

Directory

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ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations on the Pacific coast range from hammocks strung under palm-thatched huts (*palapas*) to world-class luxury resorts. In between you have beachfront campgrounds, hostels, *casas de huéspedes* (guesthouses), budget hotels and *cabañas* (independent cabins that generally come with a kitchen). This book divides accommodations into three price ranges: budget (where a typical room for two people costs under M\$400), midrange (M\$400 to M\$1000) and top end (above M\$1000).

The normal tourist high season is November to April, when many North Americans and Europeans travel to Mexico for the winter. Reservations are advisable for popular places during this time. Tourism peaks during the Christmas-New Year holidays, *Semana Santa* (the week before Easter and up to a week after it) and the July-August summer holidays. During these periods, reservations are a must. The low season lasts from May to October, with the exception of the holiday jolt in July and August.

Prices quoted throughout this book, unless specified, are for the November to April winter high season. Rates for peak season – which usually runs from December 20 through January 2 and also the week of *Semana Santa* – may rise 10% to 20% above the high-season rate. Low-season rates are often 10% to 40% lower than those we quote. Rates at budget accommodations tend to fluctuate the least, but you can generally negotiate at smaller budget spots.

Accommodation prices are subject to two taxes: IVA (value-added tax; 15%) and ISH (lodging tax; 2% to 3% in most states). Generally IVA and ISH are included in quoted prices. In top-end hotels a price may often be given as, say, 'M\$1000 *más impuestos*' (M\$1000 plus taxes), in which case you must add 18% to the figure. When in doubt, you can ask '*¿Están incluidos los impuestos?*' ('Are taxes included?'). Prices given in this book include taxes.

Camping Grounds & Trailer Parks

Camping grounds are common on Mexico's Pacific coast. Most organized camping grounds are trailer parks set up for RVs (campervans) and trailers (caravans), but they accept tent campers at lower rates. Expect to pay about M\$50 to pitch a tent for two, and M\$100 to M\$200 for two people with a vehicle, using full facilities. Some restaurants and guesthouses in beach spots or country areas will let you pitch a tent on their patch for a couple of dollars per person.

All Mexican beaches are public property. You can camp for nothing on most of them, but always assess the safety of the beach before spending the night on it.

Hammocks & Cabañas

You'll find hammocks and *cabañas* available mainly in low-key beach spots. A hammock can be a very comfortable place to sleep (but mosquito repellent often comes in handy). You can rent one and a place to hang it – usually under a palm roof outside a small guesthouse or beach restaurant – for M\$30 or M\$50 in some places.

Cabañas are usually huts with a palm-thatched roof. Some have dirt floors and nothing inside but a bed; others are deluxe, with electric light, mosquito nets, fans, fridge, bar and decor. Prices for simple *cabañas* range from M\$100 to M\$400; luxury *cabañas* can set you back as much as M\$1000.

Hostels, Casas de Huéspedes & Posadas

Inexpensive and congenial accommodations are often to be found at a *casa de huéspedes*, a home converted into simple guest lodgings.

Hostel accommodation is sparse on the coast, but when you find it, it'll run around M\$100 for a dorm room. Some *posadas* (inns) are like *casas de huéspedes*; others are small hotels. A double typically costs M\$200 to M\$400, though a few places are more comfy and more expensive.

Hotels

Mexico specializes in good midrange hotels where two people can get a comfortable room with private bathroom, TV and often air-conditioning for M\$400 to M\$800. Often there's a restaurant and a bar.

Every Mexican town also has cheap hotels. There are clean, friendly, secure ones, and there are dark, dirty, smelly ones where you may not feel your belongings are safe. Decent rooms with private hot shower are available for under M\$300 a double in most of the country.

Mexico has plenty of large, modern luxury hotels too, particularly in the coastal resorts and largest cities. They offer the expected levels of luxury – with pools, gyms, bars, restaurants and so on – at prices that are sometimes agreeably modest (and sometimes not!).

Fortunately for families and small groups of travelers, many hotels in all price ranges have rooms for three, four or five people that cost not much more than a double.

Rental Accommodations

Prices fluctuate according to amenities, season and proximity to a beach; a simple bungalow may cost as little as M\$4000 per month, while a lavish villa will cost many times that.

PRACTICALITIES

- Mexicans use the metric system for weights and measures.
- Most prerecorded videotapes on sale in Mexico (like the rest of the Americas and Japan) use the NTSC image registration system, incompatible with the PAL system common to most of Western Europe and Australia.
- If buying DVDs, look for the numbered globe motif indicating which regions of the world it can be played back in. Region 1 is the US and Canada; Europe and Japan are in region 2; and Australia and New Zealand join Mexico in region 4.
- Electrical current is 110V, 60Hz, and most plugs have two flat prongs, as in the US and Canada.
- The *News* (www.thenews.com.mx) is an English-language daily covering national news. *Vallarta Today* (www.vallartatoday.com) and *Vallarta Tribune* (www.vallartatribune.com) are dailies in Puerto Vallarta. Other print publications include the *Pacific Pearl* (www.pacificpearl.com) in Mazatlán, *Oaxaca Times* (www.oaxacatimes.com) in Oaxaca city and *El Sol de la Costa* (www.elsoldelacosta.com), which covers the Oaxaca coast.
- For the online editions of about 300 Mexican newspapers and magazines, and links to hundreds of Mexican radio and TV stations and other media sites, visit www.zonalatina.com.
- Free-to-air TV is dominated by Televisa, which runs four of the six main national channels; TV Azteca has two (Azteca 7 and Azteca 13).
- As a rule, don't drink the tap water (p295).