regarding the return of the detained Marine or Sailor for any future trials or hearings. If terms of release cannot be obtained by the responsible Yuma command within 24-hours of detention, respective policies regarding possible CCIR reporting to higher should be considered. Help with a Spanish-speaking interpreter can be obtained by calling the Desk Sergeant, Provost Marshal Office at: 269-2055. All efforts should be made to obtain the specific information below to assist the Navy Region Southwest Border Shore Patrol. Throughout this process, Yuma commands are encouraged to seek advice from the Station Staff Judge Advocate.

Information Needed

- A. Location in Mexico where the service member is detained
- B. Name, description and unit of service member
- C. Date and time of confinement
- D. Charges pending
- E. Nature of the incident
- F. Names of witnesses, who have information about the incident
- G. U.S. dollar amount of bail or fine set by Mexican Authorities

WEAPONS

The Department of State warns U.S. citizens against taking any type of firearm or ammunition into Mexico without prior written authorization from the Mexican authorities. Entering Mexico with a firearm, some kinds of knives or even a single round of ammunition is illegal, even if the weapon or ammunition is taken into Mexico unintentionally. The Mexican government strictly enforces its laws restricting the entry of firearms and ammunition along all land borders and at air and seaports. Violations have resulted in arrests, convictions, and long prison sentences for U.S. citizens. It is best not to carry even a pocketknife into Mexico as this can result in a weapons charge if a knife is found on a traveler who is arrested for separate offense.

DRUG PENALTIES AND PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

Penalties for drug offenses are strict, and convicted offenders can expect large fines and jail sentences up to 25 years. The purchase of controlled medication requires a prescription from a licensed Mexican physician; some Mexican doctors have been arrested for writing prescriptions without due cause. In those instances, American citizens who bought the medications have been held in jail for months waiting for the Mexican judicial system to decide their fate. The Mexican list of controlled medication differs from that of the United States, and Mexican public health laws concerning controlled medication are unclear and often enforced selectively.

The U.S. Embassy recommends that U.S. citizens not travel to Mexico for the sole purpose of buying prescription drugs. U.S. citizens have been arrested and their medicines confiscated by the Mexican authorities, even though their prescriptions were written by a licensed American physician and filled by a licensed Mexican pharmacist. There have been cases of Americans buying prescription drugs in border cities only to be arrested soon after or have money extorted by criminals impersonating police officers. Those arrested are often held for the full 48 hours allowed by Mexican law without charges being filed, then released. During this interval, the detainees are often asked for bribes or are solicited by attorneys who demand large fees to secure their release, which will normally occur without any intercession, as there are insufficient grounds to bring criminal charges against the individuals. In addition, U.S. law enforcement officials believe that as much as 25 percent of medications available in Mexico are counterfeit and substandard. Such counterfeit medications may be difficult to distinguish from the real medication and could pose serious health risks to consumers. The importation of prescription drugs into the United States can be illegal in certain circumstances. U.S. law generally permits persons to enter the United States with only an immediate (about one-month's) supply of a prescription medication.

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

ALIEN SMUGGLING: Mexican authorities may prosecute anyone arrested for transporting aliens into or out of Mexico for alien smuggling in addition to any charges they may face in the other country involved, including the United States.

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.

UNIFORM: Do not travel to Mexico in uniform unless authorized to do so by the U.S. Embassy.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you find yourself in need of assistance (to include arrest, detention, crime victim, injury, etc) you should immediately notify the nearest U.S. Consulate.

If you are in the Mexican State of Baja, which includes Tijuana, Mexicali, and Algodones, the U.S. Consulate in Tijuana should be contacted.

If you are in the Mexican State of Sonora, which includes San Luis, the U.S. Consulate in Nogales should be contacted.

U.S. Consulate, Tijuana

American Consulate General
Ave. Tapachula #96
Colonia Hipodromo
22420 Tijuana, Baja California

Phone (in Mexico) (664) 622-7400
Dialing from the United States: 011-52 (664) 622-7400

U.S. Consulate, Nogales

American Consulate General
Calle San Jose s/n
Fraccionamiento los Alamos
C.P. 84065 Nogales, Sonora

Phone (in Mexico) (631) 313-4820
Dialing from the United States: 011-52 (631) 313-4820

U.S. Embassy, Mexico City

American Embassy
Paseo de la Reforma 305
Colonia Cuauhtemoc
06500 Mexico DF

Phone (in Mexico) (555) 080-2000
Dialing from the United States: 011-52 (555) 080-2000

Mexican Police Department telephone numbers

San Luis, Mexico PD: 011 526 53 536 4585
Mexicali, Mexico PD: 011 526 86 559 8090
Algodones, Mexico PD: refer to Mexicali telephone number

Navy Region Southwest Boarder Shore Patrol

Chief Petty Officer Todd Bruce, Navy Region Southwest
Border Shore Patrol (W) (619) 428-2427, (C) (619) 307-2362
Consulate (619) 692-2154

MCAS, Yuma POCs

LtCol M. E. Sayegh, Director (W) (928) 269-3484, (C) (928) 941-7669
Capt S. Bost, Military Justice Officer (W) (928) 269-3488, (C) (928)941-7554

MCAS Yuma Duty Officer

Dialing from Mexico: 001 (928) 269-2252