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## Driving In Mexico - A Short Practical Guide

The following is a practical guide to driving in Mexico compiled from experiences over the last several years.

Driving in Mexico, in our opinion, is no more hazardous than driving anywhere else, however, it is different than driving in the United States or Canada. There are simply different things you have to be on the lookout for.

- 1.- Buy Mexican Auto Insurance. Mexican auto insurance is a must, since, in the case of an accident Mexican authorities will not accept foreign auto insurance policies. Any Mexican auto insurance coverage you purchase should include claims adjusters that will come to the scene of an accident **and an attorney**. This becomes very important since, in the event of an accident, you are not allowed to move your vehicle and you may be detained by the police in the event that anyone is hurt until fault can be established.
- 2.- Be aware that not all roads are in the best of conditions. Although over the last 6 - 8 years there has been an increase in the number of 4-lane toll roads throughout the country, some of the minor roads, for instance those between small towns, are more likely to be paved with cobblestone instead of asphalt and, either way, they all have their share of pot holes and ruts to be careful about.
- 3.- Although there are reports of people being stopped and their property being stolen while on an isolated road, there are few reports of people actually being injured. The best way to avoid this is to drive during the day and not to stop for hitchhikers. Also beware of any foreign objects in the road, these are normally placed there so that an unsuspecting driver will be forced to stop.
- 4.- Try to restrict driving to daylight hours. This is common sense wherever you drive since road signs are easier to read, road hazards are easier to see and avoid and there are normally more cars traveling the same road you are so there is less chance of anything bad happening.
- 5.- Always be aware of livestock. In Mexico, livestock can create problem because of a lack of fencing around the highways. Livestock are normally left to roam wherever they can find food and this is sometimes near a well traveled road.
- 6.- Remember that most people do not use their turn signals and not all cars you see on the road have functioning brake lights. Avoid accidents by keeping your distance, using your turn signals and being aware of those who don't.
- 7.- Always know who has the right of way. This is sometimes difficult because, even though you may be in the right, if the "the other guy" is bigger, he won't care. This means you will want to slow down at all intersections and look both ways whether you are required to or not; it also means you will want to yield to larger vehicles that want to occupy your same lane space.

8.- Always plan your trip ahead of time. Take a good road map along with you and know where your stops are going to be.

9.- Remember that here, just as anywhere else, all those things you learned in driving school apply. Keep free space in front, behind and beside you when driving; obey the speed limits; use your turn signals; and always make sure your vehicle is in good condition. Check your car when delivered. Spare tire, tools!

10.- Buy a basic Spanish phrase book before your trip. Learning how to tell someone you need a mechanic (*necesito un mecánico*), help changing a tire (*necesito ayuda para cambiar la llanta*) or directions (*donde está or como llego a*) can be very useful. Even if you can't pronounce it quite right, people will usually get the message and be able to effectively communicate to you what you need to know.

Just in case your considering risking the trip without Mexican auto insurance, consider the following:

- Mexican law is napoleonic - this means that you are guilty until proven innocent. The person deciding this will most likely be the policeman who arrives at the scene of the accident, especially if you cannot provide proof of Mexican auto insurance and/or produce an insurance adjuster appears.
- When a traffic accident does occur, the police may impound your vehicle, especially if there is no one there to help you defend your rights such as an insurance adjuster and/or an attorney. Also know that in the event that someone is injured and you are found responsible, you might not only be held liable for that persons medical expenses but also for financially supporting them and their dependents until they recover. If you have an attorney he will probably be able to help you negotiate a more reasonable settlement than that which you could negotiate on your own.