



# RV TRAVEL IN MEXICO FAQ

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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(compiled by Lin and Maryke Hines)

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

1. Valid US or Canadian Passport, or certified copy of original birth certificate, and Drivers License/photo ID for everyone. Make 2-3 photocopies of both in advance! (After 12/31/07 a passport will be the ONLY valid travel document for traveling abroad for everyone and required for return into the US)  
2. A Mexican tourist permit or visa (FMT). Available at the border (Migración) – in Baja in Ensenada – needs to be filled out by you and stamped by the official on duty. Ask for the visa to be good for 180 days (the maximum). The fee (approx. \$22 US in 2006) needs to be paid within 72 hours at a Mexican commercial bank. Some banks are at the border, sometimes you have to go to a bank in the next (bigger) town. If you are traveling with children (not your own) 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 photo ID or passport.

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

Any *motorized* vehicle going to mainland Mexico needs a car permit aka "Temporary Vehicle Import Permit" that consists of an official paper and a "holograma" for your windshield. You get this at the "Banjercito" at the border. You need a copy of the registration OR title (*you'll have to show the original document*) of your motorhome, car (s), motorcycle, 5<sup>th</sup> 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 of your vehicles are 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, Diners Club only) and the permit is good for 180 days with multiple entries permitted. (Approx.\$30 US in 2006) **Since January 2006, 10-year permits are required for motorhomes and also for trailers and fifth wheels (US\$50) -- (NOT the toads or tow vehicles, those are still 6 months). This is a new Mexican law and apparently not yet enforced by all border stations. Make 2-3 copies of all your papers at home, so you only have to get the copy of the tourist permit at the border (there are places where you can do this for a few pesos)**

*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 separate transactions, with different names on each credit card and driver's license. It apparently is easier now with the 10-year permit for one person to register 2 vehicles.*

For all of Baja California and part of Sonora (until Puerto Peñasco) no car permit is required. The state of Sonora has a **free** vehicle permit for the whole of Sonora ONLY, if you are not traveling to any other state. 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 soon, 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 (the permit has the VIN on it)\*\***

**Do I need Mexican Auto 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 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 Escapes magazine, or the list you will get from the wagonmaster. Get your Mexican insurance well before you leave. You can specify start/end dates and have your policy before you go. Most agents will now fax or email a PDF file of your policy. Rates are different depending which Mexican states (western Mexico/Baja vs all of Mexico) you will visit, 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! You may change your plans, once the rally is over, and want to travel further and longer!

<b>Do I need a CB Radio?</b>	When traveling in a caravan, CB radio and a good antenna are <u>essential</u> . Your group leader will advise you of road conditions, checkpoints, traffic problems & points of interest by CB radio.
<b>Should I bring my camera?</b>	Photography is great in Mexico, whatever subject you are interested in: wildlife, people, scenery, colonial buildings etc. Bring enough film and batteries; they are expensive in Mexico and not always fresh. If you are shooting digital, bring <u>several memory cards</u> , and CD/DVD's to archive your shots after downloading to your laptop. Ask/gesture before photographing people.
<b>Measurements etc. in Mexico</b>	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
<b>Can I bring my pet?</b>	Have at least a <u>current</u> (less than 60 days) US vet's rabies shot certificate for your dog/cat and even better, a USDA Certificate of Health from your US veterinarian (for returning to the US-not entering Mexico). Don't forget to bring your pet's medications, if any, including anti-flea/tick medication, heartworm etc. <b>Do NOT bring pet birds/reptiles; you cannot bring them back into the US.</b> Don't let your pet run loose and mingle with the Mexican dogs; they often have fleas/diseases.
<b>How are the roads in Mexico?</b>	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 of the road, so be careful. Do NOT go over the speed limit. Speed limits are in Kilometers (1KM=0.6Mile). 90KM= 60 MPH.
<b>Any more suggestions for driving in Mexico?</b>	A left turn signal flashing on the truck in front of you on a road without intersections probably means: it is <i>safe for you to pass</i> . Usually does NOT mean: <i>I am making a left turn</i> . (It is a good idea to extend this service to cars trying to pass you, if you can see the road ahead!) 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>
<b>Traffic signs</b>	Mexico uses international traffic signs. Make yourself familiar with the road signs in your handout, in AAA book, 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!
<b>What about the dreaded "topes"?</b>	Topes ("TOE-pees") are "sleeping police" or speed bumps, and they can be 6-12 inches high and can cause 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 topes which can vibrate your rig apart. GO SLOW!
<b>What about "check points"?</b>	You will find roadblocks or military checkpoints anywhere in Mexico. Drive very slowly—these detours can be rough! Often they will wave you through, 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", and they want to know where you came from and where you are going. Often they are just curious to see inside the "casa rodante" (house on wheels). The location of the roadblocks changes occasionally. Agricultural checkpoints are frequently not open, but if open, they often wave RVers through.
<b>Do I have to know Spanish?</b>	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. Use the handout with most common phrases. Smile a lot and point at things; try something new!
<b>What about my health?</b>	Bring all prescription drugs you are currently using (in pharmacy Rx bottles), vitamins etc. Bring an anti-diarrhea medication (eg: Imodium), general first-aid 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.
<b>Can I drink the water?</b>	For drinking purposes only, bring or buy bottled water. <b>Superchlorinate</b> all water going into your RV tank--add approx.1 teaspoon Clorox per 10 gal. Use an in line filter at the RV park faucet and/or one at your RV's sink faucet to eliminate the chlorine taste. Some water filters even kill bacteria and viruses. Water trucks come sometimes to campgrounds with 5 gallon bottles of purified water and it's always available at Mexican supermercados (supermarkets). "Microden" is for sale in Mexican markets to use in water to wash vegetables; a combination of vinegar and water will work too. 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, but sometimes it has been out for a while in the heat & can make you sick. It is frequently the mineral content of the water that usually makes us sick, NOT bacterial. Often Mexicans get sick drinking our water!
<b>Is it safe to eat out?</b>	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". Try out the local Mexican cheeses, especially in Mennonite areas en route to the Copper Canyon.

**Can I buy food in Mexico?**

The Mexican supermarkets have everything you want. Don't come over the border with a full refrigerator and freezer! 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:

**How do I communicate with home?**

**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, does not need refrigeration unopened. One brand is LaLa. There are many internet cafes throughout Mexico. E-mail is the easiest and cheapest way to communicate. For telephone (and Pocketmail) buy in the US (Sam's Club, Costco) an international phone card, or check with AT&T etc. what their access number is from Mexico, so you can use their cards. US800#s do NOT work in Mexico, Mexico has its own toll free 800#, check with your US carrier) In Mexico you can buy a Ladatel or TelMex card for international calls. Do not dial without a card direct or through operator in Mexico—very expensive! Some US cell phone carriers (Verizon, Cingular) have a “North American Plan” for a modest extra monthly charge, covering Mexico so you can use your normal minutes (per min. charge is not cheap). Cell coverage isn't always as good as in the States. Mexican post office—the mail is very slow, not recommended. Some of your fellow RVers may have WiFi/satellite dish for email and let you use it.

**Can I get TV stations?**

YES, Mexican over the air TV channels in Spanish. Some satellite dish systems, but not all, can receive their usual US channels in most parts of Mexico.

**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: The Federales are the Federal Highway Patrol + there is State Police, Judicial Police and local police. Obey the rules and you will not have a problem. Beware of a few big towns (especially Tampico!) where city police look for gringos to stop and 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, or play dumb! Use the form on our website if you are in the right and they don't believe you.

**Are there any good maps?**

The annual Guía Roji is the best Mexican road map *book* available. Approx. \$15 US. Be sure to get the current year edition! You can get them on the internet <[www.travelbooksandmaps.com](http://www.travelbooksandmaps.com)> in Seattle or in Mexico at Office Depot, Walmart or Sanborn's. It has city maps too for the larger cities. Church's 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 toad or even better take the local bus (cheap and fun). You can use GPS although most do not have detailed maps of the Mexican countryside. AAA Mexico and Baja maps are good for planning.

**What about other references?**

RV info-Mike and Terri Church's (Ch. 8 members) “*Traveler's Guide to Mexican Camping-new 3rd edition*” and “*Traveler's Guide to Camping Mexico's Baja-2nd edition*”) is the best for RVers. Other recommended reading: Lonely Planet *Mexico*, Frommer's, *AAA Mexico and Baja maps, Tour Book & Camping Book*. “*The Peoples Guide to Mexico*” by Carl Franz.

Mexico history: *Many Mexicos* by Leslie B. Simpson.

Mexican Govt. website [www.visitmexico.com](http://www.visitmexico.com) Phone 1-800-44MEXICO.

For regulations, permits etc.: [www.mexonline.com](http://www.mexonline.com)

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.

**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. All gasoline is unleaded in Mexico. Price is comparable to US; diesel is usually cheaper. 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.

**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. and special tools if any, and 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 most of the time one of them will speak at least some English. There are almost no self service Laundromats in Mexico. Most campgrounds will offer laundry service, or go into town and look for the “lavandería”. They charge per kilo (2.2 lb) or load (their machines are small!). It may take a day or most of a day to get it back dry (not all have dryers and they will dry on a clothes line).

**Where can I do laundry?**

**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. At markets, vendors sometimes don't have the correct change (if you have big bills) and have to go to a friend or neighboring stall to make change but they always come back with the correct change.

<b>Is the electric OK at campgrounds?</b>	Many camping areas are boondocking, with no hookups at all, or maybe water, if you're lucky! Many campgrounds, if they have utilities, have only 15 Amp. Bring a tester and <b>always check the voltage and polarity</b> . Have surge suppressors 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 inverter. Bring 12v clip-on fans! Mexican voltage has been known to vary between 90 and 140 VAC! If voltage too high, use a long extension cord to reduce the voltage.
<b>Can I get propane?</b>	It is recommended to start out with full propane tanks. It is readily available everywhere in Mexico, often at the outskirts of towns. <b>Butane</b> 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 cannot fill RV tanks, but they will direct you to the right place.
<b>What about dumping?</b>	Dumpsites at many Mexican campgrounds are 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.
<b>A word about "baños", the Mexican bathrooms</b>	You will notice in all Mexican bathrooms (even big hotels/restaurants) a waste basket for toilet paper. <b>Do not throw toilet paper into toilets!</b> 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.
<b>What if we are in an accident?</b>	Mexico's law is the Napoleonic Law: <b>you are guilty unless proven innocent!</b> Your Mexican insurance policy will protect you! It is advisable to have "legal assistance and guaranteed bail" included in your insurance policy, unless you prefer a stay in the "Tijuana" jail! 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!
<b>Time Zones</b>	Baja Norte is on Pacific time; Baja Sur (south of Guerrero Negro) and West Coast of mainland Mexico to Puerto Vallarta is Mountain Time. Central Mexico and East Coast is on Central Time
<b>How is the weather?</b>	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.
<b>Are there poisonous animals?</b>	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 etc. Beaches-- watch out for stepping on sting rays in shallow water and jellyfish in deeper water. Stay aware of your surroundings! Bring repellent (high % of DEET) and suntan lotion! Be aware DEET can damage plastics like cameras, sunglasses etc!
<b>Should I bring my fishing gear?</b>	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)
<b>Any other sports I can do while in Mexico?</b>	The large tourist resorts may offer tennis, golf, horseback riding etc. Hiking and swimming possibilities are endless. In Baja, especially Sea of Cortez, there is a lot of kayaking, snorkeling and scuba diving. On the Pacific side, there are surfing beaches. 4WD exploring is popular! Bring your kite!
<b>Can I boondock in Mexico?</b>	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). Many Pemex stations have room for truck or RV parking, and expect you to at least fill up and/or eat at their restaurant. Same for roadside restaurants, if there is room. If you ask, you can frequently stay on private property for a small fee; often you may be invited into their homes! Boondocking completely in the wild just by yourself is not recommended, but with 2 or 3 rigs it shouldn't be a problem. Use common sense.
<b>Are the Mexican people friendly?</b>	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!