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Mexico Answers online magazine



Answers to some questions that your research might not have turned up about moving to Mexico, with extra information about Merida/Progreso, Yucatan and Xalapa, Veracruz.

Your Home...

Rentals can run from modest to deluxe, and it is not difficult to find nice rentals. In Merida, Yucatan, we know of rentals in our area, that are two-years old, 2 bedroom 1 and a half baths, 2 floors, with yard, for less than \$300p/m USD. There are many rentals for less, and of course, many rentals for more. Depending on the area of town, size and amenities, you can find what you need.

Before you rent any place, ask if there is a working phone line. If there is not, and you want to have one, you will want to take care of that with the approval of the landlord.

If you choose to buy property, seek counsel from a reputable attorney to give you all the legal information needed first. If you want to see more information, go back to our website and look under "HomeBuying"

Telephones and Long Distance:

Internet phone services are one way to have long distance calling. We know "DialPad.com" works well ...the rates vary, but are about 3.9c a minute to the US, 1.9c in the US. Different Internet phone plans vary, so choose the plan that fits your needs.

For local phone calling, if you don't have a phone in your residence, cell phones are an alternative. Rates vary, so ask around once you get here. Also, purchasing phone cards for the public telephones is handy and the cards are available at many locations. We got AT&T cards from Sam's Club in the States. They had a 3.4c a minute rate, for calls within the US and it was the best rate going then. You can use it in Mexico also, but the rate is higher.

In the Yucatan, one of the best values is to buy long-distance phone cards at "Farmacias Similares" where you can call the U.S. or Canada and talk for 30 minutes for 50 pesos (about \$5). You will need to use a home phone or office phone to get the best rate with these cards.

Television and Internet:

The internet availability in Merida and Progreso is primarily through Prodigy and Prodigy Infinitum(DSL) through Telmex. There are new companies offering internet connections, not associated with Telmex as well. Accesa in Merida is one of them. You can also get a satellite dish to pick up television stations from the US and around the world. One of the largest is SKY satellite.

If your apartment or home does not have an internet connection already, you can find internet cafés all over Mexico. Most cost between 8 and 10 pesos per hour (about 80c to \$1.00). If you bring your laptop with you into the country, be sure to bring along important software manuals. They are not available in English here, and are hard to get on-line. Better to be safe than sorry!

You should be able to keep your Internet Service Provider (MSN, AOL, Yahoo, etc) with no trouble.

Water:

Drinking water is purchased in 20 liter jugs (almost 5 gals.), and there are a few companies that deliver it right to your door. It runs about 17 pesos a bottle (\$1.70 or so). In the Yucatan we use Electropura and they deliver to our home twice a week. Most people buy water for drinking, even if they don't purchase the big jugs. We use the tap water all the time for brushing our teeth, cooking and washing the dishes, and so far we have not been sick from the water. Since water quality varies all over the country, be sure to ask about the water quality wherever you are! Buying water is never a bad idea.

Cooking Gas:

Gas is propane, and is delivered to your home. Each 30 k. cylinder costs about 280 pesos (about \$28). If you are living on a 2nd floor or higher, tipping the gas man for carrying the cylinder, is appreciated. We have found that in most areas, the gas companies drive through the neighborhoods a few times each day, and they honk their horns to let you know they are approaching. You can flag them down and they'll stop.

Getting Around:

City buses cost 4.5 pesos, (about 45c) and go everywhere around town! We found taxis to be efficient and inexpensive too.

For inter-Mexico travel, you can get almost anywhere via **bus**. The bus system in Mexico is the largest in the world. The Deluxe, Executive and First Class buses, are Mercedes Benz or Volvo buses, and very comfortable. They also leave on time. To learn more about the bus system, one good reference book is "Bus Across Mexico," by Robert Berryhill, available via internet. The cost is around \$19.95. We found the information to be very comprehensive and decided to take a bus from the border town of Reynosa down to Veracruz based on what we read in the book. The bus was a real luxury bus with fully reclining seats, blankets, pillows, and even movies. We left at night, and slept most of the way, allowing us to arrive in Veracruz mid-morning, refreshed. We caught another bus to Xalapa, and it was a short 2 hour ride. We heartily recommend the bus system here, as it is the major way for the people to get from city to city, since most don't own cars. The book even contains pronunciations of cities throughout Mexico, to help you say the name correctly to the ticket agent, should you not speak Spanish! Every type of person rides the bus, from executive to student. Classes of bus vary, so you can choose how you would like to travel. For long trips, we recommend "GL," which stands for "grand luxury." The buses have fewer seats, as well as separate bathrooms for men and women. Our fare to Xalapa from Reynosa was about \$91. (\$85 to Veracruz, and \$6.40 to Xalapa.)

Also, the website www.ticketbus.com.mx will help you get the most up-to-date information from your computer for many, but not all, of the bus lines in Mexico. Be prepared...it is in Spanish. All you really need to do is type in your "leaving from" city and your "destination" city from the list published there, and the times and bus lines will show up on the screen, with the travel times and prices, and number of stops. If you purchase a ticket, you must use it...there are no refunds or changes accepted.

Cars. There is paperwork involved in bringing a car into the country. See the next paragraph about how to bring your car in. **You should not operate a vehicle in Mexico without Mexican car insurance.** Even with insurance, the jeopardy you may encounter, especially being from another country, can be tremendous!

One thing to remember: if you leave a car in the states in storage, either with family, friends or in a public facility, don't forget to change your auto insurance to reflect the fact that it is not being driven! Saves lots of money.

Bringing a Car Into Mexico

Mexican laws are very strict about bringing cars into the country, so it is wise to follow these guidelines! The essence of it is this: if you bring a car in, you are responsible to take that same car out.

Please note: there is a "free zone," of about 20 kilometers south of the American-Mexican border where these guidelines do not apply, so if your car remains within those limits, no problem. Note: all of Baja, California is considered a "free zone."

Beyond the "free zone, "owners of personal vehicles must present the following:

Valid US driver's license with a photo, or an International driving permit (available at auto clubs)

Valid tourist card, passport or visa

The original certificate of title, in the name of the driver

A notarized letter of permission from the lien holder authorizing temporary importation of the car (if financed) or from your company, if it is a company car.

Valid state license plates

Credit card in the car owner's name. These include MasterCard, Visa, Diner's Club or American Express. Depending on the exchange rate at the time, this card will be used to pay the vehicle permit fee (between \$10 and \$40).

Very important: The title holder, driver, and credit-card owner must be one and the same - this means that if your spouse's name is on the title, and yours isn't, you cannot be the one to drive the car into the country. The title holder must be in the vehicle at all times when it is driven, and if another person is authorized by the title holder to drive the car, their name must be put on the car permit by the official at the border. To avoid hefty fines, do not lend the car to anyone else!

Mexican Insurance. *If you haven't purchased coverage in advance, be prepared to purchase it when you cross the border. You are taking a terrible risk if you don't have it! Your US (or Canadian) car insurance will not be recognized in Mexico.* There are many reputable car insurance companies along the border with Mexico. We found **Guardian Insurance** www.guardian-insurance.net in San Antonio, Texas. Also, you can check out www.automexinsurance.com on the internet. You can receive a quote online.

The reason Mexican car insurance is stressed is this: in case of an accident, Mexican law requires that your car be held until damages are paid, or until you guarantee proper payment via an insurance policy. You may be responsible for paying for injuries sustained, as well. Courts usually grant compensation for not only the car damages, but for time off from work and medical bills. If you don't have insurance, you could have a tremendous problem on your hands! The good news is that I've been told that Mexican insurers are very good about helping you!

Ok, now that you have been warned, I'll continue with the procedures!

Once your car paperwork is deemed in order, you will be issued a car permit and a sticker to put on your vehicle, all valid for up to 6-12 months, depending on your type of visa. Your visa will be stamped to reflect that you brought a car into the country, as well. Keep these documents in a safe place, because you have to turn them back in when you leave the country. If your car is found with an expired permit, the authorities can confiscate your car!

For those of you wishing to keep a car in the country longer than the original 6 months permitted, you will have to apply for legalization of your car when you get your FM-3 visa. The car is legal in the

country, then, as long as you are! You may need to keep up the state registration from back home, so don't forget that.

We consulted several sources before writing this, but things can change, and so please consult the Mexican Consulate closest to you for the most up-to-date information.

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Your Health:

Immunizations are not necessary to enter Mexico. We had some, just to be on the safe side, though.

We got Hepatitis A/B (referred to as "Twinrix", a 3-series immunization that you take over a 5 month period); typhoid fever (an oral immunization taken over 8 days), a polio booster, a tetanus-diphtheria booster and yellow fever (we plan to visit South America, that's why we got a yellow fever shot.)

Wash your hands often, and remember that germs can be passed on in any number of ways, besides eating or drinking them! We heard a story about a couple traveling through Mexico where the husband was the one to experience intestinal disorders more often than his wife. They finally figured out that even though they ate the same food and drank the same beverages, he handled the money most often. You can carry anti-bacterial wipes with you, or use waterless hand sanitizers.

Prescription drugs. Until you establish a relationship with a doctor here, bring enough of your prescription medicine with you. We had our doctors give us prescriptions for a 6-month supply, that we had filled in the US. Bring photocopies of all prescriptions and of your medical records, and keep your prescriptions in their original bottles. You don't want any hassles crossing the border. Don't forget to bring extra contact lenses or glasses.

If you develop a **common illness**, most pharmacists can assist you at the local (and plentiful) farmácias here. We have gotten medicine for chest colds, intestinal disorders, and antibiotics too. Whatever ails you, you can usually find it!

Dental services cost much less here than in the US, so if you need work done, don't hesitate to use one of the highly skilled dental professionals here.

Insurance. International medical insurance, we feel, is a good idea. Your medical coverage from the US usually will not cover you while living outside the US. Check your company to be sure. Our medical insurance from the States reimburses us for our medical expenditures here. Be sure to keep all your receipts if you are expecting compensation. Flight for life coverage is also good to have, and is relatively inexpensive. If you have an FM3 Visa, you can apply for the local Mexican insurance, IMSS.

Banking:

We use Wells Fargo Bank in the US. They have a connection with Bancomer here in Mexico. Some other banks that have relationships with Mexican banks are: California Commerce Bank, Scotia Bank, and Bank of America. You can find information on the internet. Check with your bank to see if they have any relationships with Mexican Banks. One thing we found is that money withdrawal fees from the US via ATMs add up quickly. (One month we were charged \$150 for bank charges!) If you don't want to withdraw lots of money at one time, it is best to open a Mexican bank account. To establish a Mexican bank account, you will need to update your visa from "tourist" to FM-3. (See information on FM3s under ["Immigration" Page](#))

Mail:

Mail from the States takes anywhere from 2 weeks to a month to get to us, so we use a mail service (like Mail Boxes, etc) to send our mail once a month, using our Fedex account number. A bit more expensive, but gets to us faster and a bit more secure. Have your mail service filter out the junk mail and credit card offers, if you tend to get lots of them, to make your mail less bulky. You may wish to check into getting your own Fedex account number. We kept a US address, as we felt it was easier for our friends, family and US billing companies to use that address.

If you send mail from Mexico to the US, stamps are 9 pesos each, and for within Mexico, the stamps are 6 pesos each. Mail collection bins are scarce and there is not a very reliable system of mail delivery like you are used to in the States or Canada!

Weather in Xalapa, Veracruz and Merida, Yucatan:

Weather in Xalapa is very pleasant. The temperatures are very mild, in the mid to high 70s and low 80s during the summer months, with quick rains some days or in the evenings. The rain doesn't last, though, and keeps things green. In the winter months, it can get down to the 50s and 40s, so you may need a jacket. Although at an altitude of 4500 ft above sea level, it doesn't snow!

If you want the heat of the beach, you can travel 2 hours to Veracruz, where the hot and steamy weather can satisfy your needs. Then you'll be glad to return to Xalapa to cool off.

The weather in Merida, Yucatan, is more tropical. The rainy season runs from June through September, and from April through August it is quite hot! If you are on the beach, however, you will be blessed with ocean breezes.

Shopping:

We try to buy all our fruits and vegetables at the open-air markets because of the quality and freshness, not to mention the low prices! The markets are a real experience to behold. Every few feet is a stall offering your choice of vegetables, fruits, peppers, and seasonings. Wooden crates are stacked everywhere, workers are carrying bunches of bananas in from the trucks, 50-lb bags of onions and tomatoes are hoisted overhead to squeeze through the crowded aisles, and all the time the smells of cooking food permeates the air. Cooks are serving up the day's specials, and juice is fresh-squeezed into plastic bags with straws protruding for your drinking ease. People crowd around these small counters, and soak up the goodies with freshly made tortillas, served hot. Usually a plate will cost you less than 10 pesos. But let's remember, we came here to buy vegetables and fruit at a low cost! As an example, we recently bought a huge bunch of radishes (at least 30) for 4 pesos (about 40c)! Limes are the staple here, not lemons, and we can buy 15 limes at a time for about 60c. We use the limes to make juice, just as you would lemonade. The tastes of fresh melons, mangoes, pineapples, bananas, pears, apples and strawberries cannot be described! To make it even better, the sweet taste of saving money lingers for a long time. Take your peso coins to the market, as most vendors will not have change for large bills.

When you shop at the open-air markets, take tote bags with you, or buy a mesh bag (bolsa) with plastic handles while there.

Wash all your vegetables and fruit with either water purifier drops, or a few drops of bleach and dish soap in a dish pan, to be on the safe side.

Miscellaneous Surprises:

I was shocked to find that my hair cut only cost 30 pesos (yes, that's just \$3.00). There are many shops (mostly called Unisex salons) that offer beauty services and barber services.

Health and vitamin stores are plentiful. There is a GNC at Plaza Las Animas, in Xalapa, and the Grand Plaza in Merida.

Big Stores are all around Mexico now. In this area there are branches of WalMart, Sam's Club, Costco and Office Max, to name a few. Be sure to take your Sam's Club and Costco membership cards with you, as you can use them here.

Going to the Movies

Most movies are in English, and subtitled in Spanish. Many animated movies and children's movies are dubbed in Spanish, and not subtitled in English. When you choose the movie, see whether the word "doblado" is next to it. If it is, the movie will be in Spanish (dubbed). The movie entrance price is very low, compared to the States, and we go to the movies during the week for just 25 pesos each (that's about \$2.50). The weekend prices are double, but still just about 5 bucks.

Restaurants:

There are a great many fine restaurants in Mexico, and many small family-run restaurants and little food counters as well. There are foods for every taste and price range. Many establishments offer "comida corrida," the daily lunch special, and it can be as inexpensive as 25 pesos (\$2.50) for a complete meal, from soup to dessert. Vegetarian restaurants are easy to find too. There are vendors on the street corners and in the parks, selling boiled corn, which they coat with mayonnaise, chile pepper and lime. You can also find bags of fresh chunks of fruit, coconut, or jicama, also sprinkled with chile pepper or hot sauce and lime, deep fried potato chips, sandwiches, tamales, and a host of other goodies. You may want to go easy on buying food on the street until your gastrointestinal system has had a chance to get used to the foods.

You can also find the American franchises McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Burger King, Wendys and Carl's Jr. down here, so if your craving for American burgers won't leave you, don't worry...you'll always be able to find some fries to salt! Here in Merida we also have Bennigans and TGI Fridays.

When you eat out at restaurants, pay attention to the alcoholic drink prices. They are about comparable to drinks in the States, so even though the food may cost less, your bill may still be high. We have been surprised on occasion, so I thought I'd let you know.

Coffee There are many great coffees from Mexico. Much of the coffee is grown in the states of Veracruz, Oaxaca and Chiapas, so you can find good selections in the large cities of Merida, Oaxaca and Xalapa, especially.

Walking, Jogging, Working Out:

In Xalapa, there is a series of 3 adjoined lakes, Los Lagos, which is a great place to walk, jog or ride a bicycle. It is about 2 miles around all three, and is located by the University. There are also private clubs where you can swim, play tennis and work out.

In the Yucatan, you will find many work-out clubs, so you always be able to stay fit. You can find tennis clubs, golf clubs, and swimming pools too.

Language:

You should know some basic Spanish to get along. People will try to help you if you try to use the language, so basic phrases are important. Don't be embarrassed to ask a person to speak more slowly so that you can understand them. And speak English slowly to them, as well, if they don't understand much English. Remember to always be polite...very important here!

Spanish-language classes are available all the time. Private tutors can be hired to teach you at home, if you wish, so you can check at the Universities where you are.

English-Spanish dictionaries are easy to find here, and cost less than in the US. Don't lug a lot of dictionaries with you if you don't have to! A must-have book to help you with the language is "501 Spanish Verbs," by Christopher Kendris, Ph.D., available in US large bookstores and on the internet.

A hand-held electronic translator (we have a Franklin brand) is an invaluable asset. You can find one (or another reputable brand) at office supply stores in Mexico and the states, such as Office Max, Staples, etc. They run about \$50-\$60. If you don't speak Spanish yet, you will use this translator often!

Cultural Amenities of Xalapa and Merida:

There are world-class museums in Xalapa and Merida, galleries of fine and folk art, the symphonies, several ballet folkloricos, along with music and dance of all kinds in schools, clubs and even local halls and restaurants. The Yucatan peninsula is a world-renowned place for finding Mayan archeological sites, with pyramids much more plentiful than in Egypt!

Miscellaneous Tips:

Don't bring lots of clothes with you! You can find lots of clothing here, and it is less expensive. Bring your most comfortable walking shoes, and if you need more, shoe stores (zapaterías) are everywhere! And unless you use specialty or smaller-name brands of toiletries, they are all here too. Baby products, hair coloring products, soaps, lotions and shampoos abound.

There are not many laundromats as we know them in the states, and you may not find a rental house equipped with a washer and dryer. You will find small shops, called "lavanderias" to get your clothes done. The operator washes, dries and folds your laundry and charges by the kilo weight (1 kilo = 2.2 lb.). It is usually done the same day, if you go early. Dry cleaning shops are easy to find, as well, so don't be squeamish about bringing your silks!

Don't get flustered by bugs here. You'll probably see "cucarachas" from time to time, and you can spray or put out repellants for them. They are just a part of life! It is best to not keep grain foods accessible to bugs, so keeping the food in ziploc bags or in the refrigerator has worked for us. When you live on the beach, your house will most likely have small ants from time to time. They are part of life here too! Just keeping clean and spraying from time to time will keep the bugs at bay.

Clothing

For the colonial cities it is best to dress as the locals dress...women in skirts or dresses, or long pants and blouses. Mexican women tend to dress up more, and many still wear high heels every day. For men, long pants and long or short-sleeved shirts are the custom. There are not a lot of shorts worn in the cities, by men or women. In the beach towns, the dress code is different, and depending on the number of tourists, any manner of dress may be commonplace!

The young people wear jeans, but have not yet adopted the sloppy look many American teens are so fond of, and for school, students wear uniforms.

Don't forget to bring several pairs of sunglasses and reading glasses. They're a little more expensive here, so you may want to stock up at home.

Siesta Time: Stores in many cities and towns, are closed from 2 till 4, then open again till about 8 p.m. Be sure to check at your local stores to see if they observe this custom.

For questions or comments, contact us at : mexicoanswers@mexicoanswers.com

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