



# Mexico

## Introduction

Official Name: United Mexican States  
Nationality: Mexican  
Area: 1,972,550 square kilometers (761,606 square miles)  
Languages: Spanish, Nahuatl, various Mayan and other regional indigenous languages  
Currency: peso (MXN)  
Location: Central America, bordered by Belize, Guatemala, and the United States with coastline on the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean

## Statistical Information

Population	108.7 million
0-14 years	30.1 percent
15-64 years	64 percent
65+ years	5.9 percent
Birth rate	20 births/1,000
Death rate	5 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	2.4 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	1.153 percent
Life expectancy	75.6 years
Literacy	91 percent
HIV/AIDS rate	0.3 percent
Below poverty line	17.6 percent
Ethnic groups	60 percent mestizo (Amerindian/Spanish) 30 percent Amerindian 9 percent white 1 percent other
Religion	76.5 percent Roman Catholic 6.3 percent Protestant 0.3 percent other 13.8 percent unspecified 3.1 percent nonreligious

## Economy

Mexico has a modern, free-market economy. Its industrial and agricultural sectors contain a mixture of modern and outdated structures. Mexico's per capita income is less than one-fourth that of the United States and income distribution is highly

unequal. The implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 tripled Mexico's trade with the U.S. and Canada. In 2007, the new administration led by Felipe Calderon passed a pension and fiscal reform. Continuing challenges include the need to upgrade infrastructure, modernize labor laws, and open the energy sector to private investment. Calderon has announced that the top economic priorities for his administration will be reducing poverty and unemployment.

## Government

Capital: Mexico City (Distrito Federale)

Mexico is a federal republic. The president is both the chief of state and the head of government. The president is elected by popular vote to a single six-year term. The cabinet is then appointed by the president. The legislature consists of the bicameral National Congress, or Congreso de la Unión. The 128 members of the Senate, or Cámara de Senadores, are elected by popular vote to serve six-year terms, with the exception of 32 members elected on the basis of popular vote within each party. Three-fifths of the 500 members of the Federal Chamber of Deputies, or Cámara Federal de Diputados, are elected by popular vote to serve three-year terms; the remaining 200 are elected on the basis of popular vote within each party.

## Climate

Mexico's climate ranges from humid and tropical to arid desert. High in the mountains which cover much of Mexico's interior, the temperature tends to be much cooler.

## Environmental Concerns

Fresh water sources are scarce and polluted in northern Mexico, and inaccessible or of poor quality in the center and southeast. Raw sewage and industrial wastes pollute rivers in urban areas, and there are high levels of air and soil pollution in the capital and in urban areas along the U.S.-Mexico

border. Mexico does not have the capability to adequately dispose of hazardous waste. In addition, deforestation, desertification, and erosion all contribute to the deterioration of arable land. Large numbers of people moving from rural to urban areas compound the waste-management and pollution problems.

## History

There were a number of great pre-Columbian civilizations in Mexico. The earliest recorded civilization was that of the Olmecs. The Olmecs lived in the tropical coastal plains of the present-day Mexican states of Tabasco and Veracruz between 1300 and 400 B.C. Olmec economy was based on agriculture and fishing. They are renowned for their distinctive sculptures and motifs, as well as platforms and pyramidal mounds. The Olmec civilization is considered the “mother culture” of all Mesoamerican civilization.

Maya culture peaked between 300 and 900 A.D. Mayan civilization was characterized by small city-states, each of which had its own system of rule. Unlike other civilizations of the time, the Maya did not have strong systems of urbanization or occupational differentiation. The Maya did develop a written hieroglyphic language. After 900 A.D., the Mayan population dropped nearly 90 percent due to disease and other causes.

The Toltec civilization flourished after 900 A.D. The Toltecs formed their civilization around a warrior aristocracy. Their polytheistic religion centered around the feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl, and their ceremonies included sun worship, human sacrifice, and a sacred ball game known as *tlatchli*. The Toltec civilization was very advanced; they knew how to smelt metal, and they gained great knowledge in the fields of stoneworking and astronomy. Toltec civilization lasted until the Aztec conquest, when they were incorporated into the Aztec civilization.

The Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico from the north at the end of the 12th century. They were a poor and nomadic tribe, but they adopted cultural elements from nearby states. The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, was founded around 1325 A.D. In their early years in Mexico, the Aztecs managed to maintain their autonomy by paying tribute to neighboring states. During the 15th and 16th centuries, they used a system of alliance, treachery, and conquest to subjugate the nations around them, including the Toltecs. Aztec society was composed of three castes: nobility, priests, and merchants and military. Aztec priests had a great deal of political and religious power. The Aztecs had a large and

powerful army, which they used to conquer neighboring tribes. Most conquered tribes were allowed a degree of autonomy, although they were required to pay tribute to the Aztec government. Prisoners of war were used as human sacrifices to appease the many Aztec gods. Aztec rule was often brutal, and there was unrest among the conquered tribes.

The first Europeans came to Mexico in 1517, under Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, followed by Juan de Grijalva in 1518. In 1519, Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés began the conquest of Mexico. Cortés was able to win allies among many native tribes such as the Tlaxcala, who were tired of despotic Aztec rule. When they first saw the Spanish, the Aztecs thought they were descendants of the god Quetzalcoatl, and offered them many gifts to persuade them to leave. When this failed, the Aztec king Montezuma invited the Spanish to his court at Tenochtitlán in November of 1519. Cortés took Montezuma hostage and attempted to rule the Aztec kingdom through him. The Aztecs revolted, but Cortés executed Montezuma.

Montezuma’s brother, Cuauhtémoc, was the last of the Aztec kings. He expelled Cortés from Tenochtitlán after his brother’s death and attempted to unite the native city-states against the Spanish. When Tenochtitlán fell in 1521 after a three-month siege, Cuauhtémoc was taken prisoner and the city was destroyed. Cortés took Cuauhtémoc on his march to Honduras, and then hanged him for treason in 1525.

In 1535, Antonio de Mendoza was appointed viceroy of New Spain, or colonial Mexico. He worked to develop agriculture and industry, encouraged education, and took steps to alleviate the suffering of the native people. He put down numerous native rebellions, most notably the Mixtón War in 1541, when natives in western Mexico rebelled against Spanish rule.

Juan de Zumárraga, a close friend of Mendoza, became the first bishop of Mexico and was officially made protector of the indigenous peoples. He worked hard to convert the natives to Spanish culture and Roman Catholicism, and fought against the lingering practice of human sacrifice. In his zeal to convert the indigenous peoples, he destroyed many valuable ancient native manuscripts and remains.

The Spanish minority succeeded in holding power over the native population. Three distinct tiers of society arose: Spanish, native peoples, and mestizos, people of mixed Spanish and native ancestry. Although some viceroys worked to improve the

living conditions of the indigenous peoples, the rift between the rich Spanish landowning class and the poor indigenous laboring class grew larger. Adding to the tension between rich and poor was the growth of the underprivileged mestizo class and increasing antagonism between Spaniards born in Spain (*gachupines*) and those born in the Americas (*criollos*).

As discontent with Spanish rule grew, Mexicans were influenced by the American and French Revolutions. When Spain was occupied in 1808 by Napoleon Bonaparte, who placed his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, on the Spanish throne, revolt erupted in Mexico. The priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla began distributing the "Grito de Dolores," a revolutionary tract which called for racial equality and equal distribution of land. Armies of natives and mestizos were formed, commanded by Ignacio Allende, José María Morelos y Pavón, Vicente Guerrero, and Mariano Matamoros.

The rebels initially succeeded until their crushing defeat at the battle of Calderón Bridge in 1811. By 1815, Morelos and Matamoros had been defeated, and Guerrero had retreated into the wilderness.

Liberals gained power in Spain in 1820, and conservatives in Mexico began to look to independence as a way to avoid liberal reforms. Agustín de Iturbide called for an independent monarchy, equality between Spanish- and American-born Spaniards, and a powerful Catholic Church. Spain accepted Mexico's independence in September of 1821. Iturbide became independent Mexico's first king.

In 1823, revolutionaries Santa Anna and Guadalupe Victoria dethroned Iturbide. They set up a republic with Victoria as its president. In 1832, Santa Anna became president. He was captured during the Texas Revolution in 1836, but returned to power in 1841. Waste, corruption, and inefficiency were hallmarks of Santa Anna's government.

In 1846, conflicts in Texas led to a war with the United States. As a result of the Mexican War, Mexico lost a large block of territory in the American Southwest to the United States. Santa Anna set himself up as a perpetual dictator after the war.

In 1855, Santa Anna was ousted in a revolution, and reformers gained control of the government. Benito Juárez, an important figure in the reform movement, attacked the privileges of the clergy and army. He drafted the liberal constitution of 1857, which reduced the privileges of the army and repossessed land held by the church.

Conservatives fought the reforms, and civil war ensued. Juárez and the liberals won the War of the Reform (1858-1861); Juárez ruled Mexico until 1876, but could not establish reforms because of political disturbances.

Porfirio Díaz led a successful revolt in 1876, replacing Juárez as Mexico's president. Under Díaz, Mexico's economy grew, but social inequality became more sharply defined as the indigenous masses grew poorer.

Francisco Madero began a revolt in 1910 after Díaz again sought reelection. Díaz resigned in 1911, and Madero was installed as president. Madero proved a very ineffective leader, and was overthrown and murdered by his general, Victoriano Huerta, in 1913. Huerta's regime was dictatorial and repressive, and revolts broke out. In 1914, Huerta resigned, partially due to U.S. military intervention.

Beginning in 1920, some land reforms were enacted and numerous schools were opened. The church was heavily persecuted by President Plutarco Calles, and from 1926 to 1929, most churches and church schools in Mexico were closed. Catholic peasants revolted under the rallying cry "¡Viva Cristo Rey!", or "Long live Christ the King!"

In 1929, Calles organized the National Revolutionary Party, whose main platform was socioeconomic reform. Renamed the Mexican Revolutionary Party in 1938, and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI) in 1946, the party would control Mexican politics until 2000.

In 1942, Mexico entered World War II, declaring war on the Axis powers. Relations with the United States improved, and Mexico received considerable amounts of U.S. economic aid.

Since World War II, Mexico's economy has developed, but most of the increased wealth goes to the upper and middle classes. In the '50s and '60s, the government took steps to improve the situation of the lower classes. It redistributed several large estates, increased educational opportunities in some rural areas, and made some reforms to the tax structure.

In 1980, oil prices dropped and Mexico's economy became severely strained, since it had borrowed from other nations on the value of its oil reserves. Unemployment and inflation rose sharply, and private and foreign investment slowed. Rural Mexicans began flooding into Mexican cities and

across the U.S.-Mexico border. The government worked at economic reform, encouraged investment, tried to eradicate corruption, and worked toward increased trade with the U.S. Relations between the U.S. and Mexico remained strained because of the heavy flow of illegal immigrants and drugs across the border.

Mexico's economy improved in 1992 after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed. However, an uprising of ethnic Mayans in the state of Chiapas in 1994 highlighted the poverty in which the majority of Mexicans still lived. During the course of negotiations in early 1996, the government agreed to limited autonomy for Indians, but did not enact reforms until 2001.

In the 2000 elections, the conservative National Action Party (PAN) won the presidency, marking the first time in 70 years that the PRI did not control the government. The new president, Vicente Fox Quesada, immediately sought to defuse the conflict in Chiapas. He also sought close relations with the United States, hoping to obtain the passage of a less restrictive immigration policy which would benefit Mexicans living in the United States.

In 2005, the issue of illegal immigration grew serious. American anti-immigration patrols formed along the Mexican-American border, and the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill calling for 700 miles of new border fencing with security cameras. Mexicans were outraged, and President Fox denounced the bill, but it was passed by the United States Congress and signed into effect by U.S. President Bush near the end of 2006.

In the 2006 presidential elections, Felipe Calderón won by less than 0.6 percent of the popular vote. The opposition candidate accused him of election fraud, but U.N. observers claimed they found nothing irregular about the election. Since taking office in December of 2006, Calderón has vigorously fought organized crime and drug cartels, using federal forces to combat crime- and drug-related violence.

### **Ethnic Groups**

Around 60 percent of Mexicans are of mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry. According to the Spanish colonial caste system, one Spanish and one Amerindian parent produce a mestizo child. Two mestizo parents also produce a mestizo child. The term mestizo today refers to anyone who has both European and Amerindian ancestry. Nearly all mestizos speak Spanish, and some speak a native language such as Nahuatl.

Indigenous peoples make up from 12 percent (pure Amerindian) to 30 percent (mostly Amerindian) of Mexico's population, and are allowed self-determination in certain areas. Indigenous languages are considered national languages and are protected by law; Mexico recognizes 62 separate indigenous languages. The largest indigenous group, the Nahuas, descended from the Aztecs. There are more than 1.5 million native speakers of Nahuatl. Other large indigenous groups in Mexico include Mayas, Zapotecas, Mixtecos, and Otomís.

Some Mexicans are European descendents of the first Spanish settlers. Other Mexican citizens have German, French, Italian, Irish, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, or British ancestry. There are an estimated one million American citizens in Mexico, constituting 25 percent of all U.S. citizens abroad.

### **Religion**

Mexico has the second-largest percentage of Roman Catholics in the world, second only to Brazil. Over three-quarters of Mexicans profess to be Catholic, although the number of those who regularly attend mass is significantly lower. Christmas is a national Mexican holiday, and every Mexican school, public and private, takes a vacation during Easter. Most indigenous peoples are Catholic, but some practice Catholicism syncretized with elements of their native religions.

Another six to seven percent of Mexicans are Protestants; most Mexican Protestants belong to a Pentecostal church. There are around 45,000 practicing Jews in Mexico, along with small expatriate communities of Arab or Turkish Muslims.

### **Culture**

Food—Corn, hot peppers, and beans are the staples of all Mexican cuisine. Corn is consumed in a wide variety of ways: as a cooked or roasted corncob called an *elote*, as cooked grains of corn, as porridge known as *atole*, as wrapped and steamed dough with filling, called *tamal*, or as a flat, thin tortilla. Tortillas are made from corn dough and can come in any size. They are often filled with meat or other fillings and called tacos or quesadillas. Mexican cuisine uses over 100 different types of chili peppers, which range from the sweet chile ancho to the fiery chile habanero. The most important meal of the day is lunch, or *comida*, served between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. Comida is usually a four-course meal, including soup, rice or pasta, meat with tortillas and refried beans, and dessert. Mexicans eat dinner between 8:00 and 10:00 in the evening. It is very common for

Mexicans to eat outdoors. Soft drinks and beer are very popular in Mexico, although tequila, made from the maguey cactus, is the national drink.

**Social status**—Mexico's distribution of wealth is very unequal. Poverty is widespread, and the smallest communities tend to be the poorest. Ethnicity is related to socioeconomic status. The wealthiest segments of the Mexican population are dominated by whites and others of European ancestry, while indigenous peoples are usually among the poorest of Mexicans. Wealthy Mexicans live in gated communities patrolled by armed guards. To show wealth, Mexicans dress elegantly and wear expensive jewelry. Sandals are associated with poverty and Amerindians. Another important marker of social status is the use of public facilities. Wealthy people send their children to private schools, use private transportation, and go to private hospitals and clubs, while lower-class Mexicans must use crowded public facilities.

**Gender roles**—Women play crucial roles in the family, but the man is seen as the head of the household. Men ensure the family's physical well-being, while women are seen as the caretakers of morality. The image of the "ideal" Mexican woman is the *abnegada*—submissive, self-sacrificing, and virtuous. The key concept defining traditional Mexican masculinity is *machismo*, associated with assertiveness, power, aggressiveness, and sometimes violence.

**Marriage**—Mexicans are free to choose their own marriage partners, but there are often social rules regarding marriage, mostly related to class and ethnicity. Often, economic security and upward social mobility are factors in choosing a marriage partner. A period of formal engagement may last for several years before the marriage takes place. A Mexican marriage consists of both a civil and religious ceremony. Afterwards, the new couple holds a huge party for family and friends. Divorce is legally possible, but social stigmas against divorce are strong.

**Quinceñera**—The *quinceñera*, or *fiesta de quince años*, is an important ceremony for a Mexican girl on her fifteenth birthday. The ceremony marks the transition from girl to *señorita*, or young woman. It also indicates that the young woman is now available for marriage. Part of the quinceñera ceremony is a Catholic mass that stresses the importance of purity before marriage. After the ceremony, the family throws a large party for the young woman.

**Education**—At age four, Mexican children are required by law to attend kindergarten for two years. After kindergarten, six years of primary school are compulsory. Families choose between public and private schools; public schools tend to emphasize civic values and secular education, while private schools usually emphasize religious values. Children in both public and private schools wear uniforms. Despite legal requirements, many impoverished Mexican children do not finish primary school. Higher education is considered the way to improve one's economic and social status. Mexico has both public and private universities.

**Etiquette**—Mexicans generally shake hands when they meet. Two women or a woman and a man may kiss each other once on the cheek in greeting. Mexican etiquette is heavily influenced by the culture of social hierarchies. When people of different social status meet, the person with the socially inferior status will defer to the person of socially superior status. Academic and professional titles are commonly used when greeting a person of higher status. People of lower status will nearly always address a social superior with the formal *usted* form of "you," while those of higher status will use the informal *tú*. Mexicans value the art of speaking indirectly, especially politicians and other public speakers.

### **Dress**

Urban Mexicans dress in American and European fashions. Jeans, T-shirts, and tennis shoes are common among young urban Mexicans. In rural Mexico, it is much more common to see people wearing more traditional clothing. Traditional mestizo Mexican clothing uses many earth-tone colors, such as dark reds and browns. Vivid greens and yellows are also common. A typical traditional Mexican outfit for an indigenous woman consists of a *huipil*, or tunic-like shirt, and a skirt. Women might also wear a *quechquémitl*, or cape, or a *rebozo*, a woven shawl. Both the trousers and shirt of traditional Mexican men's clothing are European-style. The distinguishing element is the *sarape*, or blanket cape. Men often wear boots. Traditional indigenous clothing varies with each tribe.

### **Travel/Transportation**

Public transportation vehicles, especially taxis and city buses, often ignore traffic regulations such as speed limits and red lights. Do not drive on highways at night. Even multilane highways have narrow lanes and steep shoulders, and single-vehicle rollover accidents are common. Always wear seatbelts, and be

very careful when passing large trucks, approaching cities, or navigating curves in the highway.

Traffic in Mexico City is strictly regulated to cut down on air pollution. Regulation is based on the last digit of a vehicle's license plate, and applies to all domestic, foreign, and temporary plates. For more information on Mexico City's traffic regulations, see [www.hoynocircula.com.mx](http://www.hoynocircula.com.mx). This site is in Spanish.

Vehicles may be brought into Mexico via the U.S.-Mexico border, but the owner of the car must either be driving or inside the vehicle. If the owner is not present, the car will be seized by Mexican customs and will not be returned under any circumstances.

American driver's licenses are valid in Mexico; it is not necessary to obtain an IDP. Mexican law requires that all vehicles have Mexican auto insurance, which can be purchased in most cities and towns on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Foreign auto insurance is not valid in Mexico. Auto insurance is considered invalid if the driver is found to be under the influence of alcohol.

Anyone involved in an automobile accident in Mexico will most likely be taken into police custody until issues of liability and payment are settled. Jail time is common until all parties involved are satisfied that responsibility has been properly assigned and financial restitution has been made.

### **Illness/Injury**

Major cities have adequate health care facilities, although the training and availability of emergency responders may be below American standards. Standards of health care and medical ethics vary in Mexican resorts. Some medical procedures may be less expensive in Mexico than elsewhere, but it is possible these facilities have insufficient access to emergency care if something should go wrong. Consult the U.S. Embassy website ([mexico.usembassy.gov](http://mexico.usembassy.gov)) for information on doctors and hospitals in Mexico City.

### **Crime**

Mexico has high levels of violent crime, especially in Mexico City, Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo, Monterrey, Acapulco, and the state of Sinaloa. Other urban areas have lower, but still very high, rates of crime. Mexico has very low apprehension and conviction rates, which contributes to the high levels of crime. Foreign victims of crime in Mexico should report it to both the Mexican police and their own consulate.

Valuables should always be kept in a secure place, or not taken into Mexico at all. Avoid wearing clothing

or jewelry that is flashy or obviously expensive, and do not carry large amounts of cash. Pickpocketing, purse-snatching, and hotel-room theft are all very common in Mexican cities. Do not leave valuables, passports, or other identification in vehicles, even if locked.

Avoid traveling alone. Lone foreigners are vulnerable to assault and robbery, and criminals will steal credit or bank cards. Use ATMs only during the day, and preferably only machines that are within a large establishment. Avoid street ATMS inside glass enclosures, as people are sometimes accosted on the street and forced to withdraw money from their accounts using their ATM card.

Kidnappings occur frequently. "Express kidnappings," or attempts to obtain quick cash in exchange for an individual's release, occur in all major Mexican cities. Criminals target not only the wealthy, but also the middle class.

Visitors should be very careful on Mexican highways, as highway assaults occur throughout the country. Toll highways, or *cuota*, are safer than free (*libre*) highways. Keep car doors locked and windows rolled up when driving.

Armed street crime is a problem in all major Mexican cities. Bars and nightclubs are especially dangerous, since they are havens for drug dealers and criminals. Travelers have been drugged and then robbed in red-light districts.

If using public transportation, ride only first-class buses, which use the toll highways. Armed robberies of entire busloads of passengers occur on buses which use the free highways. Buses traveling from Acapulco to Ixtapa or Huatulco have especially high rates of robberies.

Travelers have reported instances of extortion or harassment by Mexican police and officials. In the event of a problem with the police, ask for identification. Keep a record of the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number.

Prison conditions in Mexico are extremely poor. Prisoners must pay for food with their own funds, and food quality and quantity is often very scant. Most Mexican prisons provide very little in the way of medical care, even in emergency cases. Other prisoners often extort "protection money" from foreign prisoners. Mexican police regularly use torture to obtain information and confessions, and this information is used in court even though torture is banned by Mexican law. Many foreign prisoners

have been beaten and mistreated while detained in Mexican prisons.

### **Safety and Security**

Politically motivated violence occurs sporadically, mainly in the southern states of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. By Mexican law, foreigners are prohibited from involvement in any political activities, including demonstrations. Visitors to Mexico should take care to avoid any areas where demonstrations appear to be taking place, since Mexican officials may detain or deport any foreigner they feel is involved with political activity.

The state of Chiapas is particularly dangerous, since armed rebel and civilian groups operate in various regions of the state. There is no effective law enforcement. Violent criminal gangs operate along the state's southern border and mostly target illegal migrants.

### **Entry/Exit Requirements**

A valid passport is required to enter Mexico. American tourists do not need a visa for a stay of 72 hours or less within the border zone (within 20 to 30 kilometers of the border with the U.S.). Tourists traveling beyond the border zone must pay a fee for a tourist card. Travelers who enter Mexico for purposes other than tourism or business or who plan to stay longer than 180 days must have a valid Mexican visa in addition to a passport. For more information on Mexican visas, contact the Embassy of Mexico at 1911 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20006.

According to Mexican law, any non-Mexican under the age of 18 must have notarized, written permission from any parent or guardian not present in order to leave the country. The child must carry the original letter as well as proof of the parent/child relationship such as a birth certificate.

### **Immunizations**

Malaria is not a risk in urban areas of Mexico. The only travelers at risk for contracting malaria are those traveling to certain remote areas of the country. Contact a travel health professional to determine if antimalarial drugs are necessary. The drug chloroquine should be used as an antimalarial drug for Mexico.

Vaccination for hepatitis A is recommended for all travelers to Mexico. Foreigners planning to spend time in rural areas should consider receiving a typhoid vaccine.

Travelers may contract parasitic diseases, such as roundworms, E. coli, or giardia, from eating

undercooked fish or poultry or from consuming contaminated water.

### **Special Circumstances**

Tap water is unsafe to drink in most areas of Mexico. Bottled water and other packaged drinks are safe. Ice is often made with tap water, and is best avoided. Hotels and restaurants generally serve tap water unless bottled water is specifically requested.

Mexican customs regulations are fairly strict. Tourists are allowed to bring their personal effects into the country duty-free. Travelers with items such as cameras, cell phones, film, personal computers, CD players, or CDs and DVDs should enter the "Merchandise to Declare" lane and be prepared to pay any duty fee assessed by customs officials. Failure to declare such items frequently results in confiscation of the items and seizure of the vehicle in which the items were traveling for attempted smuggling.

Foreigners entering Mexico with goods intended for donation must follow Mexican customs regulations, which prohibit the import of used clothing, textiles, and other goods. It is a good idea to hire a customs broker in the U.S. or Canada who is familiar with Mexican customs regulations to ensure proper documentation and compliance with regulations. Mexican officials will confiscate goods or assess a large fine if donations do not follow regulations. The website of the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros ([matamoros.usconsulate.gov](http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov)) lists common items that may not be brought into Mexico.

There are many risks involved with purchasing real estate in Mexico. Mexican real estate laws and practices differ significantly from American ones. Foreigners involved in property disputes with Mexican citizens may not be treated fairly by Mexican courts. In addition, Mexican law recognizes squatter's rights, and homeowners may spend thousands of dollars and years of litigation attempting to evict squatters from their property.

### **Electricity**

Mexico uses 127V/60Hz power, with types A and B plugs. American appliances may be used in Mexico without a power converter or adapter plugs.