



## Driving Through Mexico: U.S.A. to Guatemala

### Mexico Driving Guide, Southbound

#### Brownsville, Texas to El Carmen, Guatemala

Since August, 2001 I have driven across Mexico both northbound and southbound many times. Occasionally someone will ask me for help with directions or tips concerning driving in Mexico. This guide isn't intended to be a comprehensive travel-log. However, if you put together some of the tips contained here along with a good road map of Mexico you should be well on your way to at least staying on the right road.

If your car is registered, (titled), in Guatemala with Guatemala plates, to get in to Mexico you will need either your **tarjeta de circulacion or your title**. I have used both on different occasions with no problem. If it's registered in the U.S. or Canada you will need your original title, free of liens in your name. You will also need a **valid driver's license, your passport, and your Mexican visa application** which you will get at the frontier when you cross in to Mexico. You will have to post a bond guaranteeing that you will take the car out of Mexico at some point. This can be done with a **credit card** or cash. I always use my credit card and it costs about \$30.00 U.S. I don't know the procedure or how much it costs if you choose to post a cash bond. Some people like to buy Mexican insurance for the trip but this is not required. If you want insurance and have U.S. or Canadian car plates you can purchase Mexican insurance online, (do a google search), or at the border in the same building where you obtain your visa and car import permit.

I have always driven my own vehicle which is titled in my name. If the car is yours, you will not have a problem getting it in to Mexico. There may be some way to take a vehicle other than your own in to Mexico, but I don't know what that procedure is. If you do plan on driving a car in to Mexico and the owner will not be with you, do your research before you get to the border and be ready for a hassle. I have seen people turned back by the Mexican officials even though they had a notarized permission letter from the owner.

- There are several border crossings in Brownsville. Stay on highway 77 through Brownsville to the end, where you will be at the last crossing. There is a \$2.25 fee on the U.S. side as you exit.
- As you approach the entrance area in Mexico stay to the left and drive under the awnings and angle park. Go into the building directly to your left and obtain your visa, and import permit for your vehicle. To get your car permit you will need a copy of your ID page of your passport, your driver's license, visa application paper, and car title. You can get copies at the booth where they sell insurance in the same building where you are getting your visa and car permit. If you need pesos you can purchase them with U.S. dollars at a money changer in an office in the building next to the building where you obtained your visa. There are also two banks in this building where you can pay for your visas. Everyone in your vehicle will have to go in to the office and fill out a visa form. When you fill out the form, in the box for your destination in Mexico put "transmigrante". **Important Note!** You will obtain and fill out the visa form there at the frontier to get your passport stamped. However, **the visas must be paid for at a bank in Mexico.** The fee for the visas is \$237.00, (pesos) for each visa. Sometime on your trip as you are travelling in Mexico this form must be paid for and stamped at a bank before you will be allowed to exit Mexico when you arrive at the Guatemala border. If you are travelling on weekends or holidays plan accordingly so you don't have a problem paying for this visa. Most banks in Mexico close at noon on Saturday. **The dollar symbol, \$, is used in Mexico to denote pesos.** From this point forward in this guide when you see the symbol, \$, it is pesos and not U.S. dollars. Recently I have paid for the visa at the same time I got the car permit and not later at a bank.
- As you depart the border station look for the sign to "Ciudad Victoria". When you get to the end of the drive go to the right on hwy 101. Go through the traffic light straight towards Ciudad Victoria. Just pass the light there is a bank with an ATM. If you need pesos this is a good place to stop and get them. ATM's are few and far between on your trip. Gas stations, (Pemex), typically do not take credit cards. You will need cash.
- Go quite a ways through Matamoros on this road until you see a McDonalds on your left. **This intersection is a little tricky.** There is a sign that says to turn left to Ciudad Victoria. Stay to the right of the overpass directly in front of you and you will turn left under the overpass from the center lane. Immediately after you go under the overpass there is a bank, (Banorte), with an ATM.
- At km292 there is a checkpoint where they may, or may not stop you to check your paperwork and contraband. If they don't come out and flag you down just slow down, but keep going. If you make it past this checkpoint you are now officially in Mexico. Happy travelling!

- At km255 there is an aduana checkpoint that is under construction, Jan. 22, 2009. If the checkpoint at km 292 is closed the one at km 255 will probably be open.
- Continue following the signs to Ciudad Victoria.
- At km128 turn left on hwy 180 toward Tampico/Soto la Marina.
- In Soto la Marina continue straight through town toward Aldama.
- Follow signs to Tampico.
- At Aldama follow signs to Tampico/Tuxpan.
- A few miles before Est. Manuel you will cross a new freeway. You will go under the freeway, make a u-turn on the highway from Aldama, and then exit to the right onto the freeway to Tampico.
- As you come in to Tampico follow the signs, "Tampico". There will start to be a lot of pedestrian traffic. **Slow down, yield, and obey traffic police!!!** Until you get around Tampico the highway is well patrolled. You will get a ticket for an infraction.
- These directions will take you on a bypass around Tampico.
- When you come to the Kenworth factory on your right you will see a sign Mexico/Veracruz pointing to turn right. Turn right at this intersection. Your next major destination point is Veracruz.
- You are now on the bypass which is a toll-road. Soon there is a sign; Tuxpan, Veracruz, Tampico. If you see this sign you are on the right road.
- After you get on to the bypass you will come to a toll booth in about twenty minutes. The toll is \$21.00.
- Follow the signs to Tuxpan/Mexico/Veracruz.
- You will come to a round-a-bout with a sign that indicates Tampico to the left, Ciudad Valles to the right. You want to go right.
- Soon after you go to the right at the round-a-bout you will cross a bridge with an estuary on the right and some large cranes on the left. Immediately after the bridge there is a Pemex station. If you see this you are on the right way.
- Stay on this road and in about ten minutes there will be a huge warehouse with a sign, ICA Fluor on your left. On the right there is an exit marked Tuxpan. Take this exit to the right and it will bring you back over the highway.
- After you cross the highway on the overpass there will be a sign Tuxpan/Poza Rica straight ahead.
- In about five minutes you will come to a toll booth and the toll is \$7.00.
- In about ten minutes you will come into a small community with several speed bumps and ship docks to your left. You are still on the bypass around Tampico.
- After you cross the bridge in this community go about five minutes and there will be a Pemex on your right. A couple of hundred meters past the Pemex the road forks. You want to go to the left and you will immediately start to climb up a hill. There is a sign at this intersection that says, Casa de Gobierno.

- Shortly you will intersect a four lane divided highway. Turn right towards Tuxpan.
- Continue on this road. It turns into a two lane and you will come to Tampico Alto in about twenty minutes. You are on the right road!
- About forty-five minute past Cerro Azul you will turn right towards Alamo. This right turn is easy to miss so be watching for the sign, "Alamo". If you see a large obelisk on your right and then a Pemex on your right you missed your turn.
- After you make the right turn toward Alamo go about two minutes and turn left towards Poza Rica/Alamo.
- Just past Alamo there is a bridge toll, \$7.00.
- Shortly after you go through Tihuatlan there will be an interchange where you will turn right. The sign says Mexico libre / Veracruz libre. Go right. Do not go straight in to Poza Rica. You are going to bypass Poza Rica. This road becomes a toll road.
- Continue on this road and follow the signs to Veracruz cuota.
- Do not take the Calzones/Veracruz libre exit; continue straight ahead on the cuota.
- At km182 there are restrooms and a good parking area. This is a good place to stop if you need to.
- Just past km182 is the exit to the toll road. You will turn to the left towards Gutierrez Zamora. The toll is \$30.00.
- At Tuxtla Gutierrez the bridge toll is \$18.00.
- At Nautla the bridge toll is \$18.00.
- Follow the signs after you leave Nautla to Cardel.
- When you come in to Cardel continue straight towards Veracruz. In about twenty minutes you will be getting on a toll road with limited access for about three hours. If it is getting towards evening you may want to get a hotel in Cardel. There is a good hotel with a good restaurant on the corner of central park.
- As you leave Cardel you will enter the autopista to Veracruz. About ten minutes past Cardel there is a toll booth at km 226. The toll is \$37.00.
- At km 233 take the Paso Del Toro exit to the right. Stay to the right, there is no toll at this point.
- Stay on this road straight for several miles and there will be a Pemex on your right and a round-about directly in front of you. Go through the round-about straight ahead toward Paso Del Toro.
- A few miles past the round-about there is an exit to the right with a sign "Cordoba/Mexico cuota". Take this exit to the right.
- Soon after you take this exit there is a toll booth, \$58.00.
- Now you are on the autopista to La Tinaja.
- Just past the terminal La Tinaja take the exit to the right, "Villahermosa".
- Your next destination is Sayula/Acayucan. It is about two to three hours on this toll way.
- At the next tollbooth go straight towards Acayucan, the toll is \$150.00.

- At km 187 take the exit to the right to Salina Cruz, Acayucan. The toll is \$90.00. When you get to the top of the ramp at the highway intersection go left toward Salina Cruz/Matias Romero/Sayula.
- The highway that you are on now will take you over the isthmus to the Pacific side of Mexico. You will be on it for several hours.
- About forty minutes after you pass Matias Romero you will come down the mountain with a panoramic view of the valley before you. At the bottom of this descent at km 238 there is a large highway interchange with some huge electric wind generators in view. You want to go left at this interchange. It is not well marked, but after you make the turn to the left you will go toward Tapanatepec. There will be a new Pemex station on your right. You do not take the road to Salina Cruz.
- Arriaga is the next major town and it is a couple of hours away. You will go through Niltepec and Tapanatepec on the way.
- After you go through Tapanatepec there will be an intersection marked Tapachula to the right, Tuxtla Gutierrez straight ahead. You want to turn to the right toward Tapachula.
- As you come in to Arriaga there is an exit marked "Tapachula". Take this exit to the right and you will bypass Arriaga. If it is getting toward evening there is a good hotel in Arriaga called Ix Lumel with a decent restaurant. If you decide to go into town don't take the bypass, just continue in to town straight ahead and ask for directions to the hotel.
- Continue following the signs to Arriaga/Tonala. At km 65 the road divides, follow the sign to the right to Tapachula/Puerto Arista.
- **At km 283 is the check out point to get your vehicle checked out of Mexico.** This is very important! There might be men or boys wanting to help you with your paperwork in this area. The checkout is a very simple procedure and you will not need to pay anyone to help you. This checkpoint is open 7:00am to midnight Monday-Friday, 8:00am-4:00pm Saturday, and 9:00am-5:00pm Sundays. Pull over to the right and park by the road. Walk across the highway to your left and go to the office up the steps in front of you. The agent will come out to your vehicle and peel the sticker off of your windshield. He will give you a receipt verifying you have checked you car out of Mexico. **Keep this receipt**, you may need it when you enter Guatemala down the road or when you try to re-enter Mexico at a later date in the future.
- Turn to the right towards "Guatemala" as you leave the check point. You are now on a bypass around Tapachula.
- The bypass around Tapachula will take about twenty minutes then you will come to an intersection where you have to turn right or left. Turn to the right.
- Go on this road a few miles and there will be an intersection marked Ciudad Hidalgo to the right and Talisman straight ahead. Go straight and the border crossing at Talisman/El Carmen is just about five miles ahead.

You can go right, if you choose, and about twenty miles is the Ciudad Hidalgo/Tecun Uman crossing. I prefer to cross at Talisman/El Carmen.

- When you get to the Mexican border crossing facility at the frontier go inside and get your passports stamped out of Mexico. You will need to give them the visa papers that you validated and paid for earlier. You have already done all the paperwork for the vehicle.
- After you clear Mexico proceed on across the bridge in to Guatemala.
- At El Carmen the office where you get your Guatemala visa is on the left soon after you cross the bridge. There are people everywhere, but just pull to the side of the street go the window that where the sign says "Guatemala" and get your visas. If you have Guatemala plates on the vehicle you do not have to do any paperwork for the vehicle. Stay to the right as you pull up the driveway, get the vehicle fumigated, and slowly proceed on through the checkpoint. If your vehicle is registered in a country other than Guatemala you will need a temporary importation permit. This permit can be obtained in the building in front of you to the left under the awning. The rules on temp permits are often changing, but count on a 30-40 day permit which may, or may not be renewable no more than two times. If you are planning on bringing a car in to Guatemala long term, (more than a couple of months), you will probably have to import it which can be an expensive and cumbersome process. If you speak Spanish you will not have any problems, just ask the officials what to do. If you are not fluent in Spanish it might be a good idea to have one of the men standing around offering their services to help you. It shouldn't take more than 30-60 minutes and fifty quetzales is a sufficient tip.

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