



Top 9 Mistakes People Make When Moving To Mexico

By Taniel Chemsian

One of the best things I've done is move to Mexico. One of the most exciting things I've done is move to Mexico. One of the most challenging things I've done is move to Mexico. Packing up and moving across the border wasn't just about relocating, it was also about rebooting my life, which basically meant starting-from-scratch and pressing the restart button. I moved to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico from Los Angeles when I was 32 years old. 17 years later, I still live here and love it.

It doesn't mean it was all smooth sailing. There were plenty of ups-and-downs and new discoveries. It took me a good 18-24 months to adjust to my new environment, culture, government, to name a few. I wish I knew a few things back then that I know now.

Here is a list of a few 'whoops' I and others have made when moving to Mexico – try to catch yourself before making the same mistakes!

1. Expecting Everything To Be Cheaper

Contrary to what you've been told, everything is not cheaper in Mexico, nor should they be. Granted, a number of things are considerably less than they are in the U.S. and Canada, while other expenses can be around the same, if not more.

My cost of living in Mexico is lower than it would be in the U.S., but there are some items that can be more.

My grocery bill is generally half of what I would spend in Los Angeles. Car gas is more or less on par with California gas prices. At a local gas station in Puerto Vallarta, gas is currently around \$19.95 pesos (97 cents) per liter – which comes out to approx. \$3.67 USD per gallon (exchange rate 20.5 MN pesos per \$1 USD). The 2021 annual property tax for my condo was \$3,522.88 MN Pesos (approx. \$172 USD). My friends think I am kidding when I tell them that is the annual amount. I also

get a discount if I pay the entire amount in full at the beginning of the year!

Health insurance, medicine, water bill and telephone, home internet, are considerably less than what I was paying in L.A. For basic home telephone/high-speed internet, I pay \$389 MN pesos per month (approx. \$19 USD), and it includes unlimited local calls, unlimited calls to the USA and Canada, and high-speed internet. Up until 2003, I was paying \$75 USD per visit for cleaning service in L.A. – In Mexico, I'm currently paying around \$18-\$20 USD per visit. Cars cost more, as well as computers, televisions, other electronics, and some clothing items because most of those items are imported.

In general, real estate is considerably less in Mexico than comparable properties in the U.S. and Canada. But you will likely pay a premium in highly desirable destinations, neighborhoods, cities, newer construction, ocean views, abundance of amenities, and for location (beachfront/oceanfront, in the city, etc.), to name a few.

2. Believing Everything You Read Online/In Ex-pat Forums

When I moved to Mexico in 2003, the internet was not as an integral part of our lives as it is now - online forums weren't popular, there was no Facebook, no Twitter, no YouTube, and whatever we think of as 'social media' now served a different purpose back then. We weren't bombarded with so many opinions, comments, reviews, etc. I find some individual online posts and/or ex-pat forums helpful and as a decent general guide. But I also see many posts filled with misinformation, biased and bitter comments, negative towards almost everything, or just plain wrong!

If you believe everything you read online, you might as well lock yourself up at home and never step foot outside the door. I find it more helpful to try and connect with a person that's a professional or someone with some experience in a particular topic I'm interested in or a question I may have, reach out to a friend that either knows the answer or can refer someone who might know, or do a thorough deep dive and perform my own due diligence. There's too much false and negative white-noise in the online world (and real world), so consider taking all of the information you absorb online with a grain of salt.

3. Only Eating And Shopping In Tourist Zones

I live in Puerto Vallarta, and some of the best retail stores and restaurants in the city are located in the touristic areas. Some of the most special gastronomical experiences can be found off the beaten path. Getting out of the 'zone' and venturing into some of the local neighborhoods may surprise you.

Throughout the years, I've discovered a number of smaller family-owned restaurants and businesses outside of the tourist areas that offer great food, products and services. If venturing into the unknown makes you uncomfortable, consider making friends with locals. They probably know all the ins-and-out of your new town/city and can introduce you to a number of eateries and shops.

Getting out of the tourist zones will also help you adjust from the vacationer/tourist mindset to resident mentality in your new hometown.

4. Assuming Credit Cards Are Accepted Everywhere

Not all countries grew up with a credit card culture like the U.S. and Canada. It's not uncommon to come across businesses, especially smaller/family-owned ones, that only accept cash. Credit card interest rates are historically higher in Mexico than their northern counterparts, so a number of smaller businesses opt to be cash only, including bars and restaurants.

ATMs are easily accessible in most cities throughout Mexico, but I recommend that you only use ATMs in established banks.

5. Not Investigating Available Healthcare Services In The Your Region

I recommend doing your research regarding healthcare services and facilities in your area, especially if you or a loved one has a condition that requires regular or specific medical attention. It's not uncommon for a smaller town or city not to have a large hospital that handles most types of medical procedures or treatments. If that's the case, finding out where you need to go in the event something happens and how long it will take for you to get there, can be the difference between life and death. I've seen the Puerto Vallarta medical community grow substantially in the last 17 years, with a number of smaller and large facilities having been built throughout the Bay of Banderas. Line up all your ducks in a row before you move. Do your research.

6. Expecting Mexican Nationals To Speak English

Don't get upset and throw a temper tantrum because a Mexican national you come across doesn't speak English—regardless if you are visiting a tourist destination or a remote town. I've seen it happen a number of times and it gets ugly pretty quickly. How would you feel if you were yelled at by a local for not speaking Spanish?

After all, you are in Mexico. One of the joys of living here is learning Spanish and integrating with the locals. It's not as hard as you think – one new Spanish phrase per day is a good start. I'm still not fluent in Spanish, but throughout the years, my ears have gotten used to the language and I find myself better able to communicate. The key word here is 'communicate' – if I can't seem to remember or know of a word in Spanish, I start talking with my hands, try Google translate or another app. That usually does the trick. Your effort to speak Spanish shows respect and will go a long way.

7. Saying 'in My Country, We Do It This Way'

It might be a local custom, cultural identity, the law, or 'that's just the way it's done here' – saying "In my country, we do it this way" can come off as ignorant, arrogant and rude. I've heard foreigners say this numerous times when things are not going their way, and it is never a good thing.

You are now living in a different country – with different customs, language, government, laws, local politics, financial system, business culture, etc. The way things were done back at home may not be how they're done in Mexico, or other parts of the world. Consider giving yourself and your new environment some time to adjust. For the most part, we seem to eventually figure things out and adapt to our new surroundings.

8. Expecting Things To Happen On Your Timeline

If you are used to a fast-paced lifestyle like New York City or Los Angeles, then it will be a bit of a shock to your system if you move to Mexico...or any smaller town for that matter! Adjusting to your environment may include adjusting to how and when things might get done. Over the years, I've come to realize when someone in Mexico says 'mañana', it doesn't necessarily mean 'tomorrow', it just means – not today.

9. Only Socializing With Other Foreigners Or Expats

One of the beauties and true gifts of living in Mexico is getting to know Mexicans and Mexican culture. There is comfort in staying in your mostly expat neighborhood but you are missing out on some truly amazing memories if you choose to live this way. Some of my fondest memories living here has been hanging out with my Mexican friends and their families. Having local Mexican friends also helps with getting stuff done as they are likely to know people, places and a few shortcuts.

When moving abroad, chances are many things will be different - new friends, culture, lifestyle and exciting opportunities that await can be transformative. Your personality changes, your view-point changes, what was important to you back then and what you view now as being essential and important changes. If you just have patience and a little faith, you will learn to adjust to your new home. It is an amazing gift and experience to live in a foreign country like Mexico. Any big life change comes with challenges and adjustments. This is no different. Eventually, your new life will become your new normal.

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