

Mexico Border Crossing Information

All groups are responsible for their own passage through Mexican customs and successful entrance into Mexico. DOXA can be a great resource to help navigate the process and answer questions. As with most things, an excellent mission trip starts with sound preparation. The information below is meant to help with that preparation.

The process of entering Mexico is much less rigorous and involved than entering the United States. Still, there are some important differences and details to note.

- Depending on the time of day, there is little to no wait time to enter Mexico. Traffic, however, does tend to back up from around 3-6pm Monday-Saturday.
- There is often an inconsistency between Mexican law and what is currently being enforced at Mexican ports of entry.
- The vast majority of border crossings into Mexico do not entail showing your passport, talking to a Mexican customs official, or stopping your vehicle. You only need to stop in the secondary inspection spaces if you get a red light at the border crossing or are directed to do so by a Mexican customs official.
 - While showing a passport is rarely required to enter Mexico by vehicle, it is still a good idea to have everyone's passport easily accessible when crossing any international border. Some groups store these all in a convenient Ziploc bag.
 - Please refrain from taking pictures or being on your phone while in the border checkpoint area. This behavior may get you pulled over.
 - Please reinforce with all of your passengers that they should only speak to a customs official when spoken to first.
- While you have undoubtedly beefed up your Spanish language skills in preparation for this trip ☺, we recommend that you save it for the worksite. It is typically best that you only speak English to Mexican customs officials and police officers.
- If you do get pulled over for secondary inspection, here are some common questions that they may ask you. We recommend having a quick talk with all of your drivers, so they can be prepared for these simple questions. Nothing you are doing is illegal or needs hiding. The best thing you can do is just be honest with the Mexican customs official and provide simple, true, and concise answers.
 - How long are you staying in Mexico?
 - *Sample answer: 5 days*
 - Where are you going and staying in Mexico?
 - *Sample answer: Tijuana, staying in an orphanage (either Hogar de los Niños or Unidos por Siempre)*
 - What are you bringing with you?
 - *Sample answer: luggage, clothes, sleeping bag, tools*
 - What will you be doing in Mexico?
 - *Sample answer: volunteering, building a house*
- In rare cases, a Mexican customs official may require your vehicle to get x-rayed. Just remain calm and follow their directions. This is OK and you can trust them. Nothing you

are doing is illegal or needs hiding. The best thing you can do is treat the Mexican customs official with respect and be patient while they do their job. The x-ray process can last from 5 minutes to over an hour, and you will be required to exit your vehicle.

- Food
 - Crossing food into Mexico puts you at higher risk for problems and delays with Mexican customs officials.
 - If you are found crossing the border with a lot of food that was just bought at the store, you may be required to pay a tax or be forced to return to the United States.
 - To minimize your risk of problems, we recommend buying as much food as possible in Tijuana. There are two Costcos and many supermarkets available in Tijuana for you to use.
 - If you decide to cross the border with a lot of food, we recommend splitting that food up between as many vehicles as possible. This will minimize your risk for potential problems with Mexican customs officials.
- Persons
 - Mexican law requires that all visitors obtain an FMM (tourist card) regardless of destination or length of stay. For all trips within the 20 km border zone (includes Tijuana) that are 7 days or less, the FMM is free of charge.
 - FMM enforcement at Mexican ports of entry is rare. As of October 2019, persons entering Mexico by foot were periodically required to fill out an FMM document and show their passport. Meanwhile, persons entering Mexico by vehicle were not checked for FMM documents even if their vehicle was stopped for secondary inspection. While this is what is currently happening on the ground, please keep in mind that this may change without notice.
 - An FMM can be attained and printed at the following website:
<https://www.inm.gob.mx/fmme/publico/en/solicitud.html>
- Border Crossing Letters
 - If you are stopped in secondary inspection and the conversation with the Mexican customs official has taken an unexpected turn, you can use the appropriate border crossing letter to help further explain your situation.
 - Border crossing letters are located in this packet, at the end of the directions to the orphanage that you are heading to (either Hogar de los Niños or Unidos por Siempre).