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# Mexico Insight

Guide to Social & Business Etiquette in Mexico

2021 Edition



## About Mexico Insight

*Mexico Insight is a continuously updated series of concise guides and reports that share local knowledge and helpful advice about lifestyle and living in Mexico.*

*The series is published and distributed by [Mexperience.com](http://Mexperience.com)*



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## About the Mexico Insight series

Mexico Insight is a continuously updated series of concise guides and reports that share local knowledge and helpful advice about lifestyle and living in Mexico, published by Mexperience.com. These guides and reports apprise you of the subject and assist further research with helpful cross references.

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## Foreword

As you settle into your life in Mexico, you'll begin to encounter distinct social graces and rules of social etiquette. Learning and adapting to local customs and practices is an important —seasoned expats might say critical— part of assimilating your lifestyle when living in an environment that is foreign to your primary culture.

It takes time and patience to adopt the ways and graces of a foreign culture and having some background knowledge can bring additional awareness and understanding ahead of time, so when you find yourself in real-life situations, you'll be better placed to understand some of the nuances unfolding before you.

This guide has been written to help you to navigate Mexico's modern-day social etiquette, get a good grasp of the graces practiced in the local cultural environment and help to prevent you from committing unnecessary *faux pas*.

If you plan to move to Mexico to live or retire, this guide shares invaluable information about how to assimilate Mexican customs. If you plan to work in Mexico, or if you're planning to visit Mexico to conduct business and develop commercial relationships here, you'll find both the social and business sections a real insight that will help you prepare for your meetings, negotiations, and for cultivating constructive working relationships.



## PART ONE: SOCIAL ETIQUETTE IN MEXICO

### Class and society in Mexico

Mexico is a class-conscious society. Titles (see section about this later in this guide) and other status symbols are important within Mexico's social framework and should be politely acknowledged.

Mexico has extremely polite and courteous mannerisms built-in to its social norms [and language](#). Politeness, patience, and tolerance in situations, however frustrating they may appear, is always appreciated, and ultimately rewarded in Mexico.

Conversely, a display of impatience, anger, frustration, or lack of general respect in formal or informal situations tend to fall on 'deaf ears' when dealing with most people in Mexico; and although those around you may not outwardly react to your conflictive behavior, the ultimate outcome in a situation could be made worse for you through deliberate obstruction or total rejection of your wishes, not because it is impossible to fulfill them, but as a reaction to what is deemed to be your impoliteness.

#### FURTHER INSIGHTS

- ❖ Read articles about [Mexican culture on Mexperience](#)
- ❖ Language articles on [euphemisms](#) and [formal vs informal](#) context

### Language formalities in Mexico

Mexicans are extremely polite by Latin American standards: indeed, politeness is built-in to the language and social graces of the culture.

It's common to use the Spanish language in its formal context (“*Usted*”) when dealing with people you do not know or who are senior to you; for friends, close associates, and informal situations, the informal (“*Tú*”) form of language is more appropriate.

The use of formal language in informal situations in Mexico is often employed as a means to express irony.

#### FURTHER INSIGHTS:

- ❖ Language articles on [euphemisms](#) and [formal vs informal](#) context
- ❖ Learn about [Spanish Language](#) and get deep insights into the nuances and use of Spanish in Mexico with the [PinPoint Spanish Series](#)
- ❖ Articles about [Learning Spanish](#)



# Insure your road trip in Mexico

One of the common assumptions American and Canadian visitors make when they drive to Mexico with their car is that their home-issued auto insurance policy will cover them here.

It doesn't, and it can't, and [this article explains why.](#)

Mexico Auto Insurance





## Meeting and greeting people in Mexico

Meeting and greeting formalities are important in Mexico, and failure to follow social protocols may be interpreted by others as impoliteness or coldness on your part.

Whereas in the US and some places in Europe people will happily meet and just say "hello, nice to meet you," in Mexico, the *correct physical contact is essential* to build trust and respect with others.

### Personal space

Mexicans tend to stand closer to each other than people do in the USA and Europe, for example. It may be off-putting at first if you are used to having two feet or more of 'air' between you and other people (and especially those of the same gender as you), but in Mexico it's quite common for people to stand and converse with each other a foot or less away from each other, regardless of gender. Stepping back too far may be taken as a sign of mistrust.

### Men meeting men

Men always shake hands when they meet and before they depart each other's company. An "*abrazo*" (hug) is shared between friends and business associates with an established and productive relationship; if you are unsure about whether to hug, allow the other person to lead: if, while shaking hands, he pulls you in toward him, follow through with your left arm on his back, and give him 2 or 3 pats on the back.

### Men meeting women

It's appropriate for a man to bow slightly when meeting a woman; in social situations, women may lean toward you to kiss; you should follow through with a light kiss on the cheek. (Only one kiss.) Hugging is as above for 'men meeting men.' Note that, in initial business meetings and formal situations, it is less usual for women to expect a kiss on the cheek, and most women will simply offer a handshake.

### Women meeting women

In social situations where women know each other, women will always hug and kiss each other on the cheek. If the women are being introduced for the first time, a light handshake is a *minimum* gesture, and the woman may also lean forward to kiss on the cheek (wait for the other person to lead if you're unsure).

If the social situation is special, for example, the person being introduced is celebrating a birthday or experiencing bereavement, then women will usually give the other a kiss on the cheek *and* a hug; it is also likely that women will kiss on the cheek and hug when they depart, also.

## General observations on meeting and greeting people in Mexico

If you are introduced to a man or woman, you should always follow the protocols above: physical contact is essential; never simply stand there and say "hello, nice to meet you."

Once you have built a rapport and have a friendship developing, you will find that your Mexican hosts will be much warmer, and physical contact in the "meet and greet" process will be more prominent, e.g., handshakes and hugs will be firmer and last longer.

Don't allow any personal reserve you might harbor to interfere with this process: it is an essential aspect of gaining people's trust and understanding in Mexico.



## A note about people's names

In Mexico, people have three names: Their First name, their Paternal name, and their Maternal name. Written, they will often use all three (or the third may be abbreviated with the first letter), but verbally they will use the first two. For example, Maria Vázquez Laredo would introduce herself as Maria Vázquez, or Señora/Señorita Vázquez (although see section below about Titles). In most situations where you do not know the person, and especially formal situations, you should refrain from using first names until invited to do so.

### FURTHER INSIGHT

❖ [¿Mande Usted?](#)

## The use of titles in Mexico

Professional titles are extremely important in Mexico —they a significant status symbol— even in some informal situations.

Professionals with a degree are not referred to as *Señor* or *Señora/Señorita* in professional (and some social) situations, but instead with their professional title.

## The most common titles in Mexico

Here are the most common titles you will come across in Mexico:

- *Licenciado/a* (Professional e.g., Lawyer, BSc, etc.)
- *Ingeniero/a* (Engineer)
- *Doctor/a* (Doctor)
- *Arquitecto/a* (Architect)
- *Maestro/a* (Master, often used for fine artists and master crafts people), and
- *Professor/a* (Professor)

When you are being introduced to someone with a title, the person making the introduction may refer to them by their title; in this case, follow the example and refer to the person *continually* using the title until you are invited to use, perhaps, a first name.

*If the person you are meeting immediately refers to themselves using their professional title, you can take that as a cue to know that the conversation will be formal, even if the situation may be a social or informal one.*

It's also important to respect seniority even in informal situations, for example, when in the company of respected or admired senior citizens it's appropriate to use *Don* for men and *Doña* for women.

### FURTHER INSIGHTS

❖ For a summary about titles and social etiquette read: [This Title is Better Than No Title](#)



## Eating out: dining etiquette in Mexico

Here are some key tips in regard to eating out and dining socially in Mexico.

For information about attending business meals, refer to part two of this guide which discusses business etiquette in Mexico.

### Invitations and bill settlement protocols

If you invite someone to eat out, it is assumed (and expected) that you will settle the bill. *Splitting the bill is not done in Mexico* and, indeed, suggesting it should be done is considered rude and uncouth. The invitee(s) will usually offer to pay but *this is a social grace*, and one that should **always** be politely declined. If you are invited out for a meal you, too, should offer to pay, and then gracefully accept the decline of your offer.

### Breakfast, lunch or dinner, and supper

**Social breakfasts** may last for thirty minutes or for two or more hours, depending on the situation.

**Lunch or dinner** is the main meal of the day, usually starting between 2 and 4 p.m. and you should always plan to spend at least two hours enjoying this meal; it's rude to rush off immediately afterwards.

**Dinners and suppers** in Mexico tend to be 'friends and family' affairs; supper is taken from any time after 8 p.m. and can start as late as 10 p.m. Business dinners and suppers are uncommon except between close business associates. Being invited to dinner—and especially if you are invited to a person's own home—is quite an honor. You may take wine and/or flowers if you have been invited to dinner at someone's home. If you only take one item, we recommend you take flowers.

### Dress code at a Mexican restaurant

Formal restaurants should always be attended with a shirt and tie; a formal dress for women. Less formal settings may befit smart-casual attire; but it's generally impolite to show up in casual attire, especially for dinner. If you are unsure about the attire for a dining arrangement, talk with your host, contact the restaurant or, as a last resort, dress formally for dinner and smart-casual for breakfast or lunch.

#### FURTHER INSIGHT

##### ❖ [On Mexican meals and mealtimes](#)

### Observations on table etiquette

Here are some notes and tips in relation to table etiquette when you are dining in Mexico, whether at a restaurant or at someone's home:

- If you are at a restaurant, it is customary to allow your host to order for you. If you are the host, ascertain your guest's choices and order accordingly on their behalf;
- Always keep your hands above the table;



- ◆ Never get up to leave (e.g., to use the restroom) *soon after the meal is finished*, unless it's an emergency;
- ◆ Excess drinking is frowned upon in Mexico; particularly (but not exclusively) when it's undertaken by women: always regulate your alcohol intake in these social occasions;
- ◆ It is local custom for men to offer toasts; the traditional toast in Mexico is "*salud*" (health);
- ◆ It is customary for the host to say "*buen provecho*," or perhaps just "*provecho*" before starting a meal; *provecho*, literally translated from Spanish, means "benefit," and is the linguistic equivalent of the French "*bon appetit*";
- ◆ Some foods, like *tacos*, *tortas* and *tostadas* are eaten using your fingers; using a knife and fork may be impractical and even look comical; if in doubt, follow the lead of your host(s);
- ◆ Good topics of conversation at a meal include family (asking sincerely about your host's family is always warmly appreciated), Mexican culture, museums, art and architecture, cuisine, and fond travel experiences;
- ◆ It's advisable not to bring up the topics of war, politics, immigration, drugs, or earthquakes.

### Tipping etiquette at restaurants in Mexico

Mexico has a [strong tipping culture](#) and, if you are settling the bill, you **must** include a tip (unless the service was poor, that is unlikely). 10% to 15% of the total is normal, depending on the class of establishment and level of service you received. At [Mexican diners](#) and similar places 10% is sufficient; at higher-end restaurants and bistros, 15% is expected for good service. The 18%-25% rates now often expected at high-end restaurants in the United States are not practiced in Mexico; 15% is considered quite acceptable.

### FURTHER INSIGHTS

- ❖ For more details about meals in Mexico, read the article on Mexperience [On Mexican Meals and Mealtimes](#)
- ❖ Carnivores should read [¿Qué término?](#) to learn about how to order cooked meat at a restaurant
- ❖ To learn about some of the different varieties of popular foods, read [Mole and other things you haven't tried](#)
- ❖ You can also browse all the latest articles on Mexperience about [Eating Out](#) and [Enjoying Food & Drink in Mexico](#)
- ❖ Learn more about [Mexico's tipping culture](#)

# Insurance coverages to support your lifestyle in Mexico

A range of Mexico-related insurance services exist that can mitigate the effect and expense of unforeseen events and mishaps when you're here.

[Learn about insurance coverages](#)



Mexico Insurance



## Etiquette in other social situations

### Dress code in Mexico

How people dress is another important aspect of Mexican social culture. In Mexico, people (especially in formal and business settings) often 'treat you as they see you', so you need to dress appropriately.

- For formal occasions, men should always wear a suit and tie and women a formal dress;
- For informal occasions, smart-casual attire may be appropriate depending on the venue and situation;
- If you are meeting people for the first time, it's better to dress *conservatively*: white, navy, black or gray for men's attire, or conservatively bright summer colors for women's dresses;
- For meetings and events at Mexico's coastal cities, e.g., Cancun, Acapulco, Los Cabos, etc. as well as other hot climate areas, e.g., Mérida, most gatherings don't require you to wear a shirt and tie (or suits) due to the heat and relaxed nature of these locations; smart casual (or elegant casual) using light clothing is worn instead.

### Time and punctuality in Mexico

The English are so well known for their punctuality that, in Mexico, there's a saying people use after agreeing a time with you: "*hora inglesa*," literally translated means "English time"; the inference is that the time agreed should be strictly adhered to.

In Mexico, time is not regarded as the panacea that it is in some other industrialized cultures. Time is a very flexible thing in Mexico. As such, don't be offended or surprised if your contacts in Mexico don't show up in timely fashion: tardiness can be due to a range of different things and if it happens there will always be a 'good reason' for it!

For social events, you could show up 30 minutes later than the time on the invitation. Even back home, people rarely show up for parties at the exact time; preferring to arrive a little later on: in Mexico this is quite common.

If you are sending out invitations to host a social gathering, keep in mind that guests won't show up at the time you state and, importantly, it is not customary to define an 'end time' for social occasions in Mexico. Sometimes invitations specify a time at which the event will end but in Mexico, this should be left open-ended, i.e., no end time should be specified on the invitation.

#### FURTHER INSIGHT

- ❖ [Time and time zones in Mexico](#)

### Gifts and gift-giving in Mexico

Gift-giving is significant aspect of Mexican social culture. Gifts are seen as symbols of affection and appreciation, and the absence of a gift on some occasions may be construed as a "cold shoulder." Here are some tips about giving gifts in Mexico:





- Although gifts are not required if you are invited to dinner, they are appreciated. A gift should always be offered if you are invited to someone's home for dinner, and flowers are the best gift in this case; alternatives are a bottle of wine, fine confectionery, or a small thoughtful gift related to (and produced or manufactured in) your home country if you are visiting from abroad;
- Secretaries and executive assistants appreciate gifts in return for their assistance; for example, when a friend's assistant helps you arrange some travel plans or booked a restaurant for you. If you are male and the assistant is female, you should indicate that the gift is from your spouse or partner;
- If you want to give a gift, inquiring about what kind of gift would like to be received may be considered discourteous; see a list below of 'safe' gifts to consider if you're in doubt;
- Do not give Mexicans gifts associated with tourist mementoes; for example, items sold at Mexican airports should be avoided as should any cheap imported goods supposedly from your home country; avoid giving gifts made in silver, unless it's an exceptionally fine or unusual art piece;
- A decent bottle of wine, and bottles of good quality (fine) tequila, whisky, or brandy make good gifts, but be sure you know the person's drinking preferences (some people don't drink alcohol);
- Ideal 'safe' gifts are flowers, fine plants, fine confectionery, silk scarves, bottles of good wine or good liquor (but see note above about alcohol), and unique or interesting gifts from your own country (but not related to your own country and made somewhere else).

### General observations on aspects of Mexican social etiquette

Here are some general notes of counsel about social etiquette in Mexico:

- Avoid referring to Americans as "*Gringos*." Although some American people refer to themselves as such, it's generally an inappropriate reference in conversation; a better alternative is to refer to them as "*Norteamericanos*";
- Mexico is on the North American continent and should never be referred to in conversations as being part of South or Central America; Mexico can be referred to as being part of Latin America;
- When meeting a small group of people, it's polite to greet each person *individually* (see notes above about greetings) and not everyone as group as is common in Anglicized culture;
- You should make a genuine attempt to **speak some Spanish**. It will be greeted with warmth and considered a gesture of good-will. You will never be ridiculed or made fun of for making the effort;
- It's important to *say good-bye to people properly* in Mexico; just walking out without saying good-bye may be construed as poor form, impoliteness, or coldness on your part—there should be some physical contact, for example shaking of hands or hugs, see the [meeting and greeting](#) section of this guide for more details;



- Women in Mexico expect (and appreciate) chivalry and gentlemanly behavior, for example, doors to be opened for them by men, and women allowed to enter first; and they also like being helped to their seat at a table;
- It's best practice not to compare Mexico with your own country, or other countries you have visited, except in constructive terms;
- The [Mexican flag](#) is an important emotional and political national symbol and should **never** (under any circumstances) be exhibited, used, or referred to in mimicry or defamatory terms;
- Vulgar language and sexual innuendo, in Spanish or English, is frowned upon in polite conversation in Mexico, and people are likely to judge you harshly for employing it, even if you don't mean offense;
- Some Mexicans use a "*pssst*" sound to attract another person's attention in public places, for example, a waiter's attention at a restaurant. Although this practice can be seen happening in Mexico, it is inappropriate for a foreigner to follow suit;
- When walking past someone who has yielded to you, or past people who are in conversation with each other (e.g., to excuse your passing between them); when exiting an elevator, or leaving an office or a room when others will remain present, it is customary to say "*permiso*"; and when someone says *permiso*, in these situations, it is customary to reply "*propio*";
- When someone sneezes, it's customary to say "*salud*," literally meaning 'health' although it is the linguistic equivalent of 'bless you' in English. If someone says this to you when you sneeze, it is customary to say '*gracias*' (thank you);
- Putting your hands on your hips is a sign of aggression in Mexico; and placing your hands inside your pockets when in conversation with someone, as in many countries, is regarded as bad manners

### Further reading related to society and culture in Mexico

Here are references on Mexperience for further insights and local knowledge about matters related to etiquette and culture:

- ❖ [Articles about Mexican culture](#)
- ❖ [Articles about local customs](#)
- ❖ [Articles about lifestyle in Mexico](#)
- ❖ [Articles about Mexico essentials \(practical insights\)](#)
- ❖ [Articles about learning Spanish](#)



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## PART TWO: BUSINESS ETIQUETTE IN MEXICO

### Introduction to business etiquette in Mexico

Conducting business in a foreign country is challenging at many levels and requires a good deal of pre-planning and preparation to get right. Most people seeking to work and trade with foreigners concern themselves foremost with their products and services and the “pitch” they will deliver to convince the Mexicans to buy from them; or perhaps to persuade the Mexicans to provide vital supplies or support services which are essential to their commercial success in Mexico. And yet, long before you consider how you will sell to or work with your Mexican business associates, you need to develop the relationship. If Mexicans don’t like you, they won’t work with you.

Social nuances within the business environment are important; entwined with and emanating from these emerge several business protocols which you should also familiarize yourself with and be prepared to acknowledge and act upon at the appropriate moment.

If you don’t lay the groundwork and enter into your meetings and negotiations with an understanding of what Mexican businesspeople are expecting from you at a personal and relationship-building level, your efforts to work in Mexico and your investment of time and resources may become frustrated at best, and forlorn at worst.

Business etiquette is a natural extension of social etiquette, and you should read the first part of this guide to give yourself a grounding of the core principles of Mexican social culture. This second part of the guide will help you to prepare for your work and trade meetings, presentations, and business negotiations.

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## Working and business hours in Mexico

Mexico's working hours in Mexico City have become attuned to those in the United States. However, exceptions apply, especially in smaller towns and cities, and in coastal regions. Here is a general outline of business hours in Mexico today:

**Offices:** Office hours are generally from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Office lunches usually begin between the hours of 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.; most last an hour or less, although working business lunches can last 2-3 hours or more, so be prepared to stay longer on some occasions.

**Factories:** Factory hours in Mexico are tailored to suit the company's operations; some factories, especially *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) can operate 24-hour shifts (3x8) as and when demand calls for this; conversely, when demand wanes, hours may be cut back.

**Banks:** In an era now long past, Mexican banks were infamous for their short opening hours and long lines as customers flocked to cram-in all their banking business in the morning hours. However, with the development of Mexico's banks in the 1990s, improvements have been made, branches of main banks are now open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., some branches open Saturdays; online banking and electronic transfers have also helped to reduce the crowds and the lines at all banks.

### FURTHER INSIGHTS

- ❖ For further information about banking see [banks & banking services in Mexico](#)
- ❖ Mexperience guide to [money in Mexico](#)
- ❖ Articles about [money, banking, and personal finance](#) in Mexico
- ❖ Articles about [Mexico's banknotes](#)

## Understanding business breakfasts, lunches, and dinners

In Mexico, different kinds of business meetings take place over meals, depending on the time of day. First though, a note about the bill:

### Business meal expenses

It is not customary to split the bill and, indeed, it is frowned upon in Mexico. As a general rule, the person doing the selling pays. The exception is if you are the seller and you have been invited to the meal by the other party, although it is polite to offer to pay, anyway. (See the section in part one about [bill settlement protocols](#).) When you pay your bill, you should include the appropriate tip—see part one of this guide for advice [on tipping](#) for further details—and if the other party offers to pay, recognize that this is a social grace and respectfully decline the offer.

### Business breakfasts

Business breakfasts are common in Mexico and tend to start between 8 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. They take place in good restaurants, and it is the meal *where most business is done*. Paperwork, files, charts, facts and figures come pouring out over the table during business breakfasts. Business deals can be firmly agreed and/or closed over a business breakfast. Business breakfasts tend to last no more than two hours.



### Business lunches:

In Mexico, this is the main meal of the day and will consist of soup, starter, main course, dessert, coffee, cheese, etc. These meals start between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. and can last for two or more hours. A business lunch is *not a detailed business discussion session* as breakfast meetings can be. During lunch times, Mexican businesspeople will want to get to know you, and they will not do business with you if they don't know you, or don't like you. *Business ideas, concepts, and possibilities are discussed; specifics are not.* Don't get your paperwork and charts out—this is not the time. During lunch, you 'network', you socialize a little; you keep the conversation in the 'concept and possibility' arena only. Lunches are also "deal maker" times, used to *close deals once the detail has been pre-negotiated and agreed* beforehand. Lunches can go on until the early evening on occasions, so don't go and schedule anything immediately after—the last thing you want to do is excuse yourself for another appointment.

### Business dinners

Dinner (or supper) in Mexico is a late affair, usually it starts around 9 p.m. Family is important in Mexico, and Mexicans like to share time with their families in the evening. Other than in exceptional circumstances, business is not discussed over a dinner meal. If you are invited to a dinner, only discuss business if your host discusses it. Otherwise, treat it as a social and networking occasion. See lunches, above.

#### Further Insight

##### FURTHER INSIGHT

- ❖ [On Mexican meals and mealtimes](#)
- ❖ [Bill settlement protocols](#)
- ❖ [Tipping at restaurants](#)

### Use of telephone and email

Email and the telephone are used to arrange appointments, and importantly, to *confirm appointments*. If your meeting is scheduled far in advance, be sure to follow-up a week or so before and confirm the details of your business meeting.

Some secretaries might not speak English; so be prepared speak in Spanish if you need to or have an interpreter on hand to assist you.

Executives (and their assistants) in Mexico carry a smartphone device and constantly check their incoming messages. The use of messaging systems, especially WhatsApp, is ubiquitous in Mexico and some personal assistants might share their mobile device number with you so that you can contact them that way. If they do, be mindful of the frequency of contact and also of the time and time differences between your home country and Mexico to ensure that you do not unnecessarily disturb the assistant outside of business hours.





## FURTHER INSIGHTS

- ❖ See the guide [communications in Mexico](#) on Mexperience for in-depth information about staying in touch when you are visiting Mexico
- ❖ Articles about [internet and WiFi access in Mexico](#)
- ❖ Articles about [telephony services in Mexico](#)
- ❖ Learn about [Mexico's protocols for dialing phones](#); inside Mexico and from abroad
- ❖ Articles about Mexico's [Time and Time Zones](#)

## Authority, status, and decision-makers

Mexican businesses tend to be very hierarchical. Status, hierarchy, and titles are important in Mexico and you should acknowledge this and act accordingly. Here are some tips:

- if a Mexican firm's top managers are present at a meeting, they will expect the same from your firm. They will be offended if subordinates are sent to meet with them and your reputation may be significantly damaged if this happens;
- conversely, if a firm sends lower-level managers to deal with high level people in your company, then you will be wasting your time;
- make sure that you are meeting and negotiating with the people who will be making the decisions. More often than not, these will be senior people within the company; furthermore
- do not be afraid to ask beforehand if the people you are planning to meet with are authorized to make decisions related to your mutual intentions and goals.

## Language in business meetings

Spanish is Mexico's official language, and business meetings normally take place in Spanish. English is widely spoken in business circles —today more than ever before— and if you don't speak Spanish, your hosts may be willing to hold the meeting in English but check beforehand to avoid embarrassment and to arrange for an interpreter if you cannot negotiate in Spanish.

### Do you really need to speak Spanish?

Even though your hosts are likely to accommodate your English language needs, you should try to [learn some Spanish](#) if you intend to develop significant business in Mexico. Even an attempt to communicate with broken Spanish will be warmly appreciated and seen as a sign of interest and respect, especially in greetings and when you leave. A word of caution though: if your Spanish is not good enough to express ideas clearly, and to negotiate terms (and understand the other party's terms and demands), it is better to use English during the meeting, including for any presentations you deliver. Mexperience has dedicated a section to [Learning Spanish](#) which you can connect to for further information and resources.



If you do not speak any Spanish at all, and your hosts do not speak English, hire an interpreter (at your expense) to attend the meeting with you. In such an event, meet with your interpreter beforehand; brief her/him about the likely content of the meeting, including any technical terms that you will be using, as the interpreter may need to familiarize themselves with these in advance. When speaking through an interpreter remember to address your host and not the interpreter. You may need to moderate your speaking speed to allow for translation.

When speaking in English to a Mexican who understands English, speak clearly, slowly (but not stupidly slow), and if you have a British English accent try to pronounce your vowels and the letter "r" more than you otherwise would. Most Mexicans learn English by listening to Americans speak and a British accent can throw some people off. The closer you speak to "Queen's English," the harder it may be for others to understand some words. If you have an English regional, Welsh, Scottish or Irish accent, this may help or hinder—read the body language to determine whether you're being understood.

### Written communications and sales/marketing collateral

If you plan to sell your products or services to Mexicans, all of your marketing literature, product manuals, warranty info, labeling, and anything you expect to leave with the contact should be presented in Spanish.

Be sure to come prepared with all your relevant information translated into Spanish. It will show respect and show that you are serious about doing business in Mexico. If you start to ship products to Mexico, by law, you will need to have all written communication documents in Spanish, especially the labeling.

#### FURTHER INSIGHTS:

- ❖ Language articles on [euphemisms](#) and [formal vs informal](#) context
- ❖ Learn about [Spanish Language](#) and get deep insights into the nuances and use of Spanish in Mexico with the [PinPoint Spanish Series](#)
- ❖ Articles about [Learning Spanish](#)
- ❖ Search for [Translation Agencies in Mexico](#) (Google)
- ❖ Search for [Interpreter Agencies in Mexico](#) (Google)
- ❖ [Mexican Translators' Association](#)
- ❖ [American Translators Association](#)

### Business dress code in Mexico

Mexicans tend to dress formally for business meetings with suits and ties and will expect you do the same in the major cities (Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey). This is also true for most cities inland.

The exception to this rule is if you are meeting in a hot region or climate, for example, Acapulco or Puerto Vallarta on Mexico's Pacific coast. Next to the beach, meeting attire tends to be smart informal: light pants or slacks, and short sleeved collared shirts (not T-shirts) are acceptable, but your feet should be covered—no flip flops or similar. Dress light, and dress respectfully.

# Assistance with your Mexico residency application

Get personalized consultation and advice on your approach, as well as practical assistance and support whether it's your initial application, a renewal, or troubleshooting

[The Mexico Immigration Assistance service is here to help you](#)



Immigration Assistance



With the advent of tele-working and ‘internet culture’ some companies in Mexico are adopting a more casual dress code, and smart casual wear is acceptable in some situations, for example for initial meetings at coffee shops or to develop concepts. People working freelance, especially in the digital sphere, tend to wear smart casual by default.

Executive-level employees and salespeople will usually dress formally (or elegant casual) if they are meeting a customer or supplier. If you are not familiar with your host’s dress code, it’s better to err on the conservative side and wear a suit and tie at non-beach, temperate climate locations; and smart casual (collared shirts, elegant pants, and matching footwear) for beach and hot climate locations.

For business-social gatherings (outings, picnics, etc.) wear smart casual: chinos, polo shirt, and in cooler climates, a pull-over for the evening, etc. If you're playing golf, you'll be required to wear proper golf wear, just as you would do at established golf clubs in other countries.

Regardless of the work sphere, dress respectfully with a collared shirt, smart pants, and appropriate footwear; t-shirts, especially anything with a printed motif or statement, casual shorts and beachwear, sneakers and flip-flops are *not* appropriate attire for business gatherings where impressions count. You might not be taken seriously if you don’t wear what is deemed appropriate business attire in Mexico.

#### FURTHER INSIGHTS

- ❖ Climate zones: [land of three lands](#)
- ❖ Articles about [climate and weather](#) in Mexico
- ❖ Learn about [seasons in Mexico](#)

## Greeting protocols at a business setting

Greeting protocols in business settings are similar to those in social settings (see the first part of this guide about social etiquette); however, particular attention should be paid to titles and to the formalities of the greeting and farewell rituals, because these first impressions can be so important, especially when you are meeting your contacts for the first time.

### How to address people in conversation

In Mexico, people have three names: Their first name, their paternal name, and their maternal name. Written, they will use all three (or the third will be often abbreviated with the first letter), but verbally they will use the first two. For example, Maria Vázquez Laredo would introduce herself as Maria Vázquez, or Señora/Señorita Vázquez (although see note below about Titles).

### Being respectful in regard to professional titles

Professional titles are *extremely* important in Mexico—they a big social and cultural status symbol. Professionals with a degree are not referred to as *señor* or *señora/señorita*, but instead with their title. The most common professional titles are:

- *Licenciado/a* (Professional e.g., Lawyer, BSc, etc.)
- *Ingeniero/a* (Engineer)
- *Doctor/a* (Doctor)





- *Arquitecto/a* (Architect)
- *Maestro/a* (Master, often used for fine artists and master crafts people), and
- *Professor/a* (Professor)

### When you are unsure of a person's title

Some people still print the abbreviation (Lic., Ing., Arq., Dr.) on their business cards or include these in the footer contact information of their email correspondence, but Mexican companies are increasingly dropping this protocol as they lean towards adopting more 'global' business etiquette. Also, increasing numbers of companies use first names to address employees, customers, and suppliers. However, you should allow your Mexican hosts to take the lead in this area.

If you are unsure whether the person you are addressing has a university degree, then you could assume a title and use the one that is most likely to represent their trade, but many professionals can be offended if the title you use is incorrect and will not hesitate to correct you! If in doubt, *señor* or *señora* or *señorita* is perfectly acceptable. If you are talking to the person's personal assistant or the receptionist, and ask for 'la señora Vázquez', and in reply the assistant says, 'La [*licenciada, ingeniera, doctora*] lo atenderá en breve' you know to refer to the person by that title right away.

#### FURTHER INSIGHT

- ❖ A summary of titles and social etiquette in language may be gleaned from this article on Mexperience: [This Title is Better than No Title](#)
- ❖ [Greeting protocols](#) (part one of this guide)

### Business greeting protocols

Business greeting protocols are virtually identical to social greeting protocols:

**Men meeting men:** Men always shake hands when they meet and before they depart each other's company. An "*abrazo*" (hug) is shared between friends or in business when a relationship has been established; *wait for your Mexican contact to lead with this*. If, while shaking hands, he pulls you in toward him, follow through with your left arm on his back, and give him 2 or 3 pats on the back. Mexicans might signal to hug you even at your first meeting *if you have been in touch with them over the phone or email for some time* – it is how they show their pleasure in finally getting to meet you in person.

**Men meeting women:** A formal handshake is appropriate for business when meeting and before departing; some women may lean toward you to kiss; you should follow through with a light kiss on the cheek (only one, unlike Italy, for example). Hugging, as above.

**Women meeting women:** A formal handshake is appropriate, and it is likely that women will kiss on the cheek when they meet and depart. Hugging, as above.

**Generally:** If you are introduced to a man or woman, you should always follow the protocols above: Physical contact is essential—never just stand there and say 'hello, nice to meet you'. Once you have built a rapport and have a friendship developing, you will find that your Mexican hosts will be much warmer, and physical contact in the "meet and greet" process will be more prominent (e.g., handshakes and hugs will be firmer and last longer).



In Mexico conversations take place at close physical distance; stepping back may be regarded as unfriendly. By nature, Mexicans are warm and friendly and make a lot of physical contact. They often touch shoulders or hold another's arm. To withdraw from this tactile approach to human interaction is considered impolite or cold. Don't let any personal reserve you might harbor interfere with this process: it is essential to gaining people's trust and understanding in Mexico.

## Women in business

Although Mexico is sometimes associated with a "*machismo*" attitude towards women, contemporary Mexico is not usually like this in professional circles. The modern Mexican career or businesswoman is cosmopolitan, professional, and respected.

If you are a woman planning to do business in Mexico, whether independently or as part of an organization, you should find that you are accepted, respected, and treated courteously and professionally by the majority of businesspeople here.

## Business meeting formats

If you're used to regimented, "checklist and orderly" agendas, think again! Mexicans are highly creative and very artistic people. They don't tend to adhere to the regimented US/European-style meeting formats; they sense it breaks down the creative process that leads to new ideas and better concepts.

Be prepared for your meeting format to follow a hap-hazard pattern, with subjects changing various times and tangents commonplace. Don't attempt to force any linear agenda "orderliness" on your Mexican hosts: it probably won't work.

Your meeting should have an agenda and you should take it with you. Check-off the points as you cover them, but don't arrive at meeting expecting it to be followed through in the order in which they are listed. Be flexible, and you'll find that your meeting will flow well. You will be able to cover all your points of business, even if not in the order, or rhythm, you had anticipated.

## Tips for delivering business presentations

A quirk of presenting a proposal to Mexican companies is that any proposals and offers you send ahead of time (written or presentational) are unlikely to be read in any detail, *or at all*; other than perhaps the introduction and a glance at the price breakdown page if one is included. The company you are selling to will want to schedule a follow-up presentation meeting and will expect you to walk the company's representatives through the proposal in detail. This is distinct to the US, for example, where the company you are selling to will usually read the proposal in detail ahead of time, and the follow-up meeting will be a review about the proposal with detailed questions or discussion points raised about specific aspects without the need to walk through the entire detail.

If you are planning on delivering a PowerPoint presentation in-person, it's usually a good idea to carry your own projector unless the gathering is small and you can present directly off your laptop screen, or a





desktop screen connected to a laptop. Larger companies will usually offer the use of a projector; arrange this beforehand if you intend to project your presentation to a larger audience.

If you are presenting your proposal online, have your presentation and supporting materials prepared and ready for delivery across the online presentation platform you are using, e.g., Zoom, Skype, et al. These platforms all enable users to share screens as well as upload files with presentations for participants to view.

PowerPoint presentations can be useful to overcome many language barriers when you include diagrams, flowcharts, images, etc. However, as mentioned above, agendas in Mexico are not always followed point by point so you should not rely entirely on your presentation. Be prepared for some sidetracking due to interruptions for questions, different ideas, tangents, etc.

Unless *specifically* asked to present very technical information at these meetings, it is usually a good idea to steer clear of using too much technical jargon. Many decision makers in Mexico are more interested in “what” your product can do and not in “how” it does it, and they do not always fully understand the very technical (systems, engineering, etc.) aspects of the product—and often they will leave the detail to other people in their company to deal with and understand. To avoid any possible embarrassment, it’s best to stick to the basics – if they are interested in your product, follow-up meetings can be arranged with the appropriate technical personnel. If in any doubt, ask questions before the meeting to ascertain what the audience is expecting to see, and what questions they have that need answering.

#### FURTHER INSIGHT

❖ [Language formalities](#) (part one of this guide)

### Tips for business negotiations in Mexico

When you're doing business in Mexico, the most important thing to remember is that *the relationship must be developed first*. Mexican people make friends first, and then they do business, not the other way around.

If you do not take time to develop a relationship by building rapport and trust, then you may as well not be in Mexico trying to develop your business. You may have the best product (or they may have the very thing your company needs), but if you don't build the relationship, they will be highly reluctant to do business with you or the relationship might come into unforeseen problems later on. Therefore, your negotiations should initially center on *building a relationship*.

Small talk is imperative at the start of these meetings. Asking about someone’s family, especially children, is a good way to break the ice; other subjects could be the local climate, places of interest in Mexico that you have visited or heard about, and international **non-political** events happening at present.

Be prepared to speak about yourself, too. Mexicans will usually ask questions which might seem overly personal to Americans or Europeans, but that’s part of their culture. You don’t need to (and should not) share too many details at the outset but be sure to share enough to give the other party a brief outline of your lifestyle, your family, your core values, and your priorities. Avoiding questions completely might arouse suspicion and may not leave you in good standing after the meeting.

# Medical air evacuation from Mexico

Medical insurance provides certain worthwhile coverages, but sometimes a fully-managed medical evacuation plan might be necessary.

[Learn how medical evacuation from Mexico works](#)

Medical Evacuation



**Subjects to avoid at all meetings:** politics, religion, earthquakes, illegal aliens, drugs, or anything that may show Mexico in a bad light. Mexicans may criticize their own country between themselves, *but don't like foreigners to do so*. If your host raises any of these matters, remain impartial and do not take any specific position on them; neither should you offer any of your own opinions; express sincere regret for loss and express genuine hope for future improvement.

Begin the process of getting to know your hosts and be aware that their first impressions of you will count a lot. Use this time to develop the relationship and build a foundation for a working friendship. Your hosts certainly will.

Keep in mind the setting you are in. Most initial meetings begin over breakfast or lunch, and you should read the relevant sections in this guide to ensure you play your cards right. Don't rush and, in tandem, don't allow your Mexican business contacts to rush you. Trying to short-circuit this process can lead to problems later on.

### A note about doing business and trading at-distance

While online trade and distance contracts are increasing now, key business deals (especially high value contracts or investments that are being initiated for the first time) are seldom, if ever, closed over the phone, or by email, or video link. The stronger your foundational relationship is (and that might include pre-existing in-person meetings), and the more trust that has accumulated between you from these, will make the closing of the final deal easier.

In some situations, your Mexican counterparts will insist on a face-to-face meeting to agree important matters or sign the contract. In some circumstances this might be possible using a video conference. If you both have an excellent reputation in the market you operate in, with good third-party references you each trust to underpin that, this will help to close deals at-distance, even first-time, higher value deals.

The currency of trust that exists in the US, Canada, and Europe in regard to trading and trusting businesses to deliver their promises through electronic trade is not yet as well developed in Mexico. For larger projects (or high value investments) your business associates will usually want to meet you in person at least once, and you should want to meet them, too.

### Gift-giving between business associates

Token gifts may be exchanged by both parties during business meetings in Mexico. US and European affiliate companies usually abide by the strict gift-giving policies of their corporate offices.

These can be ideal gifts to offer your customers and hosts at Mexican companies, too. Silver trinkets are quite common in Mexico, so avoid giving gifts made in silver, unless it's an exceptionally fine or unusual art piece.

If you are doing business with a Mexican company, you may receive an expensive gift from your hosts, for example, an iPad; expensive designer pens, etc. Although this practice is frowned upon at US and European corporations, it is part of the business culture here. **In Mexico it is considered extremely rude to refuse or return these gifts.** Different companies have different policies to handle these situations, but in any event accept the gift gracefully and never —ever— refuse or return it.



## FURTHER INSIGHT

- ❖ [Gifts and gift-giving in Mexico](#) (part one of this guide)

### Credit- and reference-checking practices

Credit checking agencies are now commonplace in Mexico as its credit systems have grown and matured over the last couple of decades. Getting a credit check undertaken on a company or individual in Mexico is not as straightforward as it can be in the US/CA/Europe; however, other checks can be made to protect your interests and potential business investment. Here are some tips:

- before you commit to an agent or distributor, be sure that he/she/they have the capabilities, infrastructure, and resources to deliver what they say they are going to do;
- contact your [country's consulate in Mexico](#) to ask about any commercial credit or reference checking services they might offer; these might be offered by the consulate for a fee;
- visit warehousing/distribution centers to inspect their facilities and assess their access to resources. Check online to ensure that the facilities you inspect belong to the people you are intending to treat with;
- ask for previous client references and follow these up personally. Find existing customers and contact some of them to ask about their experience with the company. A reputable business in Mexico will be delighted to refer you to clients they work with or have worked with in the recent past. If they are not immediately forthcoming on these matters, then you should reconsider your potential business partners;
- visit established online business portals including any other industry-specific portals to check the profiles of key personnel and companies listed there.

### Tips for dealing with requests for exclusivity

Requests for exclusivity (for distribution of a product or service) are a common practice in Mexico, as some firms believe that they will put a lot of energy into marketing and selling your product, only for you to dilute the value they can gain by introducing multiple supply chains, and possible 'internal competition.'

*Only sign into an exclusivity deal if you are certain that the people you are negotiating with have the capability and resources to drive your product/s effectively in the markets you want to reach.*

Mexico is a large and complex country, and it requires significant resources to reach (distribute) a product or service nationwide. For this reason, many foreign companies who want a national distribution operation of a physical product in Mexico will contract companies or agents to distribute/sell by region and give exclusivity within that region only; or otherwise deal with a company that has a well-established national distribution network in place.

In all cases, exclusivity deals should have finite time scales, as well as specific targets and objectives tied to the exclusivity contract, and a formal review carried out at the end of each agreed time period.



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Avoid embarrassment and possible time-wasting by raising this issue at the outset; know your position and be clear about your position in regard to exclusivity; if the other party assumed exclusivity when you did not, you might expend considerable time and money in negotiations that will fail later in the discussions due this issue.

### **Additional resources for doing business in Mexico**

- ❖ Browse the section on Mexperience about [working in Mexico](#)
- ❖ For further insights, browse [articles about working and business in Mexico](#)
- ❖ Information about [visas and immigration](#)
- ❖ Find [Mexican consulates abroad](#)
- ❖ Contact [foreign consulates in Mexico](#)



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