



## INSIDER'S GUIDE TO MEXICO

By thinking a little about your holiday destination before you travel, and taking some simple steps when you are there, you can gain so much more from your holiday. You will also be making a positive contribution to the people and the places you visit.

### MEXICO

Mexico has a diverse indigenous population, comprising many different ethnic groups with a wide variety of languages and customs. The most recent survey\* of international visitors to Mexico showed that 80% spend their holidays in and around a beach resort. Cancun, the major seaside resort, is geared up to accommodate the habits of American and European visitors. But elsewhere in the country, you should be prepared for very different ways of life.

\*2005 survey

#### – RESPECT THE RIGHTS, FEELINGS AND PRIVACY OF MEXICANS

When you visit local communities let your behaviour be guided by the people you meet there. Some indigenous communities resent being visited by tour groups led by outsiders especially – as is often the case – when they receive no direct benefit from these visits. Take advice from your guide or, if possible, the community's leaders.

Respect the privacy of the local people and always ask permission before you enter anyone's home or a local community building.

#### – BE OPEN TO ACCEPTING HOSPITALITY BUT BE PREPARED TO RECIPROCATE

It is wise to be wary of possible rip-off schemes masquerading as hospitality. However visitors can find many examples of genuine hospitality offered to adventurous travellers. Mexicans report how disappointed they become when hospitality is quickly forgotten. If you do make meaningful connections with local people, honour any promises you make to keep in touch and /or send them copies of your photographs.

#### – ASK FOR PERMISSION BEFORE PHOTOGRAPHING LOCAL PEOPLE

Do not photograph people without their permission. The indigenous groups are diverse and some find being photographed without permission offensive.

#### – ENJOY SOME LIFE OUTSIDE THE ALL-INCLUSIVE HOTELS

If your holiday is 'all-inclusive', take some time to eat and drink outside your hotel. Understandably, many holidaymakers eat and drink only in their all-inclusive resorts, very little money goes back into the local economy. Eating and drinking outside your hotel can be an enjoyable way to learn something about the country as well as helping local people and the country's economy gain some benefit from tourism.

#### – TRY THE LOCAL DISHES

Try eating local foods. Although fast food and western-style outlets are on the increase in indigenous areas, be aware that they do not always open with the approval of the local communities. In Oaxaca, for example, a MacDonald's was built in front of the cathedral in spite of local opposition. It opened because the authorities believed that tourists would need this type of food. Trying local food can enhance your holiday experience – as well as help disprove the theory that tourists are only prepared to visit places that have fast food outlets.

#### – BE FAIR WITH YOUR BARGAINING.

Agree a fair final price when you bargain. Consider the time and effort that has been spent in making intricate craftwork. Bargaining should be seen as an opportunity to build a social relationship between seller and buyer, not simply as a competitive economic exchange. Sometimes locals are driven by sheer poverty to accept an unreasonably low price for a traditional handmade item.

#### – SEEK OUT FAIRLY TRADED LOCAL PRODUCTS

In many regions you can find fairly traded local products to buy. Buying them when you are visiting Mexico not only supports the local workers and their families, it also helps create a domestic market for these goods. The majority of fairly traded products are currently exported.

#### – DO NOT REMOVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RELICS

It is illegal to collect and export archaeological relics. When you are travelling around the country, take local advice about which ancient sites and ruins you should visit. Some are considered sacred by the local indigenous people who do not wish outsiders to visit.



**– HELP SUPPORT THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

There are still traditional crafts and local products that make unique gifts and souvenirs. Buying them supports and preserves the traditional lifestyles of rural communities.

**– DON'T ENCOURAGE CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

Be aware that some animal welfare organizations caution against visiting certain animal parks due to their alleged mistreatment of the animals. If you want to find out more about these issues before you go, please refer to the websites below or ask your resort rep for advice once you arrive.

**– DON'T BUY WILDLIFE PRODUCTS**

You may be offered souvenirs that originate from endangered species – even though selling them is illegal, and your purchases may be confiscated. Don't accept sea turtle products, black coral, seashells, exotic plants or butterflies. If in doubt, don't buy any animal or plant souvenirs at all.

**– BE TOLERANT OF ELECTRICITY RESTRICTIONS**

In some regions, electricity is restricted to a few hours a day. Be tolerant. Expecting round-the-clock electricity supplies, hot water and even western food in places where residents do not have such services will distance you from the people and the culture you have come to visit.

**– HELP PRESERVE THE CORAL**

Mexico's coral reefs are beautiful but fragile. When snorkeling or diving on the reefs, refrain from walking on, or touching, or removing coral. If you take a trip in a glass bottomed boat, don't accept invitations to walk on the reef.

**– TAKE AS LITTLE EXCESS PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE**

Mexico's waste disposal methods, especially in rural areas, are not always very sophisticated. The more plastic, polystyrene etc you import, the more strain you put on the land's resources. Before you leave home, remove any unnecessary external packaging from anything you're taking with you.

**FOR MORE INSIDER KNOWLEDGE**

<http://www.visitmexico.com>

Official site of the Mexico Tourist Board

[www.tourismrights.org](http://www.tourismrights.org)

For information about Indigenous Tourism Rights International

[www.wdcs.org](http://www.wdcs.org)

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society