

Travel tips for 2017 Annual Conference

Below are some travel tips and suggestions for this year's conference in Oaxaca. They are designed to get you thinking and planning about your travel so you will have a very enjoyable experience. Our many thanks go to Norma Schafer for her contributions to the tip list.

1. Planning and Time Sensitive—

- a) Double check that you have at least 6 months remaining on your passport before it expires or you will not be allowed entry into Mexico.
- b) Consider insurance that covers accidents, medical coverage, and emergency evacuation to the USA or your home country.
- c) No special immunizations are required for entry into Mexico.
- d) ATMs within Mexico are the most convenient and economical way to purchase pesos (Traveler Checks are not recommended).
- e) WARP will ask you to sign a waiver of responsibility holding the organization harmless.

2. Before you leave home:

- a) Call your credit card company and tell them the dates you are traveling to Mexico. Ask them not to block your charges and ATM use.
- b) Electronics: consider signing up for an international (Mexico) phone service with your wireless carrier and if you carry an handheld get an internet roaming plan or turn off your data off (free Wi-Fi at B&Bs/hotel).

3. Mexican Immigration and Customs: On your flight you will receive 1) an immigration form and 2) a Customs (Aduana) form. Complete these while in the air so you are ready to present these with your passport when you arrive. **Be certain to keep the immigration receipt.** This is REQUIRED to leave the country otherwise you may be detained and assessed a large fine.

If you are connecting to Oaxaca through Mexico City, you pick up your bags for customs after you go through immigration. You put your bags through an x-ray machine, pick them up on the other end. They will ask you push a button. If it turns green you are cleared to proceed. If it turns red, they will inspect your luggage. This is totally random. Then take your luggage to the right where you will see a sign for connecting flights. When you land in Oaxaca, you will go to the domestic flight area to pick up your bags and exit directly to the lobby.

For Houston–Oaxaca flights on United Airlines, you present your immigration form at the Oaxaca airport. Then, you pick up your bags, put them through the x-ray, push the button as above. Take your bags to the lobby where there is a taxi stand to buy a ticket to the city.

How to go directly from the Oaxaca Airport to Oaxaca City and Hostal Noria:

As you exit the baggage claim area, there will be a safe government regulated transportation ticket office straight ahead of you to the left before the exit door. A shared shuttle van to Oaxaca City hotels is about 75 pesos (\$6.50 USD) per person, 230 pesos (1–4 people about 19.50 USD). There are ATMs in the Mexico City and Oaxaca airports for pesos. The transportation cost to and from the airport is not included in your registration fee.

4. Weather: Check weather prior to your travel for any unexpected changes to the norm. In spring and summer days are hot and can reach the mid–to–upper 80's with humidity. There may be brief rain showers in the late afternoon that last 20–30 minutes.

5. Attire and what to pack: For cultural sensitivity, please dress conservatively. Dress is casual, light cotton or linen clothes are recommended and we recommend no bling (leave diamonds and gold at home). Also;

- a) Comfortable shoes for walking
- b) Sunscreen
- c) A hat and/or umbrella (rainy season is in June). Norma reports a rain parka can be too heavy
- d) Light weight, gauzy linen or cotton clothing—(any breathable fibers are preferred)
- e) If you anticipate rinsing clothes, plastic hangers for drying (depending on how long you are staying at Hostal Noria, there is hostel laundry facility)
- f) Extra duffle bag or suitcase for your purchases (if bringing an extra suitcase or duffle consider filling it with good used clothing. Norma can distribute to help families, leaving you with an empty for your purchases)
- g) Tote bag and/or backpack for gear
- h) Hand sanitizer
- i) Mosquito repellent (Norma recommends a non-Deet aerosol formula “Picardin”.
- j) Think about whether or not you want to consider bringing a prescription pain-killer like hydrocodone in case of an accident for immediate relief, and/or an antibacterial Cipro (ciprofloxacin) in case you get a stomach bug
- k) Earplugs if you are sensitive to noise
- l) Eye mask if you are sensitive to light
- m) Electronics (see below)

6. Going local/ personal awareness and health:

- a) Pedestrians DO NOT have the right of way, even if you have a green light. Vehicles will not yield for you; Use caution!
- b) Most likely you will see adults begging or children selling gum or flowers. Norma suggests carrying pesos in small denominations (5 pesos is 0.26, 10 pesos is 0.53, 20 pesos is \$1.05) and hand out as you are so moved.
- c) Walking after dark in the general loci of our conference is not a problem. It will remain light until about 8pm and the streets are well lit. It is however, always good to be aware your surroundings.
- d) Eating street vendor food is not recommended. If eating in cafes, it is highly advised that you do not eat raw greens, salads or anything that has been pre-peeled and cut. Again, travelers are recommended to bring an Rx for ciprofloxacin, an antibiotic for diarrhea and intestinal issues. Imodium won't work.
- e) Drink bottled water! Carry your own water, tissue paper/napkins and small container of hand sanitizer. *Do not drink tap water or use it to brush your teeth.* Agua Pura or Agua Natural are the normal available bottled waters. Never drink fruit waters from street vendors, only in restaurants where everything is prepared with purified water and lettuce/veggies are disinfected. If in doubt, ask: “Disinfectado”? Otherwise stick to cooked foods. Our lodging host uses only purified water for drinking and cooking.
- f) The universal way to flag a taxi is recognized, however, buses stop at designated stops. Taxi and bus ride fares are not negotiable. A 50 peso bill is the most convenient for a taxi or bus fare.
- g) Plumbing is antiquated; Please use the trash container next to toilets to dispose of soiled paper.

7. Money:

- a) *Exchange:* The peso is Mexico's currency. As of March 20, the exchange rate is approximately 1 USD to 19 pesos. Dollars are not usually accepted. There are ATMs in the Mexico City and Oaxaca airports. There are also bank ATMs in Oaxaca City, most clustered around the Zocalo (Calles Independencia and Garcia Virgil). Fees are less when you withdraw pesos from ATMs rather than using a money-changer (casa de cambio). Check to see if your bank has a reciprocal agreement with a Mexican bank. For example, ScotiaBank has an agreement with Bank of America to waive fees. ATMs are much more convenient, too-- always open. When you buy directly from artisans at our expoventa for example, or in villages, they usually only accept cash. Credit card fees for them are

16% and most do not accept credit cards. Most shops/galleries that cater to tourists will take credit cards. Some will offer a 15–20% discount if you pay in cash. NOTE: if visiting Teotitlan del Valle there are NO ATMs.

- b) If you are using a money-changer you will need your passport. For this transaction, Norma recommends that you carry no more than \$100–200 USD in \$20 bills. Use caution not to expose money, especially after exchanging or an ATM withdrawal. Secure your pesos and credit card before turning around and leaving the ATM. Carry your money close to your person e.g., with an across the shoulder or front style bag.
- c) *Tippling*: In family-style restaurants Norma suggests leaving a 10% tip. In more elegant, upscale restaurants, a 15% tip. For hotel service people: housekeeping, 30–50 pesos a day. Norma suggests leaving this daily because staff changes, and they know we will be appreciative of their services. Bellmen, 10 pesos a bag. Tips for taxi drivers not necessary.

8. Technology:

- a) Electric current is the same, no need for a converter
- b) Don't forget extra batteries, memory card, or battery chargers if you use these
- c) Adapter (optional) outlets are Type A and B (see <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com/mexico/>)

If you have any questions about the travel tips please contact Gail Ryser glryser@gmail.com