

Acapulco 2

Fringing one of the most beautiful bays on Mexico's Pacific coast, Acapulco is the country's most famous resort. The Spaniards founded the city in the 16th century, and for the next 300 years it served as the country's main gateway to the Far East. Continued prosperity was guaranteed in the 1940s when the then president, Miguel Alemán, selected Acapulco as Mexico's first tourist resort. Hollywood celebrities such as John Wayne, Errol Flynn, and Elizabeth Taylor arrived shortly afterward, and the high-rise hotels soon followed.

MAP OF ACAPULCO BAY



Exploring Acapulco

Acapulco can be divided into two distinct sections. To the west is the older, historic downtown area, or **Centro**; to the east is the newer "strip," which runs along the 11-km (7-mile) coastal road known as **La Costera Miguel Alemán**. This is lined with hotels, shops, restaurants, and nightclubs. The Centro is home to the



Señor Frog's, a popular restaurant overlooking the bay

1930s, Moorish-style **cathedral**, which overlooks the main square, as well as the bullring, the docks, and **La Quebrada**, where the world-renowned cliff divers perform their daily routine. Two blocks east of La Quebrada is a house where artist Diego Rivera spent time toward the end of his life. His colorful mosaics adorn the house.

The city boasts magnificent beaches and a worldwide reputation for the high life. It is also a working port and does not escape the environmental implications which that involves. The quality of the bay's water, for example, is not always perfect and drops noticeably in the rainy season (June–October) when litter is washed down from the hills.



View across Acapulco Bay from the southeast headland



Mosaic of Quetzalcoatl by Rivera, on a house near La Quebrada

▲ Fuerte de San Diego

Costera Miguel Alemán. Tel (744) 482 38 28. ☐ Tue–Sun. 📺 Sun free. 📍 Today, one of the few reminders of the city's history is the star-shaped Fuerte de San Diego, an early 17th-century fort that now houses the Museo de Acapulco. The museum details the city's history from pre-Columbian times to Independence, with special emphasis on its importance as a commercial center.



Brightly colored hotels overlooking Playa Icacos

📍 The Beaches

The city's main bay – 7 km (4 miles) wide – is broken up into a number of separate beaches. **Playa Caletilla** and **Playa Caleta** are situated on the peninsula south of the Centro. Smaller and more intimate than the other beaches, they are popular with local families who enjoy the calm, clean waters. Boats can be taken from here for the ten-minute trip to **Isla la Roqueta**, a small offshore island with thatched-roof restaurants, a small zoo, and several beaches.

Playa Honda, **Playa Larga**, and **Playa Manzanillo**, on the northern side of the same peninsula and just south of the main square, were popular

in the 1930s and 40s, but now serve mainly as departure points for charter fishing trips. **Playa Hornos** and **Playa Hornitos** occupy a central position on the bay. They have a family atmosphere but can get busy on the weekends. They also have the advantage of several beachside restaurants and nearby Papagayo Park, which has boating, rides, and other children's activities.

Farther to the east is **Playa Condesa**, the best known and most crowded of all the beaches. It is considered by those in the know to be the resort's "hot-spot" and is a

favorite with younger visitors. On the eastern side of the bay, **Playa Icacos** runs from the Presidente Hotel to the naval base and is often less crowded than the other beaches.

Enviros

Pie de la Cuesta, just 25 minutes' drive west of the city, is an attractive, broad, palm-fringed beach, but swimming here can be dangerous because of the powerful currents. The nearby **Laguna de Coyoaca** is a large freshwater lake that featured in the early *Tarzan* films, as well as *The African Queen* and *Rambo II*. Fishermen and water-skiers share the lagoon with a wide variety of birds and wildlife. The sunsets here are superb.



The palm-lined Laguna de Coyoaca, west of the city

VISITORS' CHECKLIST

Guerrero. 📍 721,000. 📏 30 km (19 miles) SE. 📞 Eje 47, (744) 469 20 30. 📍 Costera Miguel Alemán 4455, (744) 484 44 16. 📅 Festival Acapulco (late May). 📅 Virgen de Guadalupe (Dec 6–12).

Puerto Marqués is a large bay to the east of the city, with a few luxury hotels, food stands on the beach, and safe swimming. Farther to the east is **Playa Revolcadero**, unsafe for swimming due to the strong undertow, but relatively free of crowds and perfect for sunset-watching, surfing, and riding horses (rentals available).



LA QUEBRADA CLIFF DIVERS

The death-defying cliff divers of La Quebrada provide Acapulco's most famous and spectacular attraction. The performance starts with the young men climbing a 38-m (125-ft) cliff on the side of a narrow inlet. On reaching the top, they offer a prayer at a small altar before launching themselves into the shallow waters below. Each dive must coincide with an incoming wave if the diver is to avoid being dashed on the sharp rocks below. The five daily shows, one at 12:45pm and the rest in the evening, can be seen from a viewing platform or from Hotel El Mirador (see p308). The last two shows are performed holding flaming torches.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Mexico is gradually acquiring a modern tourist infrastructure and is now an easier country to travel around, although tourist facilities in more remote areas may be limited. There are national tourist offices in all large cities; in smaller towns, visitors can obtain information on hotels, restaurants, attractions, and activities in the area from the *palacio municipal* (town hall). Be prepared to slow down your pace of life in Mexico: everything takes a little longer. This may be desirable when you are relaxing on the beach, but it can become frustrating if you are up against bureaucracy when traveling. Patience and a philosophical outlook are definitely a help.



Mexican Ministry of Tourism logo

WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit inland sites is from February to June, before the rainy season begins (see pp36-7). In Chiapas, Tabasco, and Veracruz, the rains are diluvial, but in most areas the rains are only a refreshing daily downpour.

November is ideal for the beach: the climate is fresh, and prices are lower than the mid-December high season. Mexicans also visit the coast during July, August, and on *puentes* (see pp30-33). On the Caribbean coast, September and October may bring hurricanes. The smog in Mexico City is worst during the winter, from December to February.

VISAS AND PASSPORTS

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To obtain the FMT, issued for 180 days, visitors need a passport valid for six months from the date of travel, a return or onward ticket, and proof of finances. US and Canadian citizens need only show proof of citizenship and, for Canadians, a birth certificate. Visitors are required to carry their FMT at all times.

Unaccompanied travelers under 18 need a consent form signed by both parents. (British minors only need an FMT.) Non-tourist visitors need to

obtain a visa, and all visitors should check requirements before traveling.

CUSTOMS INFORMATION

Visitors over 18 have a duty-free allowance of 3 liters of wine, beer, or spirits, and 400 cigarettes or 50 cigars. All visitors

are allowed one video camera and one still camera, with up to 12 rolls of film. People using APS cameras are advised to bring film with them as the system is not known in all areas of Mexico.

Anyone driving beyond Baja California or the 20-km (12-mile) border zone,

will need a vehicle permit (*permiso de importación temporal de vehículos*) from customs, or the Registro Federal de Vehículos (see p379).

Archaeological artifacts may not be taken out of Mexico: the penalties for doing so are harsh. Good, certified reproductions are quite acceptable.

LANGUAGE

The official language of Mexico is Spanish, spoken by almost everyone. In the big tourist towns many locals will speak some English, but for anyone traveling off the beaten track, a smattering of Spanish is a great advantage.

The 57 indigenous groups in Mexico each have their own language. In remote villages some people speak little Spanish, although there are usually a few bilingual locals.



Mexican customs alcohol allowance



Mexico City on a rare smog-free day, from the Torre Latinoamericana

◀ A carnival parade in Huejotzingo, near Puebla

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Courtesy is appreciated in Mexico. On greeting, it is usual to shake hands or kiss on one cheek. When addressing people, use their relevant title (*señor, señora, señorita*), or professional title according to their university degree, such as *Licenciado (Lic.)* for arts or law graduates.

Attire is casual, except when visiting churches. Observe signs that forbid photography. Some indigenous people also do not like to be photographed, so ask first to avoid any confrontation.

Mexican *machismo* is world famous but generally harmless, although lone women should avoid isolated areas (see p366).



Road sign to a local museum

OPENING HOURS

Most of Mexico's museums and archaeological sites are governed by the state-run INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) and art galleries are under the care of the INBA (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes). Admission is generally charged, but children go half-price. Opening times are 9am to 5pm, Tuesdays to Sundays.

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Most airports, and good hotels and restaurants, have wheelchair ramps and adapted toilets. Elsewhere, Mexico does not have good disabled facilities, though the situation is improving in cities.

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TOURIST INFORMATION

The Sector (Secretaría de Turismo) offices in Mexico City, state capitals, and main tourist centers provide maps (of variable quality), and information on where to stay and what to see in their area. In smaller towns, visit the town hall for information.



A SECTUR tourist office, providing local information and advice

Entrance tickets to a range of tourist attractions



DIRECTORY

EMBASSIES

Australia

Rubén Dario 55,
 Polanco, DF 11580.
Tel 11 01 22 00.

Canada

Schiller 529,
 Polanco, DF 11580.
Tel 57 24 79 00.

United Kingdom

Río Lerma 71,
 Cuauhtémoc,
 DF 06500.
Tel 52 07 21 49.

USA

Reforma 305,
 Cuauhtémoc,
 DF 06500.
Tel 50 80 20 00.

SECTUR OFFICES

Mexico

Presidente Masarik 172,
 Planta Baja,
 Polanco,
 DF 11580.
**Tel 078; 50 89 75 00; 01800
 9807 80224 (toll free).
 www.sector.gob.mx**

Canada

2 Bloor St West,
 Suite 1801,
 Toronto ONT M4W 3E2.
Tel (416) 925 2753.

United Kingdom

8 Halkin Street,
 London
 SW1X 7DW.
Tel (020) 720 10961.

USA

New York:
 21 E 39th Street,
 NY 10016.
Tel (212) 217 6400.
Houston:
 10103 Fondren,
 TX 77093.
Tel (713) 772 2581.
Los Angeles:
 2401 West Sixth Street,
 5th floor,
 CA 90057.
Tel (213) 351 6801.

Health Precautions



Sunhat

Wherever you plan to travel within Mexico, it is wise to pack a small medical kit of essentials before leaving home, including plasters, bandages, tape, gauze, and tweezers. Antiseptic ointment can prevent infection of minor wounds, and insect repellent is essential. Bring supplies of any prescribed medication with you, and solutions for contact lenses if you wear them. The sun's rays are very strong in Mexico, so pack sunscreen with a protection factor of 15-plus, as well as a sunhat. Water purification tablets are a good idea for those traveling off the beaten track.



Mexican ambulance

VACCINATIONS AND INSURANCE

No specific vaccinations are required to enter Mexico, except for travelers coming from a country where yellow fever is present, in which case an inoculation document is required. But it is worth observing a few precautions, depending on the region.

Malaria is found in some rural parts of Mexico, particularly in the south, and antimalarial medication is recommended for these areas. More for comfort than necessity, visitors to the Pacific and Gulf coasts are also advised to use repellent against mosquitoes. Travelers to remote regions should be immunized against diphtheria, hepatitis A and B, and typhoid, and make sure their tetanus vaccinations are up to date.

Travel insurance is essential; public health care is not always adequate, and private treatment can be expensive.

MEDICAL TREATMENT

There are three types of hospital in Mexico. Social Security (IMSS) hospitals are restricted to Mexican residents, and ISSSTE hospitals and

clinics are for civil servants and university workers only. Everyone else, including visitors, must either pay for private treatment or rely on the local, and generally overcrowded, Centro de Salud (Civil Hospital) run by the state, or the Cruz Roja (Red Cross).

The level of care is variable in all types of hospital. In major centers such as Mexico City, Monterrey, and Guadalajara, public hospitals are fairly well equipped, but in more remote towns they often lack basic requirements. Equally, the large private hospitals in big cities, such as the



Sign for a Cruz Roja hospital

ABC Hospital in Mexico City, are often very good, but the smaller, private clinics are sometimes poorly equipped.

Hotels usually have a list of reliable doctors (English-speaking if necessary), as will your relevant embassy, or the nearest local tourist office.

IN AN EMERGENCY

In case of emergency, the Red Cross has an ambulance service in most major cities and tourist centers. If you are in a remote area, it may be quicker to take a taxi to the nearest hospital. If you are not covered by medical insurance, go to the emergency room (*Emergencias*) of any state hospital.

SECTUR, the Mexican Ministry of Tourism, has a 24-hour telephone hotline. Although this is primarily for immediate assistance, it can also provide general, non-emergency health guidance.

PHARMACIES

Mexico has a fairly tolerant attitude to medication. Many drugs that are not available, or have been banned, in the

USA, Canada, or Europe can be bought in Mexico, often without a prescription. Prices for all drugs are high, except for social security patients who receive basic drugs free of charge. Packets of oral

rehydration salts are provided free at health centers for people suffering from diarrhea.



A busy pharmacy in the center of Mexico City



Tourists wearing hats in the sun

MINOR HAZARDS

Visitors to archaeological sites often have to walk long distances with little or no shade. Sunscreen, hats, and bottled water are strongly recommended for these excursions, as well as for the beach and other exposed places. It is also a good idea to carry bottled water and oral rehydration salts when traveling in tropical regions.

Coral cuts and jellyfish stings should be bathed in vinegar, then dabbed with antiseptic ointment. If the wound becomes infected, seek the advice of a doctor.

Some people are affected by the combination of high altitude and severe air pollution when they first arrive in Mexico City, and may experience dizziness, nosebleeds, breathlessness, or fatigue. While acclimatizing, it is best to avoid excessive exercise and alcohol. The elderly, and anyone with anemia, hypertension, or respiratory or cardiac problems, should consult their doctor before traveling to Mexico City.

STOMACH UPSETS

By following a few rules, there is a good chance you will avoid diarrhea, or "Moctezuma's revenge" as the local version is often called. Never drink water straight from the tap, and when ordering cold drinks at local establishments, ask for them without ice (*sin hielo*). Most hotels provide purified water (*agua de garrafón*), and bottled water is readily available. Otherwise, boil water for 20 minutes or disinfect it with drops (*gotas*) bought at any supermarket or pharmacy.

Foods to be particularly wary of are lettuce, strawberries, and all raw, unpeeled fruits or vegetables; these need to be washed and disinfected prior to consumption. Raw fish, which is the main ingredient of *ceviche* (see p323), is also risky because it can carry water-borne diseases such as cholera.

Exercise discretion, especially at street food stalls (*tacos al pastor* are notorious), but with a little care there is no need to spend your vacation eating in fast-food outlets.

INSECTS

The majority of visitors to Mexico are unlikely to come across any dangerous creatures, and it is rare for tourists to become seriously ill as a result of an insect bite.

Scorpions are common in Mexico. Black or dark brown ones are quite harmless, but the light yellow ones, found in hot, dry places, will need an antidote (free from any Centro de Salud). Tarantulas look more intimidating than they are; far worse is the *capulina*, or black widow spider, found in western Mexico. Always check shoes and shake out clothing before putting them on, especially in more rural areas.



Insect repellent and a mosquito coil for protection against bites

SERIOUS DISEASES

Diseases such as typhoid, malaria, hepatitis, and yellow fever can be protected against by immunization. Standard food and water precautions are the best forms of protection against cholera.

Common parasitic infections include tapeworm as well as giardiasis, which is acquired by drinking contaminated water. It can cause chronic diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fatigue, nausea, loss

DIRECTORY

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance

Tel 065

Police

Tel 060.

SECTOR helpline

Tel 078; 50 89 75 00; 01800 9807 80224 (toll free).

HOSPITALS

ABC (American British Cowdray) Hospital

Tel 52 30 80 00.

of appetite, and weight loss. A prescribed treatment with the drug metronidazole is usually very successful in curing the infection.

Dengue fever is a viral illness spread by mosquitoes for which there is no vaccination. The best protection is to use plenty of insect repellent, cover up well when outside (particularly at night, but also in the daytime), and sleep under mosquito nets. The onset of dengue is sudden, with fever, headache, joint pains, nausea, vomiting, and a rash. Although not usually serious, it may last up to 10 days and full recovery can take up to 4 weeks. In the case of all serious illnesses, see a physician as soon as you can.

PUBLIC TOILETS

Public toilets are few and far between in Mexico, and those that do exist (in gas stations, markets, cafés, and bus and train terminals, for example) are often badly equipped and unhygienic. In larger cities it is best to make for a Sanborn's (see p114), or another large department store, restaurant, or supermarket, as they provide better facilities.

Toilets at airports and major tourist centers vary from good to adequate. Elsewhere it is always advisable to carry a roll of toilet paper and a bar of soap.



Toilet sign

Personal Security

Crime is on the increase in Mexico, and although most visitors do not encounter problems, it is important to be aware of dangers and take appropriate precautions. Pickpockets are common in cities, and rife in the capital. Leave valuables in a hotel safe and keep cash in a moneybelt under your clothing. If traveling by car, avoid driving at night, park in hotel parking lots, and never leave possessions visible inside the car. Avoid isolated routes or beaches, where attacks can sometimes occur.



Auxiliary police officers guarding a store

POLICE FORCES

As a general rule it is best to avoid all police in Mexico; they are rarely helpful and can make difficult situations worse. (The federal traffic police and the tourist police are exceptions: the former will assist you if you get stuck on the highway, and the latter usually speak some English and can be useful if you need help or directions.) However, should you find yourself in contact with the police during your stay, it is useful to recognize the various divisions.

Most visitors are likely to come into contact with three or four types of police officer. From time to time the uniforms worn by Mexico's police forces change, and colors vary from region to region. The traffic police (*Policía de Tránsito*) direct traffic and impose fines for traffic offenses. In Mexico City they are nicknamed *tamarindos* (tamarinds) because of their dark brown uniforms.



Mexico City traffic police



Baja California traffic police

The auxiliary police (*Policía Auxiliar*), dressed in dark blue, are an important force in the capital. They provide backup to the traffic police, and work as security guards in shops, restaurants, and metro stations. The bank and industry police (*Policía Bancaria e Industrial*), who also wear blue-colored uniforms, work on contract to banks and businesses.

Outside the cities, the federal traffic police (*Policía Federal de Caminos*), patrol the highways in black and white cars. A few states have a tourist police force (*Policía Turística*) to assist visitors to Mexico.

Other forces include the mounted police, riot police, and, most notoriously, the *Policía Judicial Federal* (PJF). These *judiciales*, as they are called, work for the Federal Chief Prosecutor, and deal with crimes such as homicide and drug pushing. They wear plain clothes, have a sinister reputation, and are best avoided.

DEALING WITH THE MEXICAN POLICE

If you find yourself in any trouble while in Mexico, it is more advisable to contact your embassy than the police.

However, should you come into contact with the police, the first rule is to stay as calm and polite as possible. If you get stopped and booked by the traffic police (a common occurrence with the *Policía de Tránsito*, especially in the capital), first try explaining that you are a tourist. If that does not impress them, they may ask you to pay an unofficial fine, which many people pay. Officers' wages are very low in Mexico, and these *mordidas* (literally "bites") are generally considered a supplement to their income. The *mordidas* are also negotiable and usually cost less than the official fine (*infracción*). To make a complaint against any police officer, take a note of his or her name, badge, and patrol car number.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Any woman who travels alone in Mexico is likely to get a stream of uninvited compliments. This is usually no more than a verbal game, but if it becomes too persistent, a firm *déjeme en paz* (leave me be) should work. This *machismo* can be a help at times, as men will come to your aid. Women should avoid going to isolated beaches or rural areas, or wandering through lonely streets at night. Nude or topless bathing is not generally acceptable.



Policía Federal de Caminos police car



Fire engine ready for action

STREET HAZARDS

Pedestrians do not have the right of way in Mexico. Whether walking or driving, it is important to keep your eyes wide open at all times. Be prepared for uneven road surfaces and sidewalks, or even unexpected gaping holes in the middle of a busy street.

Be sure to look both ways when crossing one-way streets in Mexico City, as on some of them the buses are allowed to travel in both directions. Be careful at junctions too – traffic signals and signs are not always obeyed by drivers.



Green and white VW taxi in Mexico City, to be avoided if possible

MEXICO CITY TAXIS

As a result of increasing incidences of robbery and assaults on passengers in taxis, visitors to Mexico City are officially advised against flagging down taxis in the street. When in need of a cab, it is best to telephone for a radio taxi (*sitio*). As an additional precaution, you can ask

the telephone dispatcher for the driver's name and the cab's license plate number. Visitors arriving at the international airport in Mexico City should take only airport taxis, which are white and yellow, with an airport symbol on the door. For these you must pre-pay the fare at one of the special booths inside the airport.

LOST AND STOLEN PROPERTY

There is little point in reporting lost or stolen property to the Mexican police unless you need to file an official report (*levantar un acta*) for insurance purposes. You will need to do this at the nearest police station (*delegación*), usually within 24 hours of the robbery. Lost passports and travelers' checks should be reported to your embassy and to the issuing bank, respectively.

NATURAL DISASTERS

In Mexico, as in all countries with a variable, tropical climate and landscape, natural disasters do occur, but they are by no means a regular threat.

In the event of an earthquake, try to remain calm and move away immediately from electricity poles, wires, or any high structure that could

fall on you. Do not attempt to use elevators. If you are in a building, the best place to stand is in a doorway, but never under the stairs. Most injuries in earthquakes are caused by broken glass, so keep shoes and a flashlight near your bed at night. If you are unlucky enough to be on the

DIRECTORY

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Tourist Security

Tel 078: 50 89 75 00; 01800 9807 80224 (toll free).

Ambulance

Tel 065.

Police

Tel 060, 5242 51 00.

Telero Property

Tel 061.

Fire Department and Earthquake Advice

Tel 56 83 11 42.

MEXICO CITY TAXIS

Super Sitio 160

Tel 52 71 91 46 (24 hours).

Sitio 210

Tel 55 95 60 03 (24 hours).

Sitio 252

Tel 52 71 25 60 (24 hours).

Servitaxis

Tel 55 16 60 20 (24 hours).

Caribbean coast when a hurricane hits and are unable to leave the area, stay in your hotel, shut all windows tightly, and stand as far away from them as you possibly can.

Since December 1994, the Popocatepetl volcano has registered seismic activity (see p149). The authorities have restricted access to the area, and have closed parks and hiking trails on the mountain's slopes. Similar restrictions are in place on Colima's Volcán de Fuego (see p187). If you plan to hike in the vicinity, be alert to posted warnings, and contact your embassy or SECRETUR (Secretaría de Turismo) for the latest information.



Fire and earthquake safety instructions

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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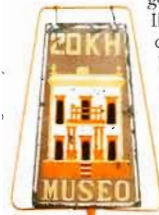
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DIRECTORY

EMBASSIES

Australia
 Rubén Darío 55,
 Polanco, DF 11580.
 Tel 11 01 22 00.

Canada
 Schiller 529,
 Polanco, DF 11580.
 Tel 57 24 79 00.

United Kingdom
 Río Lerma 71,
 Cuauhtémoc,
 DF 06500
 Tel 52 07 21 49.

USA
 Reforma 305,
 Cuauhtémoc,
 DF 06500.
 Tel 50 80 20 00.

SECTOR OFFICES

Mexico
 Presidente Masank 172,
 Planta Baja,
 Polanco,
 DF 11580.
 Tel 078; 50 89 75 00; 01800
 9807 80224 (toll free).
 www.sector.gob.mx

Canada
 2 Bloor St West,
 Suite 1801,
 Toronto ONT M4W 3E2.
 Tel (416) 925 2753.

United Kingdom
 8 Halkin Street,
 London
 SW1X 7DW.
 Tel (020) 720 10961.

USA
New York:
 21 E 39th Street,
 NY 10016
 Tel (212) 217 6400.

Houston:
 10103 Fondren,
 TX 77093.
 Tel (713) 772 2581.

Los Angeles:
 2401 West Sixth Street,
 5th floor,
 CA 90057.
 Tel (213) 351 6801.



Mexico City on a rare smog-free day, from the Torre Latinoamericana

Banking and Currency

The unit of currency in Mexico is the peso, but US dollars are widely accepted in tourist areas, and most large hotels, shops, and restaurants accept the major credit cards. Only in smaller places will you find difficulties without pesos. Bring cash or traveler's checks in US dollars; other foreign currencies are not readily exchanged in all banks. There are no restrictions on the import or export of peso notes and coins.



Standard cash dispensing machine

BANKS AND BUREAUX DE CHANGE

The two largest banks in Mexico are **BBVA Bancomer** and **Banamex**, but there are a growing number of foreign banks which also operate branches in Mexico. Opening hours are normally from 9am to 5pm, weekdays only, although in the capital and other large cities, many stay open until 7pm, and are open on Saturdays until 2pm. Ask at your hotel for opening times of the nearest branches. It is important to remember, however, that

many branches do not change foreign currency or traveler's checks after 2pm, so aim to go in the morning. Bureaux de change (*casas de cambio*) are open longer hours than banks, and offer a quicker service and better exchange rates, particularly compared to hotels and shops. The main international airports have at least one *casa de cambio* – useful for changing a small amount for taxis or buses.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS AND CREDIT CARDS

Traveler's checks drawn in US dollars are the safest way of carrying money. They can be changed at *casas de cambio*, and at most banks. When cashing the checks you will be asked to show your passport or another form of identification. Fees are not charged, but the exchange rate is likely to be lower for checks than for cash. Keep the receipt and a record of the

serial numbers separate from the checks, in case they are lost or stolen. The credit cards most widely accepted are MasterCard, VISA and, to a lesser extent, American Express. Cash dispensing machines (*cajero automático*) are common in Mexico's big cities. As a precaution against theft it is always a good idea to draw money from the machines only during business hours, and then in populated areas like main streets, banks, or shopping malls.



Changing money at a *casa de cambio*

DIRECTORY

BANKS

BBVA Bancomer

Bolívar 38,
Mexico City.
Tel 56 21 34 34.

Banamex

Isabela Católica 44,
Mexico City.
Tel 52 25 30 00.

LOST CARDS AND TRAVELER'S CHECKS

American Express

Tel 53 26 26 66

MasterCard (Access)

Tel 001 800 307 7309 (toll free).

VISA

Tel 001 800 84 72 911 (toll free).

TIPPING AND TAXES

In Mexico, tips are generally unofficial, but appreciated. In restaurants, tip between 10 and 15 percent of the total bill. If paying by credit card, fill in the tip box (*propina*) on the payment slip with the amount you wish to give – if you leave the box blank some unscrupulous staff may fill it in with a far greater amount. Taxi drivers do not expect to be tipped unless they have carried your luggage or provided some other extra service. Porters, on the other hand, especially those at airports or large hotels, expect a gratuity. It is everyday practice to give small change to people who help you in any way, such as chambermaids or gas station attendants. Most of these workers earn a minimal wage so tips are an essential part of their income. Parking attendants and the children who help in supermarkets are unpaid, and survive on tips.

Prices usually include the 15 percent sales tax, or VAT, (*Impuesto al Valor Agregado*, or IVA), but sometimes a price is given as *más IVA* (plus sales tax) which means that 15 percent will be added to the bill.

CURRENCY

The Mexican peso is divided into 100 centavos. On January 1, 1993, three zeros were knocked off the peso so that 1,000 pesos became 1 Nuevo Peso (N\$1). The word *nuevo* (new) has now been

dropped, and the currency is again referred to as simply the peso (\$1). Nuevos pesos are no longer legal tender.

The peso's symbol, \$, is easily confused with that of the US dollar. To solve this problem, prices are often printed with the letters MN

after them, meaning *moneda nacional* (national currency). Always carry small amounts of cash around in both coins and small denomination bills, for tips and minor purchases. Shops, taxis, and buses are often unable to give change for larger denomination notes.

Coins

There are four peso coins, in denominations of \$1, \$2, \$5, \$10, and \$20. All peso coins are silver and gold, and increase in size according to their value. Centavo coins are in denominations of 5¢, 10¢, 20¢, and 50¢. The denominations are clearly marked on the front.



1 peso



50 centavos



20 centavos



10 centavos



10 pesos



5 pesos

Bank Notes

Mexican bank notes are issued in six denominations: \$20, \$50, \$100, \$200, \$500, and \$1,000 (which looks very similar to the \$20 note).



20 pesos



50 pesos



100 pesos



200 pesos



500 pesos

Communications



Mexican post office logo

The telephone is the most popular means of communication in Mexico, largely because the postal service is so slow and unreliable – letters can take weeks, even months to reach their destination. Public telephones are easy to find and, in most cases, take phonocards. If mailing a letter, mail boxes are mostly yellow, although in Mexico City and tourist resorts, the new ones, marked *Buzón Expresso*, are bright red. For entertainment, Mexico has nine television channels and two national radio stations. English-language visitors can catch up on events by reading the *Mexico City Times* and *The News*.

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

The country code for calling Mexico is 52, followed by an area code. These area codes are currently one or two digits, followed by numbers of seven, six, or five digits. All area codes are in the process of changing. Two- and three-digit codes become one-digit.

the last numbers of the code being incorporated into the main number. In Monterrey and Guadalajara, the one-digit codes are being added to the local number, to give eight digits and no code. The one-digit code has already been dropped in Mexico City.



Logo of the Mexican telephone company Telmex

PUBLIC TELEPHONES

Local calls, which cost a small amount, can be made from call boxes in the street, and from coin-operated phones in stores or restaurants displaying a telephone sign.

The blue LADATEL telephones, run by Teléfonos de México (TELMEX), take LADATEL phonocards, which are available in denominations of 30 or 50 pesos from most newsstands and stores. A few public phones can also be used with credit cards, or with US and UK phonocards, accessed by dialing the appropriate code. With TELMEX, long-distance calls are cheapest at weekends, and after 8pm on weekdays. A

50-pesos LADATEL phonocard is the best one to use when making a transatlantic call.

If there is no working LADATEL phone available, most towns and some villages have a *caseta de larga distancia*. These commercially-run telephone booths charge higher rates than public phones but are cheaper than phoning from a hotel. It is a good idea to ask how much the call will cost beforehand.

Mexicans generally answer the telephone by saying "¿Bueno?" and then waiting for you to identify yourself.

DIALING CODES

- For operator/directory service, dial 040.
- To make a collect (reverse-charge) call, dial 020 (national) or 090 (international), ask for *llamada por cobrar*, and give the number you wish to call.
- For long-distance calls within Mexico, dial 01 followed by the area code and the number.
- For international calls, dial 00 followed by the country code, then the area code and number. Country codes are: Australia 61; Ireland 353; New Zealand 64; South Africa 27; UK 44; USA and Canada 1.

USING A PUBLIC TELEPHONE

1 Lift the receiver, and wait for the dial tone. The display will indicate that you should insert your phonocard (*inserte su tarjeta*) in the slot to the right of the receiver.

2 Once the phonocard is inserted, the current value of the card will be indicated on the digital display.

3 Key in the number you want to dial. As you dial, the number you are calling will appear on the display. You will also be able to see how much money is left on the phonocard.

4 When your call is finished, replace the receiver. At the end of the call the phonocard will automatically re-emerge. If the card runs out mid-call you will be cut off and have to start the call again.



Phonocards in various designs and denominations



Mexican stamps decorated with themes of the country, including culture and wildlife

MAIL SERVICES

Sending (and receiving) parcels by regular mail service in Mexico is not recommended.

Registering both letters and parcels improves the odds against pilfering. However, the safest way to send anything abroad is through one of the international courier services.

The main post offices (*oficinas de correos*) open from 8am to 8pm on weekdays, and from 8am to 3pm on Saturdays. Smaller post offices usually have shorter opening hours. Stamps for postcards can usually be purchased from the larger hotels.

A mail holding service is available at most main post offices. *Poste restante* letters should be addressed to the *Lista de Correos*, followed by the name of the town and state. You will need to show ID when collecting letters.

American Express also provides a free holding service for their customers. You can have your mail sent directly to one of their offices, from where you can then collect it.

MEXICAN ADDRESSES

Mexican addresses list the house number after the name of the street. In some cases,

the street number is followed by a hyphen and then the number or letter of the apartment. The next line of the address may indicate the name of the *Fraccionamiento* (*Fracc.*) if the house is on an estate. The *colonia*

(*col.*) refers to the neighborhood or area within the city. Include the *Código Postal* (zip code) if you can.

RADIO AND TELEVISION

Not all of Mexico's nine television channels can be seen across the whole country, and some regions broadcast local programs at certain times of the day. Seven of the channels are private. Channels 11 and 22, which broadcast films and programs of cultural and scientific interest, are run by the state.

The largest television company is Televisa; Cablevisión and MVS are the two principal cable television companies.

Foreign programs are generally dubbed into Spanish, but movies are occasionally shown in their original language with Spanish subtitles. Most hotels provide cable television, with programs in both Spanish and English.

Satellite TV is often available at the more upscale hotels throughout the country.

Almost every city in Mexico has a local radio station, and some, particularly in the more touristic areas, play English-language songs and have daily slots for English programs. In northern areas it is possible to pick up US radio stations.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

The *Mexico City Times* and *The News*, both published in the capital, cover mostly Mexican and US news, and have listings pages for cultural activities in Mexico City. (For Spanish-speaking visitors, the listings in *Tiempo Libre*, published on Thursdays by *La Jornada* newspaper, and *¿donde?* are more complete.) Outside Mexico City, English-language newspapers are published in areas with English-speaking communities, such as Guadalajara and San Miguel de Allende. The *International Herald Tribune* and *New York Times* are usually on newsstands the day after publication. News magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* are also available.

The widely read national broadsheet newspapers are *Reforma*, *El Universal*, *La Jornada*, and *Excelsior*. The tabloids, such as *La Prensa*, have a far larger readership.

INTERNET AND FAX

An e-mail address is a good way of keeping in touch while traveling. Cybercafés, where you can pick up e-mail and surf the internet, are on the increase in Mexico's cities and tourist areas. Hourly rates are usually very reasonable.

Public fax machines are also widely available in large towns and cities. Look out for a sign saying *Fax Público*.



Sending mail at a Mexican post office counter

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Mexico is a huge country, and although internal travel is not always as fast as visitors might hope, the transport system is increasingly easy to use. There are airports within reach of all the major cities. Flights from the USA and around the world arrive at more than a dozen international airports, and domestic flights offer an alternative to land travel. Privatization of the railroad system



Mexicana airplane waiting to depart

has eliminated train travel, since most passenger services have been cut. However, there is an extensive bus network reaching even tiny villages. Driving offers the most flexibility in terms of speed and accessibility, but it can be hair-raising, and road conditions are not always good. Ferries connect the mainland with Baja California and the Caribbean islands of Cozumel and Isla Mujeres.

ARRIVING BY AIR

Mexico City's Aeropuerto Benito Juárez is the key arrival point for international flights into Mexico. There are scheduled flights here from over 20 US cities. As well as to the capital, travelers can fly direct from numerous cities in the USA to Acapulco, Cancún, Cozumel, Guadalajara, Guaymas, Huatulco, Loreto, La Paz, Manzanillo, Mazatlán, Puerto Vallarta, San José del Cabo, Veracruz, and Zihuatanejo. Flying times from New York and Los Angeles to Mexico City are five-and-a-half and three-and-a-half hours respectively. **Air Canada** flies daily from Toronto to Mexico City in just under five hours.

From Europe, some international airlines still fly via the USA, although **AeroMéxico**, **British Airways**, **Iberia**, **Air France**, **Northwest/KLM**, and



Arrivals area of Aeropuerto Benito Juárez in Mexico City

Lufthansa operate direct flights, cutting travel time considerably. **British Airways** (BA) operates four direct flights from London to Mexico City each week, with a flying time of 12 hours. There is also a weekly BA scheduled flight to Cancún. **Air France** and **AeroMéxico** fly direct from Paris; **Northwest/KLM** from Amsterdam; **Lufthansa** from Frankfurt; and **Iberia** and **AeroMéxico** from Madrid (a flight time of just over 11 hours). Some chartered flights

travel direct from Europe to the major beach resorts. Visitors transferring in Mexico City must claim their baggage before boarding their onward domestic flight.

There are no direct flights from New Zealand or Australia, but you can transfer in LA or San Francisco to a connecting flight. The total flying time from Sydney to Mexico City, via LA, is 16.5 hours.

Central and South American airlines **Aviateca** and **Varig** run flights into Mexico City. **Mexicana** and **AeroMéxico** also offer connections between Central and South American cities and Mexico City.

AIRPORTS

There are 60 airports in Mexico. Of these, 15 operate international flights for tourists. Another 30 are classified as "international," but are

AIRPORT	INFORMATION	DISTANCE TO TOWN OR RESORT	AVERAGE TIME BY ROAD FROM AIRPORT
Mexico City	55 71 36 00	Zócalo 15 km (9 miles)	45 minutes
Acapulco	(744) 466 94 29	Downtown 30 km (19 miles)	30 minutes
Cancún	(998) 848 72 00	Cancún City 20 km (12 miles)	30 minutes
Cozumel	(987) 872 04 85	Cozumel town 6 km (4 miles)	5 minutes
Guadalajara	(33) 3688 51 20	Downtown 16 km (10 miles)	20 minutes
La Paz	(612) 124 63 36	Downtown 14 km (9 miles)	10 minutes
Puerto Vallarta	(322) 221 12 98	Calle Madero 7 km (4 miles)	10 minutes
Tijuana	(664) 607 82 00	Downtown 7 km (4 miles)	15 minutes
Veracruz	(229) 934 90 08	Downtown 18 km (11 miles)	15 minutes



Modern interior of Mexico City's international airport

either towns on the US border, or operate only one or two flights to foreign destinations. The other 15 airports are for domestic flights only (see pp374-5).

PACKAGE DEALS AND ORGANIZED TOURS

Air fares can vary greatly from one travel agent to another, and also from season to season. Christmas, summer, and to a lesser extent, Easter, tend to be the most expensive times.

Fixed-date returns are always cheaper than open returns, though less flexible. It is also worth noting that international air tickets are expensive to buy in Mexico.

Packages for main resorts are available at travel agencies worldwide and are becoming increasingly popular. These inclusive vacations tend to be cheaper than independent travel. The most popular package destinations are Cancún,

Acapulco, Baja California Sur, Huatulco, Puerto Vallarta, and Ixtapa and Zihuatanejo.

There are also companies, both in Mexico and abroad, that organize inclusive tours (*viaje todo pagado* or VTP) to sites or regions of particular interest, such as the Copper Canyon, the Maya ruins of the



Mexican airport sign

Yucatán, and the Colonial Heartland.

Popular special interest vacations include mountain climbing, horse-back riding, scuba diving, white-water rafting, and bird-watching.

ARRIVING BY LAND FROM THE USA

Visitors are free to enter Mexico's border zone (including the Baja California peninsula and the Sonora Free Trade Zone) without passing through immigration control. If you wish to travel past the free zone, you must obtain an FMT tourist card or visa (see p362). There are bus



The border crossing between Mexico and the USA, which is strictly controlled at all times

services into Mexico from some US border towns, but most people arriving by bus or train prefer to cross the border on foot, and pick up one of the cheaper Mexican buses.

Vehicle entry into Mexico is strictly regulated, and drivers bringing their cars across the border need to obtain

DIRECTORY

AEROMÉXICO

Tel 51 33 40 00.
Tel 01 800 02 14 050 (toll free).
www.aeromexico.com

MEXICANA

Tel 54 48 09 90.
Tel 01 800 50 22 000 (toll free).
www.mexicana.com

OTHER AIRLINES

Air Canada

Tel 91 38 02 80.
www.aircanada.com

Air France

Tel 21 22 82 00.
www.airfrance.com

British Airways

Tel 53 87 03 10.
www.britishairways.com

Iberia

Tel 51 30 30 30.
www.iberia.com

Northwest/KLM

Tel 52 79 53 90.
www.klm.com

Lufthansa

Tel 52 30 00 00.
www.lufthansa.com

CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICAN AIRLINES

Aviateca

Tel 52 11 66 40.
www.grupotaca.com

Varig

Tel 52 80 91 92.
www.varig.com

a *permiso de importación temporal* (temporary import permit), as well as separate car insurance (see p379).

ARRIVING BY LAND FROM CENTRAL AMERICA

There are three border crossings from Guatemala into Chiapas, and one from Belize into Quintana Roo. The official immigration procedure is the same as when entering from the USA, although it is invariably less efficient. Visitors traveling south of the border must hand in their tourist card. On returning to Mexico, a new FMT card will be issued.

WELCOME TO ACAPULCO



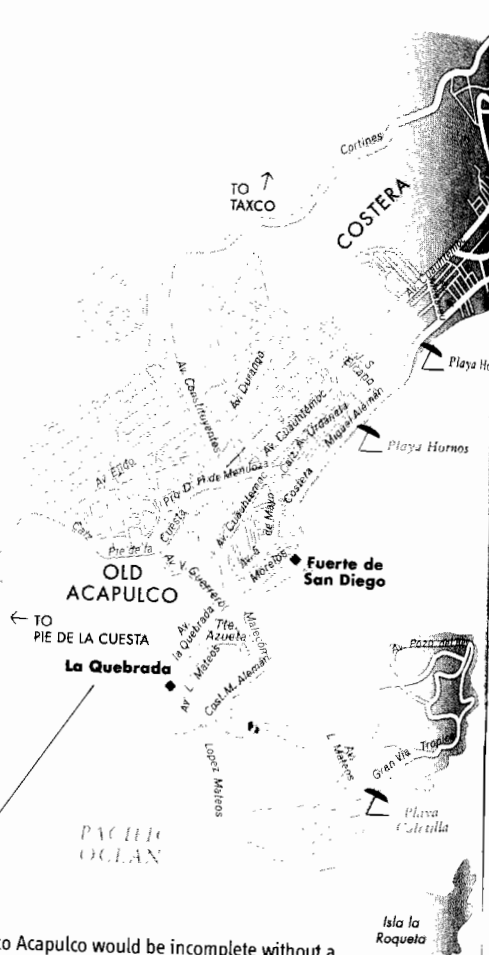
Acapulco cliff diver

TOP 5 Reasons to Go

- Dining:** Eating out is the most popular activity in town. You can sample cuisines from around the world or feast on classics from throughout Mexico.
- Pie de la Cuesta:** This laid-back village northwest of Acapulco offers you the chance to see authentic Pacific-coast small-town life, plus eat fresh, cheap seafood.
- Fuerte de San Diego:** The old Fort of San Diego overlooking Acapulco Bay houses one of the best museums in Mexico, illustrating the historical importance of this nearly 500-year-old city.
- Nightlife:** A small sleepy fishing village Acapulco is not. With big-city sophistication comes fabulous ocean-side restaurants, flashy lounges in sleek hotels, dance clubs with a hotter-than-thou clientele, and laid-back surfer bars on the beach.
- Taxco:** One of Mexico's prettiest towns, Taxco is also the place to buy silver jewelry.

Old Acapulco Your trip to Acapulco would be incomplete without a few hours spent exploring the old section. The *zócalo* (town plaza) is filled with majestic banyan and rubber trees, providing shade for a wide cast of characters. The surrounding streets are crowded with small businesses and the elusive soul of the city. The beaches are favored by local families and panga fishermen, now sharing the bay with gigantic cruise ships. The magnificent Fuerte de San Diego is nearby, as is La Quebrada, where otherwise sane men dive more than 30 meters (100 feet) into the surging and rocky Pacific.

Arts and crafts, Taxco



Getting Oriented

The city of Acapulco is on the Pacific coast 433 km (268 mi) south of Mexico City. Warm water, nearly constant sunshine, and balmy year-round temperatures let you plan your day around the beach—whether you want to lounge in a hammock or go snorkeling, parasailing, fishing, or water-skiing. Attractions to lure you away from the sands include crafts markets, cultural institutions, and the amazing cliff divers at La Quebrada.



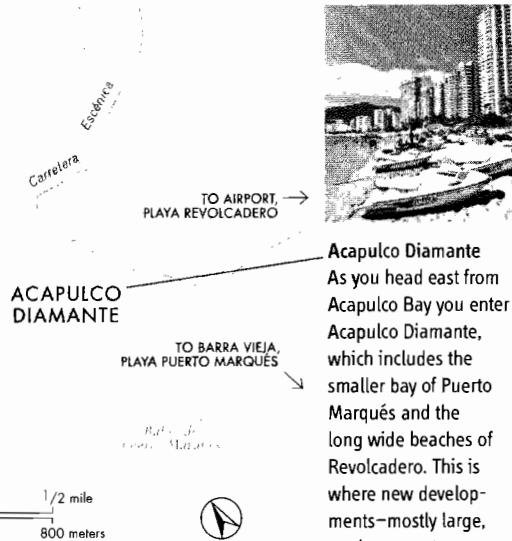
Acapulco, Mexico

Costera The heartbeat of Acapulco, Costera pulses with activity. There is nothing quaint or serene about this busy 8-km (5-mi) stretch of commercial bayfront property along Avenida Costera Miguel Alemán. The thoroughfare is lined with resorts, shops, markets, banks, discos—even a park and a golf course. And within walking distance are the bay's golden beaches. You can land here and never find the need to leave, unless, of course, you crave peace and quiet.

Bahía de Acapulco

Acapulco Bay Acapulco is the world's largest U-shape outdoor amphitheater, and the Bahía de Acapulco is center stage. The inhabitants in the surrounding hills and beach resorts can admire the action of watercraft and people in the harbor. While the daytime performance is one of fun in the sun, the late-night show features twinkling lights reflected in the water and salsa music drifting on the breeze.

Church Taxco



Acapulco Diamante As you head east from Acapulco Bay you enter Acapulco Diamante, which includes the smaller bay of Puerto Marqués and the long wide beaches of Revolcadero. This is where new developments—mostly large, opulent resorts—crop up. Above, the hillside neighborhoods overlooking the water host many of Mexico's most spectacular private villas. If you like a little breathing room and miles of breezy beach-walking, this is the place for you.

- ★ **Spratling Ranch** (☒ *South of town on Carretera Taxco-Iguala, Km 177* ☎ 762/622-6108) is where the heirs of William Spratling turn out designs using his original molds. You can shop only by appointment. **Talleres de los Ballesteros** (☎ *Calle Florida 14* ☎ 762/622-0026 ☎ *Joyería San Agustín, Calle Cuauhtémoc 4* ☎ 762/622-3416) and their branch, Joyería San Agustín, carry a large collection of well-crafted silver jewelry and serving pieces.

ACAPULCO ESSENTIALS

TRANSPORTATION

BY AIR

American has nonstop flights to Acapulco from Dallas, with connecting service from Chicago and New York. Continental has nonstop service from Houston and Newark. Mexicana's flights from Chicago, San Antonio, New York, and Los Angeles stop in Mexico City before continuing on to Acapulco. Aeroméxico has one-stop or connecting service from Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Miami, and Orlando. US Airways has a nonstop flight from Phoenix.

Aeropuerto Internacional Juan N. Álvarez is 20 minutes east of the city. Private taxis aren't permitted to carry passengers from the airport to town, so most people rely on Transportes Aeropuerto, a special airport taxi service. The helpful English-speaking staff will help you get on your way. Look for the desk with the sign that says TAXIS on the walkway outside the terminal. Tell the attendant what hotel you want, buy your ticket, and follow the directions to reach the dispatcher, who will guide you to your transportation. The ride from the airport to the hotel zone on the strip costs about \$8 per person for the *colectivo* (shared minivan) and starts at \$26 for an authorized cab. The drivers are usually helpful and will often take you to hotels that aren't on their list. Tips are optional, but appreciated.

Airport & Transfers Aeropuerto Internacional Juan N. Álvarez (☎ 744/466-9434). **Transportes Aeropuerto** (☎ 744/462-1095).

Carriers Aeroméxico (☎ 744/466-9109). **American** (☎ 744/466-9227). **Continental** (☎ 744/466-9063). **Delta** (☎ 01800/902-2100 toll-free in Mexico). **Mexicana** (☎ 744/486-7587). **US Airways** (☎ 744/466-9257).

BY BOAT

Many cruises include Acapulco as part of their itinerary. Most originate from Los Angeles, San Diego, and Fort Lauderdale. Some of the reliable cruise lines visiting Acapulco are Carnival, Celebrity, Cunard, Crystal, Disney, Holland America, Norwegian, Oceania, Princess, Radisson Seven Seas, Royal Caribbean, and Silversea. You can book through a travel agent or by contacting the cruise line directly. It always pays to check out the cruises online in advance.

Contact Carnival Cruise Lines (☎ 305/599-2600 or 888/227-6482 ☎ www.carnival.com). **Celebrity Cruises** (☎ 305/539-6000, 800/221-4789, 800/668-

6166 in Canada ☎ www.celebrity.com). **Crystal Cruises** (☎ 310/785-9300 or 888/722-0021 ☎ www.crystalcruises.com). **Cunard Line** (☎ 800/728-6273 ☎ www.cunardline.com). **Disney Cruise Line** (☎ 800/951-3532 or 888/325-2500 ☎ www.disneycruise.com). **Holland America Line** (☎ 206/281-3535 or 800/626-9900 ☎ www.hollandamerica.com). **Norwegian Cruise Line** (☎ 305/436-4000 or 800/323-1308 ☎ www.ncl.com). **Princess Cruises** (☎ 661/753-0000 or 800/774-6237 ☎ www.princesscruises.com). **Radisson Seven Seas Cruises** (☎ 954/776-6123 or 800/285-1835 ☎ www.rssc.com). **Royal Caribbean International** (☎ 305/539-6000 or 800/327-6700 ☎ www.royalcaribbean.com). **Silversea Cruises** (☎ 954/522-4477 or 800/722-9935 ☎ www.silversea.com).

BY BUS

ARRIVING & DEPARTING

Bus service from Mexico City to Acapulco is excellent. Grupo Estrella Blanca has first-class buses, which leave every hour on the hour from the Taxqueña station; they're comfortable and in good condition. The trip takes 4½-5 hours, and a one-way ticket costs about \$27. Estrella de Oro also has deluxe service, called Servicio Diamante, with airplane-like reclining seats, refreshments, restrooms, air-conditioning, movies, and hostess service. The deluxe buses leave four times a day, also from the Taxqueña station, and cost about \$40. Plus service (regular reclining seats, air-conditioning, and a restroom) on the same bus line costs \$27.

GETTING AROUND

Within Acapulco one of the most useful buses runs from Puerto Marqués to Caleta, making stops along the way. Yellow air-conditioned tourist buses, marked ACAPULCO, run about every 15 minutes along this route. If you want to go from the zócalo to the Costera, catch the bus that says LA BASE (the naval base near the Hyatt Regency). It detours through Old Acapulco and returns to the Costera just east of the Ritz Hotel. If you want to follow the Costera for the entire route, take the bus marked HORNOS. Buses heading to Pie de la Cuesta or Puerto Marqués say so on the front. The Puerto Marqués bus runs about every 15 minutes and is always crowded. The fare is under \$1. Scarlet-with-white-stripe buses are the most common but lack air-conditioning and are often packed. They follow the same routes listed above and are a few cents cheaper.

Contact Estrella de Oro (☎ *Av. Cuauhtémoc 158, Old Acapulco, Acapulco* ☎ 744/485-8705 or 762/622-0648 ☎ *Av. Taxqueña 1320, Tlalpan, Mexico City* ☎ 55/5549-8520). **Grupo Estrella Blanca** (☎ *Calle Ejido 47, Old Acapulco* ☎ 744/469-2028 ☎ *Av. Taxqueña 1320, Tlalpan, Mexico City* ☎ 55/5628-5721).

BY CAR

ARRIVING & DEPARTING

The trip to Acapulco from Mexico City on the old route (Carretera Libre a Acapulco) takes about six hours. A privately built and run four-lane toll road is expensive (about \$48 one-way) but well maintained, and it cuts driving time between the two cities to 4½ hours. Many people go via Taxco, which can be reached from either road.

GETTING AROUND

Rent a car if you plan on being in town for a few days and want to take side trips to Taxco and the coastal villages. If you plan to spend most of your time at the beach in front of your hotel, however, you don't need to rent a car. Taxis and buses can take you around the Costera, Old Acapulco, and Acapulco Diamante.

Renting a car costs around \$45 per day, including insurance and unlimited miles. It doesn't take many taxi rides to add up to the same amount. Driving in Acapulco is like driving in any crowded big city in the United States. The traffic along the Costera can get heavy, but it moves, and street parking is competitive but not hard to find. Some parking spaces have meters that accept peso coins, others are completely free.

Contact **Avis** (☎800/288-8888). **Budget** (☎744/481-2433). **Dollar** (☎744/466-9493). **Hertz** (☎744/485-8947).

BY TAXI & MINIBUS

Before you go anywhere by cab, find out what the price should be and agree with the driver on a fare. Tipping isn't expected, but a few extra pesos are always appreciated. Drivers will sometimes recommend a certain restaurant or store, from which they may get a kickback. That said, their recommendations can often be good ones, so if you're feeling adventurous, try one. Hotel taxis are the most expensive, the roomiest, and in the best condition. A price list that all drivers adhere to is posted in hotel lobbies. Fares in town are \$3 to \$7; from downtown to the Princess Hotel is about \$18; from the hotel zone to Playa Caleta is about \$9. Cabs that cruise the streets usually charge by zone, with a minimum charge of \$2. A normal fare is about \$3 to go from the zócalo to the International Center. Rates are about 30% higher at night. You can also hire a taxi by the hour or the day. Prices vary from about \$10 an hour for a hotel taxi to \$8 an hour for a street taxi; always negotiate. Minibuses travel along preset routes through Taxco and charge about 40¢. Volkswagen "bugs" provide inexpensive (average \$1.50) taxi transportation.

CONTACTS & RESOURCES**BANKS & EXCHANGE SERVICES**

ATMs are the best places to obtain pesos; they're convenient and safe, and they offer the best exchange rates. You'll also find many *casas de cambio* (currency exchange offices) around the zócalo and along the Costera. Their hours are generally Monday–Saturday 9–5. Most banks are open weekdays 9–3 and Saturday 9–1.

Banks Banamex (☎Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 38-A, Costera ☎744/484-3381). **Bancomer** (☎Av. Costera Miguel Alemán at Calle Laurel, Fracc. Club Deportivo, Costera ☎744/484-8055). **Bital** (☎Calle Jesus Carranza 7, Old Acapulco ☎744/483-6113).

Exchange Offices Casa de Cambio Austral (☎Av. Costera Vieja 3, Old Acapulco ☎744/484-6528). **Casa de Cambio Servicio Auxiliares Monetarios** (☎Av. Cos-

tera Miguel Alemán 88, Old Acapulco ☎744/481-0218). **Dollar Money Exchange** (☎Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 151, Costera ☎744/486-9688).

CONSULATES

If you are a victim of crime, or in case of any kind of legal trouble, contact your consulate first.

Canadian Consulate (☎Marbella Mall, Suite 23, Costera ☎744/484-1305). **U.K. Consulate** (☎Acapulco International Convention Center, Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 4455 ☎744/484-1735). **U.S. Consulate** (☎Continental Plaza Hotel, Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 121-14, Costera ☎744/469-0556).

EMERGENCIES

In a medical emergency, dial **065** or **066**, for police **060**. If you need to call the police, choose the tourist police (in white shirts and black shorts) instead of the city police (in blue uniforms), who are sometimes less than scrupulous. Hospital Magallanes is the best choice should you need emergency medical care. For less serious needs, your hotel may have an on-site doctor. The Costera strip has several pharmacies.

Emergency numbers Tourist Police (☎744/485-0490). **Red Cross** (☎744/445-8178 or 744/445-5911).

Hospitals Hospital del Pacífico (☎Calle Fraile and Calle Nao 4, Costera ☎744/487-7161). **Hospital Privado Magallanes** (☎Calle Wilfrido Massieu 2, Costera ☎744/485-6194).

INTERNET

Contact **iNternet Cyber Café** (☎Calle Horacio Nelson 40-7A, near the Marbella Hotel, Costera ☎744/484-8254). **Hostal K3** (☎Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 116, in front of Fiesta Americana hotel, Playa Condesa ☎744/481-3111). **Vid@Net** (☎Calle Hidalgo off the zócalo, Old Acapulco).

MAIL & SHIPPING

Overnight Services Airborne Express (☎Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 178, Costera ☎744/484-1076). **DHL** (☎Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 810, Fracc. Hornos, Old Acapulco ☎744/485-9567). **Mail Boxes, Etc.** (☎Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 40-3, Costera ☎744/481-0565).

Post Offices Correos (Post Office ☎Av. Costera Miguel Alemán 215, Old Acapulco ☎744/483-1674 ☎Acapulco International Center, Av. Costera Miguel Alemán, Costera ☎744/484-8029).