

Mexican Immigration Procedure by land with a vehicle

By Had Robinson www.southwestairsports.com

TIPS

It is probably safer to travel in Mexico than in any big city in the U.S.

1. BE FRIENDLY! Smile a lot. Say please and thank you. Greet officials in Spanish, not English. Most speak English but are pleasantly surprised if you speak to them in their native language. Mexican officials are not hostile to tourists but will usually help in any way they can. Generally, Mexican culture is much more helpful and friendly than our own. If you think you may need extra service, bring a box of fresh Krispy Crème doughnuts and put them on the desk of the first official you meet, usually a greeter at the port of entry building. They will appreciate this gesture and may excuse a mistake or error on your part. Pay-as-you-go government (a.k.a. bribery) is routine in Mexico (and most of the world). Do not be offended – it is still cheaper than any other way and it is often negotiable. If you are careful to obey the rules, it will not be an issue.
2. It pays to get to the Mexican port of entry early in the morning, preferably when it opens. Officials tend to be more interested in getting everyone processed than for looking for errors and nitpicking tourists about details.
3. If you have an “attitude”, expect trouble and delays, sometimes a day or two. I continue to witness senseless pilots who never get this straight and wonder why they have so much trouble? Go figure....
4. Unlike the U.S., Mexico has separate departments and officials for immigration and customs. Tourists must take care of matters with each respective department before crossing the border.
5. Driving new and fancy vehicles attracts attention. It is safer to take the oldest and dirtiest vehicle you have into Mexico. Generally, you want to blend in per clothes, vehicles, and everything you do. Do NOT take or wear expensive watches, shoes, or jewelry.

6. Plan your trip carefully so that you will stay on the toll roads as much as possible and so you will not have to travel at night. Toll roads are expensive but worth every penny as they are well patrolled and maintained. Toll road service station bathrooms are cleaner than the majority here in the U.S. and are free to use.

7. Going alone into Mexico with a travel trailer is not a good idea unless you have a carefully planned trip and stay ONLY in RV parks or hotels with enclosed parking areas. Thieves are everywhere. You can be assured that if you leave your vehicle and/or trailer anywhere unguarded (even for 5 minutes), it will be broken into. Being accosted while driving on public roads is rare. Do not visit areas of Mexico known for being controlled by the drug cartels. Check with the U. S. State Department concerning this. You would not travel to east St. Louis or south-central L.A. for exactly the same reasons. Mexico and most of the world are no different than here.

8. Bring a spare tire(s), a tow rope, flat tire repair kit, a portable air compressor, a shovel, a can of emergency aerosol tire leak repair, and extra water. If you have vehicle trouble, be sure to get off the road as far as possible so as not to be hit by other vehicles. The police will stop and help you if they can – they care about the safety and comfort of tourists.

9. While you cannot import gasoline into Mexico, it is smart to take a few empty (5) gallon fuel containers and fill them up at your first convenience. All fuel stations are government owned and, like any government enterprise, they can run out of fuel and you will be stranded for an undetermined amount of time. Mexican gasoline is high quality and is available in regular and premium grades. Thankfully, Mexico does not add ethanol to their gasoline. When refueling within 200 miles of the border, you may want to carefully watch your vehicles(s) to prevent anyone attaching contraband to the undersides. It is a rare event but it is good to be cautious.

10. Do not carry any firearm or ammunition into Mexico without a permit. Jail time and/or huge fines are in store if you get caught.

11. DO NOT DRIVE AT NIGHT FOR ANY REASON! Plan accordingly.

Before arriving at the Mexican port of entry

1. Make (2) copies of your vehicle registration(s) including your trailer if you are bringing one, your passport, and your driver license.

2. Get Mexican vehicle insurance. If traveling more than (30) days get a (6) or (12) month policy <https://secure.bajabound.com/index.php>. The cost is about \$8/day for liability only and is less the longer the term. Be careful to declare to the insurance company what you will be driving and include things like camper shells and anything you tow, even a small trailer.
3. Check your cell phone account for sufficient time, if necessary. Disable data use if you want to save money. Unless you have an agreement for international service with your carrier, the best value and service in Mexico is to buy a TelCel SIM for use in compatible and "unlocked" cell phones. Every convenience store in Mexico sells them for under \$20 (they include free minutes). You will have a Mexican cell phone number and much better coverage and service. Roaming cell phones are always at the bottom of the heap if circuits are busy. TelCel does not encourage roaming by foreign cell phone companies. It is what it is.
4. Call the bank that issues your credit card(s) and let them know that you will be using them in Mexico for a particular period.
5. If you have any sort of U.S. government issued card for fast entry into the U.S., bring it along. It will save time crossing at the U.S. border station when you return.

Mexican Immigration

1. Go to "migracion" and get the temporary immigration form "FMM". They will hold your driver's license while you are filling it out. If staying >7 days there is a fee. If <7 days it is free. The tourist visa is ONLY good for one entry and one exit from Mexico. You cannot go back and forth across the border.

Vehicle Importation Permit

Note: This can be done online (7) – (60) days in advance here:

<https://www.banjercito.com.mx/registroVehiculos/>) The permit will be mailed to you.

1. If you have not made copies of your documents, there is a copy center in the port of entry building where you can purchase the necessary copies. In any case, you will still have to make a copy of your FMM visa.

2. Go to the Mexican bank in the port of entry building (Banjercito) and give the teller your documents. The period of the vehicle permit is directly linked to the FMM including the length of time.
3. Sign the TEMPORARY IMPORT PERMIT and VEHICLE RETURN PROMISE AGREEMENT.
4. Pay the import fee (\$51) & deposit with a credit card. The cost of the deposit varies with the year your vehicle was manufactured.
5. Return to immigration with your documents. They will stamp your passport with the temporary visa.
6. Remove and attach the temporary import permit to your windshield directly in front of your rear-view mirror. If you forget to do this, you can get in trouble with the police if you are stopped for any reason while traveling in Mexico.

Mexican Customs

1. Go to "aduana" to get an official to look at what you are taking into Mexico if it is anything out of the ordinary. If you are taking sporting equipment (paraglider, hang glider) be sure to show photos, magazine articles, etc. about it to demonstrate what it is and how it works. Follow the official's instructions whatever they are. Even if you are not taking anything unusual, it is always best to have the official check your stuff anyway. If you are going deep into Mexico, it might pay to register the equipment and pay the fee but this is usually not necessary. They are supposed to let you bring sporting equipment into the country. You may have problems if you do not register your equipment and you have multiple paramotors, gliders, etc.
2. If all is OK with the official, proceed to cross the border. You probably will be stopped right after you go through the gate/light. Another official will ask the same questions so show the photos, magazine article, etc. if you need to. Do not be hostile! It will just make everything worse.

Military Checkpoint at 20km

1. There is now no inspection going south.

Returning to the U.S.

1. Military Checkpoint at 20km – Have the magazines, photos, etc. ready to show the soldier what you were doing and what the equipment is. There should be no problem but they still may want to inspect your vehicle.
2. Mexican Border station – be sure to park your vehicle on the Mexican side. DO NOT CROSS THE BORDER!
 - a. Go to immigration and have the official cancel the visa in your passport.
 - b. Go to the special lane for canceling temporary vehicle importation permits. Give the official your vehicle papers. He will then check your VIN and remove the temporary permit from your windshield. If you do not complete the process here and just cross the border, you will lose your deposit. If you ever attempt to enter Mexico in the future, even with a different vehicle, you will have to pay a fine if you cannot produce the vehicle with the permit intact so that they can officially remove it.
 - c. You may now proceed to the U.S. border station.

Be sure to obey Mexican motor vehicle laws unless you are rich and are ready to pay hefty fines. Do not attempt to bribe Federal police. Local police may stop you and expect you to pay the fine on the spot (+\$20). If you choose not to, they will take your driver license and you will have to appear in a traffic court which can be 100 km away. It could be the same day, in a week, or for multiple times.

Do not drive at night unless you are in large cities that are well lit. It is dangerous because of road hazards (stray animals, road debris, pot holes, etc.) and it also attracts the attention of criminals.