

Getting Ready

*Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and
smile, smile, smile.*

popular song during World War I

Details, Details



When to Visit

The **high season** in the Yucatán occurs during the dry winter months (December through April), with peaks at Christmas and Spring Break. **Hurricane season** runs from August through October, with September the most likely month for the unpredictable storms. The weather is comfortably warm year-round, with an average temperature of 80°F (27°C).



Courtesy Mexico Tourism Board



Money Matters

The Mexican currency is the **peso**, sometimes called the new peso after a drastic devaluation late in 1994. It floats against the dollar at the rate of around 12 pesos to the dollar, as of this writing. The more pesos per dollar, the better the rate of exchange for you.

The US dollar can be exchanged at banks or change booths (*casitas de cambio*). Although dollars are accepted almost everywhere (at a variable exchange rate), it's a good idea to bring traveler's checks to convert at a bank or change booth – you should have a passport for ID. You can also use ATMs to get that extra cash.

Bring lots of dollar bills for tips. It's easier than figuring out the exchange rate.

Many restaurants add a 10% tip to the bill. Leave more if the service is good.

Most prices in the shops are quoted in pesos (written with a \$ sign), but make sure beforehand. Hotel prices are generally in dollars.

A WAKE-UP CALL

A careless businessman took one of the glamorous suites in Casa Turquesa in Cancún thinking that the 3,200 price was in pesos. The next day he was presented with a bill for 24,000 new pesos, the equivalent of US \$3,200! Have a nice day, Señor.

Credit Cards, Traveler's Checks

Most hotels and larger shops and restaurants accept credit cards. Banks exchange cash or traveler's checks, without commission, during limited hours.

In Cancún, Playa del Carmen, Tulum and Cozumel, exchange booths are open longer hours and will also change cash or traveler's checks.

Shop around. The rates vary between change booths and even banks – and they change daily. The worst place to convert spending money is your hotel in the hotel zone, where the rates are generally lower than anywhere else. The change booths with the best rates in Cancún are downtown. The best rates are usually found at one of the three *cambios* located on Av. Cobá, just before you get to Av. Tulum.

ATMs

ATMs (*casitas automaticas*) are located inside shopping malls and banks. Any credit card charges or ATM withdrawals go through at the official exchange rate. We've found it more convenient to use ATMs when we travel than to bring much cash or traveler's checks.

Passports & Visas

No visas are required for travel in the Yucatán, but tourist cards are a must (you'll be given one on the plane). The card permits a stay of 180 days. Applications for extensions should be made at the **Immigration Office** in Cancún, at the corner of Av. Uxmal and Nader (☎ 998/884-1729).

To enter Mexico, US citizens and legal aliens need a passport. Passport applications for United States citizens can be obtained from regional or federal authorities at major post offices, courthouses or federal passport agencies in major cities. You can also download an application online at <http://travel.state.gov>. If you lose your tourist



card in Mexico, the Cancún Immigration Office can replace it. Go the office at 8 am and wait in line.



What to Bring

Pack light. The Yucatán offers a warm-weather climate with only occasional rain or cool temperatures. Dress styles are relatively casual in most restaurants and clubs, even in the evening. Plus you can always buy clothes there, especially T-shirts and sportswear. In-town laundromats offer inexpensive drop-off, wash and fold services.

Electrical appliances such as blowdryers and electric shavers will not present a problem: electricity is the same as in the States.

Fair Air Fare



One way to save money is to check your newspaper's travel section for package trips that include airfare and choice of accommodations from luxury to moderate. Large package vacation companies with service to Cancún include **Apple Vacations** (www.applevacations.com) and **Funjet** (www.funjet.com). Have your travel agent look for specials, or check the Web.

🌀 TIP

Ask your travel agent to check the bucket shops or wholesalers for airfare-only deals. We once flew Apple Vacations air-only on a Mexicana flight at a substantial discount. Use this book to find a hotel that you like and get a good travel agent to make reservations and find the lowest airfare.

Quintana Roo



GETTING READY

Direct flights are now offered from the US to Cozumel, or you can connect through Cancún International (CUN).

A regional airline that flies from Cancún to Cozumel, Chichén Itzá or Mérida is **Aerocaribe Aero-cozumel** (☎ 998/884-2000 or 886-0083).

Flight Times to Cancún (hours)

New York	3½
Miami	1½
Los Angeles	4½
Vancouver BC	6
Toronto	4½
Denver	4
Europe	12

Health & Safety



No shots are required. However, we recommend that all travelers get a **hepatitis B** shot no matter where in the world they are going. Most hotels and restaurants offer purified tap water, but drink bottled water (*agua purificada*) or seltzer water (*agua mineral*) to be sure. Qualified English-speaking doctors are available for health emergencies. Don't hesitate to call one.

Be sure to wash your hands every chance you get, especially at meal times. If you do get sick it's usually the scary but not serious **tourista**. *Tourista's* symptoms, which mimic those of salmonella poisoning, may include any or all the fol-

lowing: nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps and raging fever.

 TIP

If we're in one of our budget hotels, the first thing we do when we start feeling bad (and it does come on very quickly) is upgrade to a hotel with air conditioning – maybe cable TV – and a comfortable bed.

A couple of aspirin and plenty of sleep is called for. If you're suffering with diarrhea and stomach cramps, take the recommended dose of Imodium AD. It's necessary to drink plenty of bottled water or Coca Cola with lime. In severe cases, you should drink rehydration fluids such as Pedialyte, available at local drugstores. We also drink *manzanilla* (chamomile) tea with honey, a helpful and pleasant folk remedy. We repeat the Imodium if the diarrhea returns.

In about 24 hours we're usually feeling well enough to get back out and enjoy the sunshine – with some reservations. If you've had a bout, you may still feel a little weak: Take it easy and don't overexert. For a few days you may also experience mild stomach cramps after eating. Eat light and cut out liquor and hot spices.

Sun poisoning, even sunburn, is a serious consequence of trying to get a quick tan (and there is no such thing). Use sunscreen with a strength of 30 or higher and you'll still get a tan within the week. Wear a hat and sunglasses. Children are particularly susceptible. Keep them well protected.

Sunscreen is not effective until 30 minutes after it has been applied to your skin.



Crime



Most crime in the Yucatán is limited to a rare pick-pocketing or over-charging. Use common sense and normal precautions, especially in crowded areas, and you should have no problems. In an emergency, dial 060 or 066 to reach the police.

Smoking



Cuban cigar smokers will be pleased: what's considered the ultimate smoke is legal here. You can even take a quick junket to Havana from here, but don't tell the US State Department. Among the best-known Cuban brands (illegal to bring back to the States) are Partagas, Punch, Romeo y Julieta, Cohiba, Hoyo de Mon-terrey, Montecristo and H. Upmann. See *Shopping* for more details.

Two good Mexican cigars are Santa Clara's Los Aromas de San Andrés and Cruz Real.

TIP

Look for the word “Cubana” or “Habana” on the label because some Cuban brand names are made in other countries as well.

Telephones

To call Mexico from the US, dial 011 for an international line, then 52 for Mexico, followed by the number listed in the text. We've given the area or city code first, separated from the phone number by a slash (/).

Calls between different areas in Mexico are preceded by 01. However, *local calls do not need the area code*. If you're in Cancún, for example, and

Area codes:

Cancún, 998
Cozumel, 987
Isla Mujeres, 998
Mérida, 999
Puerto Morelos, 998
Playa del Carmen
& Riviera Maya,
984

the number we list is 998/888-8888, simply drop the 998 when you dial.

Dial 001 + the area code to reach the US.

Calls Home

If you call home from your hotel room, make sure surcharges and rates aren't exorbitant. You can call through Telemex and charge it to an AT&T card, but it's a little more costly than dealing direct with a USA-based server. Reach a direct line to the major American telephone companies from a hotel that offers its guests access to long-distance calling.



Public Telephones

Public telephones marked “Ladatel” can also be used to charge a call to your calling card or to call the States directly. The only way to reach the operator or a direct service from a pay phone is by using a Ladatel or Ladaphone phone card, which can be purchased from any of the many vendors that display the blue and yellow Ladatel logo. The cards are commonly sold in values of 30, 50 or 100 pesos. Ladatel cards have a computer chip that tracks the time on line. With Ladaphone cards you punch in a code before dialing. Ladatel calls to the US cost about 50¢ per minute. To reach your US long-distance carrier for calling card calls, see “Collect & Charge” below.

Collect & Charge Calls

Call collect or charge your AT&T credit card by dialing 090 and speaking with the operator. To reach **AT&T Direct Service**, dial ☎ 001/800/462-4240. For **MCI WorldPhone**, ☎ 001/800/

674-7000. **Sprint International** is at ☎ 001/800/877-8000. Good luck!

WARNING

Avoid calling home on phones that offer calls to the US or Canada by punching *01, or a similar prefix, to charge the call on a major credit card. These phones are everywhere in Cancún and, although convenient, charges are upwards of US \$25 for the first minute! It's a rip-off aimed at young vacationers who might not have major phone company cards.

Internet & E-mail



Internet cafés are the main resource for local people to send & receive e-mail. Every town has one or more, so just go in and sign on. It costs about \$3 an hour.

Tipping



Many restaurants often add a 10% tip, *propina*, to your bill. If you have received good service, don't hesitate to leave another 10% on the table. Tips are the major source of income for service workers, as their salaries are well below North American standards and sometimes even below Mexican standards. Maid service in rooms should be tipped at least US \$2 per night.

Customs Allowances

Customs stops on the way in and out of Mexico are fairly simple. Don't have drugs or firearms, period. Drug possession penalties in Mexico

(even for the smallest amount) include harsh prison terms and the embassy can do little to help you. It's just not worth it. The Yucatán is making a serious effort to curb drug trafficking. If you drive in the countryside you can expect to be stopped occasionally by the Army's anti-drug patrols.

You can carry into Mexico two bottles of any liquor and two cartons of your favorite coffin nails. There's a green light/red light Customs system. You punch a button at inbound Customs and, if the traffic light goes green, you can pass through unhindered. If it flashes red, you are subject to either a cursory or complete luggage search. On your return to the United States you can bring in up to US \$400 per person of duty-free goods, including one liter of alcohol. Canadians are allowed \$300 with a written exemption, or \$100 without.



Things to Buy

Silver and gold jewelry, pottery, hammocks, honey, embroidered dresses, T-shirts, folk art, Panama hats, men's guayabera shirts, wood carvings, pewter, and blankets.

Mexico leads the world in silver (plata) production.

Driving/Car Rental, Buses

Rental cars are relatively expensive and you should buy all the insurance on offer. Unlike the United States, rental drivers are liable for 10% of the car's value, so we strongly advise taking zero deductible policies. Roads are in excellent condition, but night driving in the countryside is very dangerous for a variety of reasons.



 WARNING

Be cautious when you drive in Mexico, as left turns are made from the right lane. On Cozumel's four-lane northern road, for example, in order to make a left turn, pull into the right lane and wait until the traffic passes before you turn. Yikes!

Buses are a good alternative and very reasonably priced. The hotel zone in Cancún offers frequent bus service along the main drag and into downtown for about 75¢. The bus station for long-distance service is downtown at Av. Uxmal & Tulum.

More Information



To get information and brochures about Cancún, Cozumel and Mexico in general, call the **Mexico Hotline**. In the US, ☎ 800/44-MEXICO (800/446-3942); in Canada, ☎ 800/2MEXICO (800/263-9426). Online info is available at www.Cancun.com; e-mail welcome@cancun.com.

Numerous tourist information booths at the airport and in downtown Cancún advertise free trips to Isla Mujeres, discounted tours or car rentals, gifts, free Jungle Tours, etc. These are mostly time-share promotions that require what is euphemistically called “an hour” of your time. Unless you're an old pro or are thinking seriously of joining an interval ownership group, your best bet is to just say no.

TIP

Your best bet is to pick up a copy of the **Cancún Tips** magazine – free – and go.

Time & Measurements

As of now, the Yucatán remains on Central Time. Weights, measures and temperatures are given in metric. Gasoline is sold by the liter and distances are measured by kilometers. Dates are expressed with the day first, followed by the month (Christmas Day is 25/12).



GOING METRIC

General Measurements

1 kilometer	=	.6124 miles
1 mile	=	1.6093 kilometers
1 foot	=	.304 meters
1 inch	=	2.54 centimeters
1 square mile	=	2.59 square kilometers
1 pound	=	.4536 kilograms
1 ounce	=	28.35 grams
1 imperial gallon	=	4.5459 liters
1 US gallon	=	3.7854 liters
1 quart	=	.94635 liters

Temperatures

For Fahrenheit: Multiply Centigrade figure by 1.8 and add 32.

For Centigrade: Subtract 32 from Fahrenheit figure and divide by 1.8.

Centigrade	Fahrenheit
40°	= 104°
35°	= 95°
30°	= 86°
25°	= 77°
20°	= 64°
15°	= 59°
10°	= 50°