



Mexico 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Mexico City



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. OSAC encourages travelers to [use this report](#) to gain baseline knowledge of security conditions in the Embassy's consular district, which comprises Mexico City, the southern tip of Tamaulipas State and the following 13 states: Chiapas, México, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz. For information regarding the security environment elsewhere in Mexico, review OSAC's Crime & Safety Reports for [Ciudad Juarez](#), [Guadalajara](#), [Hermosillo](#), [Matamoros](#), [Mérida](#) (including Cancun and the Riviera Maya), [Monterrey](#), [Nogales](#), [Nuevo Laredo](#), or [Tijuana](#). For more in-depth information, review OSAC's [Mexico country page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Mexico at Level 2, indicating travelers should exercise increased caution due to crime and kidnapping. The State Department assesses some Mexican states at higher Travel Advisory levels. Do Not Travel to the States of Colima, Guerrero, Michoacán, Sinaloa due to crime; or to the State of Tamaulipas due to crime and kidnapping. Reconsider Travel to the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Jalisco, Mexico, Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo Leon, San Lui Potosi, Sonora, and Zacatecas due to crime. Review OSAC's report, [Understanding the Consular Travel Advisory System](#).

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Mexico City as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. The general crime rate in Mexico City is above the U.S. national average, and varies widely.

The low rate of criminal convictions contributes to the high rate of crime. Although there is no pattern of criminals specifically targeting foreign or U.S. businesses/personnel, criminals will target victims based on an appearance of prosperity, vulnerability, or a lack of awareness. Armed robbery, kidnapping, car theft, credit card fraud, and various forms of residential/street crime are daily concerns. Criminals can easily resell jewelry (including expensive watches) and cellular phones in illegal markets. Although Mexico has strict gun-control laws, criminals often carry handguns or knives. Review OSAC's report, [All That You Should Leave Behind](#).

Be careful of cash transactions on the street. A hurried transaction for merchandise often leaves the customer with shoddy or counterfeit goods, out-of-circulation valueless currency, or incorrect change. Many shops and vendors readily accept U.S. dollars at their own exchange rate.



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Organized criminal gangs continue to cause significant levels of violence throughout parts of the country. Mexico is experiencing a combination of conditions that collectively degrade the security environment in certain areas. The government has captured some of its most wanted criminals. Consequently, organized criminal groups are becoming much less organized and disciplined. The northern half of Mexico had been a higher-threat area, primarily due to organized criminal conflicts and competition for drug trafficking routes to the U.S. However, recent statistics show that violence is on the rise in central and southern states as well.

Various groups have splintered into smaller gangs, which have branched out into different illegal business activities, and associated violence is spreading across Mexico. One common practice is for gangs to charge protection fees or add their own tax to products/services, with the threat of violence for those who fail to pay. Extortionists have targeted foreign and U.S. companies, attacking some for not responding to demands. Some criminal groups will mandate that individuals or even whole communities work for them as lookouts or couriers. Others will threaten municipal and state administrators into accepting corrupt practices. Beheadings, lynching, torture, and other gruesome displays of violence, as well as high numbers of forced disappearances, have become routine occurrences in some locations. Criminals have killed numerous journalists and bloggers for reporting on these incidents. Regarding cartel violence, wrong-place/wrong-time incidents present the greatest threat to personal safety. The best ways to reduce the risk is to practice good personal security habits, especially maintaining high situational awareness and promptly departing from potentially dangerous situations.

Credit card security remains a concern, especially in the tourist areas of Quintana Roo. There have been reports of criminal use of credit cards. There are numerous reports in which criminals skimmed U.S. credit/debit card numbers, stealing the money in their debit accounts or fraudulently charging their credit cards. Skimming is the theft of credit card information by an employee of a legitimate merchant or bank, manually copying down numbers or using a magnetic stripe reader or using a camera and skimmer installed in an ATM. In addition to skimming, the risk of physical theft of credit or debit cards also exists; criminals may also acquire card data manually when cards are handed to or left momentarily with employees of businesses. Try to use ATMs in bank branches during business hours. Mexican establishments accept U.S. dollars widely. Portable credit card terminals are widely available in Mexico; always request the establishment bring a portable credit card terminal to charge a credit card in your physical presence. Review OSAC's reports, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#) and [Taking Credit](#).

Cybersecurity Issues

Social engineering of data for scams, kidnapping, and extortion schemes is a cybersecurity issue in the region. Police indicate that in most kidnapping and extortion cases, the victims were targets because of the large amount of personal information available on social media accounts. Mexican citizens are usually the targets of this type of cybercrime, but tourists are not immune to criminal exploitation based on their social media activities.

Review OSAC's reports, [Cybersecurity Basics](#), [Best Practices for Maximizing Security on Public Wi-Fi](#), [Traveling with Mobile Devices: Trends & Best Practices](#), and [Satellite Phones: Critical or Contraband?](#)



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Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Driving in Mexico requires vigilance. Drivers are not uniformly experienced, and often drive cars in disrepair. Be alert for vehicles moving slower than the rest of the traffic flow, and for vehicles speeding through traffic signals at the last minute. Give a wide berth to public buses and trucks.

Minor steering mistakes that drivers can normally correct on a road with wide and level shoulders often cannot be corrected easily, causing drivers to lose control of their vehicles. Many vehicles drive with defective or inoperable lights at night. Signage and traffic lights are improving, but are not always clear. Road damage is not always quickly repaired, leaving potholes that can damage your car or cause drivers to swerve or brake unexpectedly.

Motor vehicle accidents are a leading cause of U.S. citizen deaths in Mexico. If you have an emergency while driving, dial **911**. On a *cuota* or any other major highway, contact the [Green Angels](#), a fleet of trucks with bilingual crews, by dialing **078**.

A variety of road conditions exists throughout the region. Toll (*cuota*) highways are comparable to U.S. interstate highway standards with multiple traffic lanes and broad paved shoulders. The *cuotas* generally have better lighting, frequent police patrols, fewer access points (on/off-ramps), and are generally a safer method of overland transit, but their isolation leaves travelers vulnerable to crime, especially at night. Speed, nighttime travel, weather (especially the summer rainy season), unfamiliarity with the road, lack of lighting, and other elements are contributing factors to serious traffic accidents and incidents on highways. Drivers can reduce the risk of carjacking by limiting intercity travel to daylight hours.

Non-toll (*libre*) highways are usually in poorer condition. They are usually two-lane roads with no shoulder. There are more reported incidents of carjacking and shootouts between rival criminal groups, particularly after dark, on the *libre* highways.

Plan routes ahead of travel, and notify family/friends of your itinerary. Keep a charged cell phone with you and know how to reach friends and family in an emergency. Ensure vehicles are roadworthy and maintain a full-size spare tire in case of a flat.

Road conditions in urban areas can also vary considerably. In upscale or tourist neighborhoods of major cities, the roads are in good condition, whereas roads are often in poor condition in marginalized areas. There are large speed bumps installed around major cities, including on some highways, that often lack appropriate markings. Drivers should be alert for changing road conditions. Drivers routinely disobey even the most fundamental traffic laws and commonly treat red lights like stop signs, crossing as soon as they have checked for opposing traffic.



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Drivers on roads and highways may encounter government checkpoints, which often include a military staff. The government has deployed National Guard and military personnel to combat organized criminal groups. Police also set up various administrative checkpoints in and around cities (speed control, sobriety checkpoints) and along the highways (vehicle registration checkpoints). However, criminal organizations sometimes erect their own unauthorized checkpoints and have killed/abducted motorists who fail to stop and/or pay a “toll.” Likewise, self-defense groups have established checkpoints in their communities and have shot and wounded travelers who fail to stop. When approaching a checkpoint, regardless of whether it is official, cooperate and avoid any actions that may appear suspicious or aggressive.

U.S. driver’s licenses are valid in Mexico. Mexican law requires that only owners drive their vehicles or that the owner be inside the vehicle. Failing to abide by this law may lead to impoundment and a fine equal to the value of the vehicle. Mexican citizens who are not also U.S. Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) or U.S. citizens may not operate U.S.-registered vehicles in Mexico. Mexican insurance is mandatory for all vehicles, including rental vehicles; insurance associated with U.S. credit cards is insufficient. Maintain Mexican liability insurance in the event of a vehicle accident. Driving under the influence of alcohol, using a mobile device while driving, and driving through a yellow light are all illegal in Mexico.

It is common for strangers to approach vehicles asking for directions or change, handing out flyers, washing windows, or selling goods. Be alert, lock doors, and keep windows up far enough in case they are not well intentioned. When stopped in traffic, leave adequate distance between vehicles to escape. Do not stop to assist strangers whose vehicles appear broken down.

Park inside a residential or hotel compound, in a parking lot with an attendant, or at least within view of the location of your visit. When parking in the lot of a shopping facility, park as close as possible to the store entrance and away from dumpsters, bushes, or large vehicles.

Review OSAC’s reports, [Road Safety Abroad](#), [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#), and [Evasive Driving Techniques](#); and read the State Department’s webpage on [driving and road safety abroad](#).

Check with your U.S. auto insurance provider regarding international coverage. Driving requires local liability insurance, which, in some cases, you must purchase separately from a Mexican insurance provider or through a rental car company.

Public Transportation Conditions

Local commercial and municipal buses and taxis are readily available in most cities. Drivers can be untrained and do not always follow the rules of the road. Vehicles may be poorly maintained or in disrepair. Accidents are common. First-class commercial bus service between major cities and tourist areas exists. In Mexico City, municipal buses and the Metro (subway) are generally safe to use. City buses and the Metro may be crowded. Passengers should be on the alert for pickpockets and other thieves, especially on the most crowded, busiest routes during rush hour. Avoid non-municipal buses (*micros*).



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Visitors should travel by intercity bus only during daylight hours, and only by first-class conveyance whenever possible. Although there have been several reports of bus hijackings and robberies on toll roads, buses on toll roads have experienced a lower rate of incidents than second- and third-class buses that travel on less secure, *libre* highways. There have been occasional reports of significant security incidents (apart from theft) on tourist buses in/around Mexico City and to nearby tourist destinations.

The Embassy does not recommend using *libre* taxis, those that pick up fares on the street after customers hail them; they may have criminal links. *Sitio* (radio-dispatched) taxis are far safer, more reliable, and worth the added expense. Patrons cannot hail these types of taxis from the street; they must order them by phone or meet at a designated taxi stand. *Sitio* taxis in Mexico City most often have meters and government registrations. In addition, the Embassy recommends that government employees use ride-sharing apps that allow consumers to verify the driver and vehicle number. Note that not all platforms operate in all areas.

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The Consulate advises that its employees fly, rather than drive, between many Mexican destinations.

Airports are generally secure and well policed. *Sitio* taxis are usually available from a kiosk in the arrival terminal of the airport and require travelers to prepay fares at the kiosk before exiting the airport and boarding a taxi. Patrons pay in advance for regulated *sitio* taxis from Benito Juarez International Airport (MEX) in the terminal (at the *sitio* stands).

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Government of Mexico's Civil Aviation Authority as compliant with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of Mexico's air carrier operations.

Be prepared for U.S.-styled security screening and unpredictable wait times and travel delays from all airports in the region.

Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed all posts in Mexico as being **LOW**-threat locations for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Embassy focuses on Mexico as a potential transit country for foreign terrorist groups to conduct operations against the U.S. There are no known foreign terrorist organizations operating/residing in or transiting through Mexico, and there is no evidence that any terrorist group has targeted U.S. citizens in Mexico.



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Mexico does not provide safe haven to terrorists or terrorist groups. However, the nature of the border and the ready access to human traffickers, lax immigration controls, the abundance of fake Mexican travel documents and Mexico's geographic location potentially make the country an attractive transit point for transnational terrorists. These vulnerabilities make cross-border transit of people and goods a key concern. Businesses conducting cross-border trade should be aware of this vulnerability, as terrorist and criminal organizations could use legitimate business transport to traffic people or items across borders. To mitigate this risk, U.S. Customs and Border Protection operates the [C-TPAT \(Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism\)](#) program in Mexico.

Local authorities cooperate with relevant U.S. government agencies on persons of interest. Criminal organizations have used terror-like tactics (e.g. car bombs, grenades) to attack each other and security forces. Though they commit gruesome acts of violence designed to terrorize, the purpose of these acts is criminal in nature, directed largely at rival gangs, and not for a larger political agenda.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Political violence against Mexican politicians is common and stems from widespread corruption.

Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Mexico City as being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Peaceful demonstrations of all sizes gather regularly at the Monument to Independence (the Angel), near the U.S. Embassy, to protest government policies, labor, social issues, and, occasionally, U.S. policies. These protests often affect traffic during peak commute hours on and near Paseo de La Reforma, the city's primary avenue. Most demonstrations are peaceful. However, even demonstrations intended to be peaceful may turn confrontational and escalate into violence. Groups associated with teachers' unions and those protesting alleged human rights violations in Guerrero have used checkpoints as a way of raising money for their causes.

Protesters in Mexico may block traffic on roads, including major thoroughfares, or take control of tollbooths on highways. Those who encounter protesters demanding unofficial tolls generally may pass upon payment. Non-Mexican nationals should avoid participating in demonstrations and other activities that authorities might deem political, as Mexican law prohibits political activities by foreign citizens and such actions may result in detention and/or deportation. Review OSAC's report, [Surviving a Protest](#).

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

There have been no reports of anti-U.S. sentiment towards U.S. citizens or interests (official or non-official). U.S. interests are generally not targets of political violence. Many Mexican citizens have visas for entry into the United States, and frequently travel there for both business and pleasure.



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Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Earthquakes within the Embassy's consular district are routine, especially in Pacific coast states. Mexico experienced a 7.1-magnitude earthquake in September 2017, with an epicenter off the coast of Oaxaca, and a 7.2 quake in February 2018, with an epicenter in Oaxaca. Although there have been substantial improvements in building regulations and response planning since a devastating 1985 earthquake, the earthquake in 2017 killed at least 370 people. Rebuilding costs may exceed US\$1.6 billion.

Active and dormant volcanoes are scattered throughout central Mexico. One of the country's largest volcanoes, Popocatepetl, is located 43 miles southeast of Mexico City; it has had several low-level eruptions in the past several years. The government prevents access to the mountain, closing it to climbers and hikers. According to public safety officials, travelers to the area should have N-95 filter masks available in case ash falls on them. Clouds of ash associated with volcanic activity can limit air travel and make evacuation by air difficult. On January 22, 2019, Popocatepetl spewed volcanic lava and ash 13,000 feet into the air. In June and July 2019, Popocatepetl continued to erupt, spewing ash clouds up to 28,000 feet into the air

From May to November, hurricanes may affect the Pacific and Gulf coasts of the Embassy's consular district. The coastal states tend to suffer the brunt of these storms, but storms have caused flooding and disruption of utility services throughout the district. During 2019, approximately five tropical storms hit Mexico's coasts. Minor tropical storms can develop into hurricanes very quickly, limiting the time available for a safe evacuation. Travelers in affected regions have had to delay their departure due to infrastructure damage to airports and limited flight availability. Travelers should apprise family and friends of their whereabouts and keep in close contact with their tour operator, hotel staff, business contacts, and/or local officials for evacuation instructions in the event of a weather emergency. Monitor local radio, the [National Weather Service](#) and [Mexican weather authorities](#) (in Spanish).

Avoid driving during and after rainstorms; inadequate drainage creates street flooding and large, submerged potholes. Heavy rains may leave sections of roads washed out completely.

Critical Infrastructure

The new government is looking at the option to modernize Santa Lucia Air Force Base (NLU) and the Benito Juarez International Airport (MEX), with an estimated completion date of three years.

Economic Concerns

Mexico appears on the Watch List in the [2019 Special 301](#) Report, noting inadequate intellectual property rights (IPR) enforcement and the wide availability of pirated/counterfeit goods, mostly via physical and virtual markets. Criminal organizations are significantly involved in the counterfeit and pirated goods trade. Enforcement efforts suffer from weak coordination among federal, state, and municipal officials; limited resources for prosecutions; lack of long-term sustained investigations to target high-level suppliers; and the need for deterrent level penalties.



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The U.S. continues to encourage Mexico to provide its customs officials with *ex-officio* authority, to allow the Attorney General Offices the authority to prosecute transshipments of alleged counterfeit and pirated goods, and to enact legislation to strengthen its copyright regime, including the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Internet Treaties. The U.S. also continues to work with Mexico to resolve IPR concerns through bilateral, regional, and other means of engagement.

The law covering misappropriation of trade secrets also covers economic espionage activity. The three sources of trade secrets law are the Industrial Property Law, Federal Criminal Code, and NAFTA, all of which provide fines and criminal penalties for misappropriation of trade secrets. There have been extremely limited prosecutions of trade secret misappropriation due to onerous legal requirements and evidentiary issues tied to proving theft of digital files.

Exercise caution when considering investments or purchasing real estate, and be aware of the aggressive tactics some sales representatives use. Before initiating a real estate purchase or time-share investment, consult with a Mexican attorney to learn about important regulations and laws that govern real property.

Cargo theft remains a key area of concern for U.S. and foreign companies. FreightWatch International ranks the level of cargo crime in Mexico as “severe,” its worst ranking, primarily because the supply chain continues to face threats from cargo criminals, corrupt law enforcement personnel, and, to a smaller extent, organized crime. Insurance policies have increased as a result; some no longer provide coverage for overnight cargo travel.

Personal Identity Concerns

The issue of femicide, defined as killing a woman because of her gender (as opposed to any killing of a woman) has been a major issue in Mexico, and is a federal offense punishable by 40 to 60 years in prison. It is also a criminal offense in all states. According to Interior Secretariat statistics, in the first six months of 2019, prosecutors and attorneys general opened 387 investigations into 402 cases of femicide throughout the country.

Rape and sexual assault are serious problems in some resort areas. Many incidents occur at night or during the early morning hours, in hotel rooms, on hotel grounds, or on deserted beaches. Assailants have drugged the drinks of victims before assaulting them. Pay attention to your surroundings and maintain positive control of your drink. Review OSAC’s report, [Shaken: The Don’ts of Alcohol Abroad](#).

Same-sex sexual relations are legal in Mexico. The law provides for protections against discrimination based on gender identity. Travelers will find more openness and acceptance in urban areas, and conservative stances in rural areas. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was prevalent, despite a gradual increase in public tolerance of LGBTI+ individuals, according to public opinion surveys. There were reports the government did not always investigate and punish those complicit in abuses, especially outside Mexico City. A poll conducted during the year found six of every 10 members of the LGBTI+ community reported experiencing discrimination in the past year, and more than half suffered hate speech and physical aggression. Civil society groups claimed police routinely subjected LGBTI+ persons to mistreatment while in custody.



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Due to sporadic reports of violence targeting LGBTI+ individuals, travelers should exercise discretion in identifying themselves publicly as LGBTI+. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [LGBTI+ travelers](#).

The Jewish community experiences low levels of anti-Semitism, but there are reports of some anti-Semitic expressions through social media. Jewish community representatives report good cooperation with the government and other religious and civil society organizations in addressing rare instances of such acts. The Catholic Multimedia Center reported criminal groups targeted priests and other religious leaders in some parts of the country and subjected them to extortion, death threats, and intimidation. Review OSAC's report, [Freedom to Practice](#), and the State Department's webpage on security for [faith-based travelers](#).

Travelers with disabilities should consult individual hotels and facilities in advance of travel to ensure they are accessible. Mexican law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment and education, as well as access to health care, transportation, and other services, but the government does not enforce the law effectively. Public buildings and facilities often do not comply with the law requiring access for persons with disabilities. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [travelers with disabilities](#).

Drug-related Crime

Mexico is a major drug-producing and transit nation. Drug trafficking continues to be a significant issue throughout the country, affecting the security climate and influencing local politics. Drug-related violence in Mexico mostly involves those involved in the drug trade or those fighting against it.

Mexico is the world's third-largest producer of opium, with poppy cultivation in 2015 yielding a potential production of 475 metric tons of raw opium. The government conducts the largest independent illicit-crop eradication program in the world. Mexico continues to be the primary transshipment country for U.S.-bound cocaine from South America, with an estimated 95% of annual cocaine movements toward the U.S. stopping in Mexico. Major drug syndicates (TCOs) control most of the drug trafficking throughout the country. Mexico is a producer and distributor of ecstasy, a major supplier of heroin, and the largest foreign supplier of marijuana and methamphetamine to the U.S. market.

Kidnapping Threat

The number of kidnappings reported throughout Mexico, while difficult to determine, is concerning. Most cases go unreported to authorities, as the popular belief is that the police may be involved or are unable to resolve the situation. Victims of traditional kidnappings are physically abducted and held captive until a ransom is paid. Most cases reported to U.S. Mission Mexico have been kidnapping for ransom (KFR). In some KFR cases, the captors receive a ransom and set the victim free; in others, the captors kill the victim despite having received a ransom. Kidnappings for ransom in the Yucatán Peninsula remain an anomaly.

The FBI investigated 219 kidnapping events in Mexico in 2019 (106 events in 2018). In 95 of them, the victim was a U.S. citizen, and in 22, the victim was a U.S. Legal Permanent Resident. Of the cases, 135 were KFRs, 73 were virtual kidnappings, and in 11 there was no ransom demand.



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The number of reported express kidnappings are occurring with more frequency, but are still uncommon, and even less common among tourists or visitors. Express kidnappings take advantage of the 24-hour industry-wide withdrawal limit placed on ATM cards, holding victims for 24-48 hours to maximize withdrawal amounts. A common *modus operandi* for express kidnappings is to target passengers using *libre taxis*; two or three armed accomplices will enter the taxi a few minutes into the trip. The term “express kidnapping” also applies to the kidnapping of random victims held for brief periods where kidnappers demand only small ransom amounts. A typical scenario may last for several hours and settle for the peso-equivalent of a few hundred or thousand dollars. Few official U.S. government employees have suffered this type of crime, but many Mexican-national employees of the Mission either have been victims themselves or know a victim.

There appears to be an uptick in virtual kidnapping. These extortion telephone calls vary in style, but the methodology is often the same. These extortion telephone calls vary in style, but the methodology is often the same. In these cases, there is no actual kidnapped individual. The victim is actually a person who receives a telephone call. Callers say that they have kidnapped a loved one and often include a crying/pleading voice immediately after answering the call but before the kidnapper gets on the phone. Callers intend to confuse the victim and trick them into giving away important information. The voice will usually be crying and/or hysterical, making it difficult to identify and increasing the likelihood that the victim will believe it is their loved one. Criminals use fear and timing against victims. They plan their calls to coincide with times when it is difficult to contact the victim (e.g. when children are on their way to/from school). [Kidnapping Threat](#)

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Alternatively, the callers will obtain the cell phones of two family members. They will call both victims at the same time and claim to have kidnapped the other. They use fear and the threat of violence to keep both victims on the line while they urge them to pay a ransom. Once the kidnappers have obtained as much money as they feel they can, they end the call. They may demand that the victims deliver the ransom in person, which can turn into a real kidnapping, or that they send the money electronically. Variations use callers claiming to be lawyers or police looking to get a family member out a bad situation. They pressure the target to pay them to waive charges or to bribe alleged corrupt officials to free their loved one and avoid a long, expensive judicial process.

Virtual kidnapers call Mexican and international numbers alike, and often use information obtained from social networking websites. Some originate from Mexican prisons. A variation affecting travelers at hotels is an extortion-by-deception scheme, wherein extortionists call a victim and convince them to isolate themselves from family/friends until they receive a ransom. The criminals coerce the victim (by threat of violence) to remain isolated and to provide phone numbers for the victim's family/loved ones. The criminals contact the victim's family and extract a ransom. Often, the callers make statements to suggest surveillance.

To reduce the likelihood of receiving a virtual kidnapping call, answer the phone with only a "hello" and make the other person ask for you by name and know the details of your family's itinerary and contact information (e.g. landline and cell phone numbers). Never provide personal information to someone who calls or approaches you, and do not post personal information on social networking sites.

As a precaution, vary routes/times and be alert to possible surveillance, noting any individual who appears out of place. When hiring domestic help, vet them by identifying references. Ensure that they receive training not to volunteer information to strangers or to allow access to workers without prior authorization.

Review OSAC's report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).



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Other Issues

Weapons laws in Mexico vary by state, but it is generally illegal for travelers to carry weapons of any kind including firearms, knives, daggers, brass knuckles, as well as ammunition (even used shells). Illegal firearms trafficking from the United States to Mexico is a major concern, and the Department of State warns all U.S. citizens against taking any firearm or ammunition into Mexico. If authorities catch you entering Mexico with firearms or ammunitions, you will likely face severe penalties, including prison time. Read the State Department's webpage on [customs and import restrictions](#) for information on what you cannot take into or out of other countries.

The Citizens' Council for Public Security and Justice (*Consejo Ciudadano de Seguridad Publica y Procuracion de Justicia*) takes complaints from those in Mexico City afraid to go to the police. Call 5533-5533.

Police Response

The emergency line in Mexico is **911**. Generally, Mexican police must concentrate their limited resources on urban areas. State Police dedicate some resources to rural areas where there may be little or no municipal rule of law, but response times are usually high, and police prioritize cases of active threats or violent crime. Levels of professionalism vary greatly among police agencies. Consequently, citizens are often indifferent to police authority.

In some instances, U.S. citizens have become victims of harassment, mistreatment, or extortion by law enforcement and other officials. Authorities have cooperated in investigating some cases, but one must have the officer's name, badge number, and patrol car number to pursue a complaint effectively. Note this information if you have a problem with police or other officials. Be aware that offering a bribe to a public official to avoid a ticket or other penalty is a crime. Cooperate with the police if they stop or question you.

The general perception is that most victims do not report crimes due to fear of reprisals by TCOs or the police, the belief that police are corrupt, or the feeling that nothing would come from such reports. The net result is that most crimes go unreported or uninvestigated. Reporting crime can be a bureaucratic, time-consuming process, and is widely perceived to have limited effectiveness. Federal and state security forces have limited capability to respond to violence in many areas.

Reporting crimes can be a long, frustrating experience. Victims must make a complaint (*denuncia*) to police or the local branch of the State Prosecutor's Office (*Ministerio Publico*). When making a *denuncia*, the burden of proof is on the individual to substantiate that a crime occurred. Even after filing a *denuncia* properly, the complainant must ratify it several days later. Satisfying this requirement is not practical for many visitors on short stays.

Police rarely investigate non-violent or minor property crimes. Crimes against foreigners are likely to get more attention from the authorities than crimes against Mexican citizens. Despite the substantial obstacles to reporting a crime, the U.S. Mission encourages all U.S. victims of crime to report the crime to the *Ministerio Publico* and the American Citizen Services office of the Embassy or nearest Consulate.



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Not all uniformed police perform investigative functions or can take *denuncias*. In some cases, their roles are to patrol and prevent crimes. The Tourism Police specifically polices tourist areas and is commonly the only unit that speaks English. Its main purpose is to enhance the safety of tourist areas by deterring crime and responding to accidents. Tourist police cannot take *denuncias*, but can assist travelers in contacting authorities who can. Download the State Department's Crime Victims Assistance [brochure](#).

Police/Security Agencies

The organization of state and federal police agencies is similar to that in the U.S., but law enforcement capabilities are not comparable to U.S. standards. Police corruption and police involvement in criminal activity is common. Generally, police receive low wages, are vulnerable to corruption, and receive less training than their U.S. counterparts.

The Government of Mexico has recently dissolved the Federal Police (*Policía Federal*, PF) and stood up the National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*) whose mission, make-up, and mandate differ across Mexican states, where immigration enforcement is often the Guard's priority mission. The Guard is not self-sufficient and relies on the army (SEDENA) and navy (SEMAR) to conduct policing and security functions, and to combat organized criminal groups. The National Guard (Guardia Nacional) is composed of personnel from SEDENA, SEMAR, and Federal Police.

- The General Procurement Office (*Procuraduría General de la República*, PGR) of the Mexican Attorney General is responsible for investigating and prosecuting federal crimes. The General Procurement Office (*Procuraduría General de Justicia*, PGJ) of each state/city oversees investigating and prosecuting state and local crimes.
- The Interior Secretariat (*Secretaría de Gobernación*, SEGOB) oversees the Mexican Immigration Service (INAMI), whose officers have the right to detain suspected undocumented aliens and may deport them without formal deportation proceedings.
- The Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit (*Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público*) deploys customs officers (*Aduana*) to borders and international airports to interdict contraband.
- The Bank of Mexico (*Banco de México*) operates its own security division charged with enforcing banking and monetary laws, including cases of counterfeiting, fraud, and money laundering.
- State-level police (*Policía Estatal Investigadora*, PEI) in each of the country's 31 states and the Federal District maintain preventive and judicial police, and serve as the primary criminal investigative agency in a state. State police in border states have specialized groups that work with the FBI on kidnapping and other sensitive investigations. State police are under the direction of the state's governor. Each state contains numerous municipalities, many of which maintain a municipal police force.
- Municipal Police (*Policía Municipal*) mainly patrol and conduct crime prevention. They are the primary responders when summoned through 911, to include traditional police calls like traffic violations and incidents in residential communities.
- Transit Police (*Policía de Tránsito*) are responsible for overseeing and enforcing traffic safety compliance on roads and highways. Response to even minor car accidents can take a long time.



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Medical Emergencies

The emergency line in Mexico is **911**. Excellent health facilities are available in major cities. Ambulance services are widely available, but training and availability of emergency responders may be below U.S. standards.

There are public and private medical systems in Mexico. Most visitors and relatively wealthy Mexicans choose to use private health care services. All major cities have private hospitals and private ambulance services, most of which offer adequate care in an emergency or if immediate travel to the U.S. is not possible. Mexican citizens receive free emergency and non-emergency medical care through the public system. In rural areas, public health facilities are often the only option, and the level of care can be substantially lower than that in major cities. The health care system does not operate in a manner comparable to U.S. health care standards. Travelers should look to establish a medical response plan. Find contact information for available medical services and available air ambulance services on the U.S. Embassy [website](#).

In major cities, ambulance response time is typically 10-15 minutes, depending on the location. Injured or seriously ill travelers may prefer to take a taxi to a health provider. Foreigners residing or working in Mexico on a permanent basis should consider coverage with a private ambulance company for faster service.

Most private hospitals and emergency services require payment or adequate guarantee of payment before providing services. Very few hospitals in Mexico accept U.S. medical insurance. Instead, travelers will need to pay the hospital and then seek reimbursement from their insurance provider. Hospitals have refused to discharge patients until receiving payment. The U.S. Department of State strongly recommends purchasing international health insurance before traveling internationally. Review the State Department's webpage on [insurance overseas](#).

U.S. citizens have lodged numerous complaints against some private hospitals in resort areas to include exorbitant prices and inflexible collection measures. Obtain complete information on billing, pricing, and proposed medical procedures before agreeing to any medical care in these locations. Be aware that some resorts have exclusive agreements with medical providers and ambulance services, which may limit your choices in seeking emergency medical attention. Some hospitals in tourist centers use sliding scales, deciding on rates for services based on negotiation and on the patient's perceived ability to pay. In some instances, providers have been known to determine the limits of a patient's credit card or insurance, quickly reach that amount in services rendered, and subsequently discharge the patient or transfer them to a public hospital.



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Exercise caution when purchasing medication overseas. Pharmaceuticals, both over the counter and requiring prescription in the U.S., are often readily available for purchase with little controls. Counterfeit medication is common in certain parts of Mexico and may prove ineffective, mislabeled, or dangerous. Purchase medication in consultation with a medical professional and from reputable establishments. For a list of controlled substances in Mexico, visit the [COFEPRIS](#) website and the [Mexican Drug Schedule](#). U.S. citizens should carry a copy of their prescription or doctor's letter, but it is still possible that they may be subject to arrest for arriving in Mexico with substances on these lists. Note that a medicine considered over the counter in the U.S. may be illegal in Mexico. For example, pseudoephedrine, the active ingredient in Sudafed, is a controlled substance in Mexico. Review OSAC's report, [Traveling with Medication](#).

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Mexico](#).

In many areas in Mexico, tap water is not potable. Bottled water and beverages are safe, although many restaurants and hotels serve tap water unless patrons specifically request bottled water. Ice for drinks might use tap water. Take precautions when drinking water or eating fresh fruits, vegetables, and salads. Review OSAC's report, [I'm Drinking What in My Water?](#)

Air pollution is a significant problem in several major cities in Mexico. Consider the impact seasonal smog and heavy particulate pollution may have on your health. Many cities in Mexico, such as Mexico City, are at high altitude, which can lead to altitude illness. Review OSAC's report, [Traveling in High Altitude](#).

Review OSAC's reports, [The Healthy Way](#), [Health 101: How to Prepare for Travel](#), and [Fire Safety Abroad](#).

The following diseases are prevalent: Hepatitis; Typhoid Fever; Travelers' Diarrhea; Dengue; Chikungunya; Zika; Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever; Parasitic Infections; and Chronic Respiratory Disease. The CDC offers information on vaccines and country-specific health guidance for [Mexico](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The Country Council in Mexico City is active, meeting monthly. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's [Latin America team](#) with any questions or to join.

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

Paseo de la Reforma, 305, Col. Cuauhtémoc, Mexico, D.F. 06500
Business Hours: Monday-Friday, 0830-1730
Telephone - 5080-2000 (24/7 switchboard operator)
Website: <http://mx.usembassy.gov/>

Other U.S. Diplomatic Posts In Mexico

[Consulate Ciudad Juarez](#), [Consulate Guadalajara](#), [Consulate Hermosillo](#), [Consulate Matamoros](#), [Consulate Mérida](#), [Consulate Monterrey](#), [Consulate Nogales](#), [Consulate Nuevo Laredo](#), [Consulate Tijuana](#)



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Helpful Information

Before you travel, consider the following resources:

- [OSAC Risk Matrix](#)
- [OSAC Travelers Toolkit](#)
- [State Department Traveler's Checklist](#)
- [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#)
- [Mexico](#) Country Information Sheet