

Mexico: Protocols for Travelers and Expatriates

Several border cities have suffered an increase in violence over the past year, some of which has been directed against U.S. citizens. Visitors to the U.S.-Mexico border region and northern cities such as Chihuahua City, Ciudad Juarez, Culiacan, Matamoros, Monterrey, Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Tijuana, have experienced a dramatic rise in general and violent drug-related crimes. Authorities have devoted large numbers of troops and resources to deal with the crisis, but these measures have yet to produce significant results. While travelers generally are not targeted by drug cartels they face a high risk from collateral violence and damage due to clashes between rival cartels and cartels against security forces. All tourists are strongly encouraged to remain alert and aware of their surroundings at all times.

Crime is the most serious threat to visitors in Mexico. In urban centers such as Guadalajara, Mexico City, Monterrey and Tijuana, foreigners are prime targets for pickpockets and purse-snatchers during the day and armed robbers at night. Criminal activity is generally less frequent at tourist destinations such as Cabo San Lucas / San Jose del Cabo, Mazatlan, and Puerto Vallarta, but visitors and expatriates should always follow sound security practices and avoid non-tourist downtown areas.

In recent months, other tourist destinations, including Acapulco and Cancun, have encountered a dramatic increase in drug-related violence with no signs of abating. The wave of violence throughout Mexico has been aimed primarily at members of drug-trafficking organizations, criminal justice officials and journalists. While U.S. citizens not involved in criminal activities are generally not targeted, they have been among the victims of homicide and kidnapping in the border region. Innocent bystanders such as foreign visitors and residents are at risk from the increase in violence in the streets of border cities where local police forces have been ineffective in maintaining security. Mexican authorities have failed to prosecute numerous crimes committed against U.S. citizens. Criminals, armed with an impressive array of weapons, know there is little chance they will be caught and punished since local police forces suffer from a lack of funds and training, and the judicial system is weak, overworked, and inefficient. In some cases, assailants have been wearing full or partial police uniforms and have used automobiles that resemble police vehicles, indicating some elements of the police might be involved. Visitors are very vulnerable when visiting the local "red-light districts," particularly if they are departing alone in the early hours of the morning.

In Ciudad Juarez, Monterrey, Nuevo Laredo, and Tijuana, shootings have taken place at busy intersections and at popular restaurants during daylight hours. There has also been a rise in automobile accidents in which municipal police extort money from U.S.-citizen victims. In addition, Mexico now leads Colombia with the highest rate of kidnapping in the world; though foreigners are rarely targeted, short duration 'express' kidnapping of wealthy locals is a problem. Security measures in areas other than the South will remain cursory though counter-terrorism efforts will continue to disrupt travel between Mexico and the U.S.

In recent years, foreign tourists have been assaulted and occasionally killed on beaches, hiking trails, parks, and other isolated locations. Kidnappings occur frequently; most do not involve travelers. However, the Mexican government has recorded the abduction of foreign businessmen in northeastern Mexico, many of them in Nuevo Laredo in the state of Tamaulipas, and Tijuana in the state of Baja California, a destination visited primarily by U.S. travelers.

U.S. citizens are urged to use only those ATMs that are inside banks or upscale hotels to avoid 'express' kidnappings, in which a victim is selected with little or no planning and held for a short period of time (a few hours to a few days) for relatively small sums of money. Avoid public transportation due to the high incidence of violent crime on these modes of transit. Be especially aware of safety and security concerns and exercise commonsense precautions such as visiting only legitimate business and tourist areas of border towns during daylight hours.

For employees that must travel, provide travel advisories and regular updates.

Special Note:

Book business trips through Cox Travel and receive an automatic travel advisory when an international ticket is purchased. Travel advisories, and information on medical care or evacuation services to employees in need, are provided through a special service. Contact Corporate.Security@coxinc.com today for details.

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Travel precautions: Some things expatriates and business travelers should be aware of:

All Americans need to be aware of street crime (i.e. armed robbery, pick-pocketing, purse-snatching, ATM robbery, etc.). In order to prevent it:

- **Avoid business trips if practical.** Ask our customer, business partner, etc. to meet with you in the U.S. instead.
- **Maintain a low profile.** Do not advertise the fact that you are a visitor. Dress casually, keep valuables out of sight, and do not draw attention to yourself.
- **Arrange for cab service through a concierge' or known contact.** Hailing a cab on the street yields travelers with an unknown entity. Look for a municipal cab permit and try to map your route so you can spot any deviations.
- **Vary your routine.** Be unpredictable in your movements; vary your routes from home to the office and your departure and arrival times.
- **Be alert to possible surveillance.** Note and avoid anyone who appears out of place along your routes to regularly scheduled activities, such as going from home to office. Avoid sitting outside at restaurants. Instead, try to find a seat in an area not clearly visible from the street.
- **Be alert to your surroundings.** Be aware of popular scams and robbery tactics used to distract your attention.
- **Reduce the incentive for someone to rob you and minimize the possible loss.** Do not carry valuables or large sums of money.

To Protect Your Person:

- **Do not wear "branded" clothing such as caps, jackets, logoed shirts, or other articles.** While the more iconic logos are more attractive, express kidnappers target business-affiliated travelers most. They know businesses can turn over the average \$30K ransom more readily.
- **Avoid wearing jewelry, and carry a clutch or neck purse instead of a shoulder bag.** Carry your wallet in the front trouser pocket or front jacket pocket.
- **Carry a mobile device that works in the region.** Ensure that you know how to make a phone call in Mexico and are aware of the emergency telephone numbers for that area.
- **Never leave shopping bags or merchandise unattended.** This includes items left in plain view in your car, for even a short period of time.
- **When hiring domestic help, vet them to the greatest extent that you can.** Ensure hired help is trained not to volunteer information to strangers or to allow access of workers without prior authorization.
- **Take normal tourist precautions with food and beverages.** Be careful when drinking water and eating fresh fruits, vegetables, and salads.
- **Exhibit care with medications.** Avoid purchasing prescription medications in Mexico unless you have a prescription from a Mexican doctor.

For additional information or consultation on your international employees and travelers, please contact Corporate Security at Corporate.Security@coxinc.com.

Corporate Security 

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