



Mexico is open to tourists. Here's what locals want you to know before you go.

Americans are allowed into Mexico, but there are precautions to consider before booking a trip.



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Americans willing to travel abroad have limited options. Their [passport](#), which once unlocked access to most of the world, is now [hindering them](#) from moving freely as countries watch [coronavirus cases rise](#) in the United States.

But one of America's most popular travel destinations remains open and available: Mexico.

While the State Department [recommends](#) people “reconsider” travel to Mexico because of the [coronavirus](#), and nonessential travel across land borders is [still restricted](#), discounted flights have been tempting Americans throughout the pandemic. According to data from the travel booking company CheapCaribbean.com, Mexico now makes up 70 percent of the company’s bookings, up 20 percent from the pre-covid-19 era. SkyScanner data has shown Cancún as one of the most-searched destinations for fall travel.

But do Mexicans want Americans to visit during the pandemic? We spoke with people who work in hospitality and tourism there to find out what they want Americans to know before booking a trip.

What locals say

Before the pandemic, Andrea Villela says a major selling point for her mezcal business, [La Fiera Mezcal](#), was the intimacy of the tasting sessions at her home in Mexico City. Now those personal touches, like home-cooked meals and lingering conversations, can feel like a risk. She’s now limiting tastings to groups of four. Although she relies on travelers for her business, she says, it’s still too early for Americans to be visiting.

“I know I can get the virus not only from tourists — I can get the virus here in the city,” Villela says. “I don’t feel like I have more chance to get the virus by hosting a group of people than from going to downtown in peak rush hour, even with my protection.”

Her advice to travelers who still decide to come to Mexico is to avoid small towns, where Villela says there is a lot of coronavirus misinformation and a lack of resources. “They don’t have hospitals, and people are getting really, really sick,” she says.

David Alvarado, a Mexican American producer and [creative consultant](#) living in Mexico City, says he’s 100 percent against Americans visiting Mexico at this time and regularly tells friends not to plan trips yet.

“I run into Americans always here on vacation who are not wearing masks, who don’t take the locals and their health into consideration,” he says. “I don’t even think they’re aware of the lack of resources available to Mexico right now in the middle of this pandemic.”

It’s a double-edged sword: Alvarado recognizes that tourism is an economic lifeline and that there’s no government support for those not working, but he’s also wary of what a second wave could do to the country.

“There are not a lot of government funds going into testing and providing resources. If you get someone sick, you directly impact their economic livelihood,” he says. “[Americans are] coming here no matter what, so just be mindful of how vulnerable a lot of people are here.”

Mexico City chef Maycoll Calderón says he has burned through his personal savings to pay his bar and restaurant employees's salaries throughout the pandemic. Per the city's coronavirus restrictions, he can only allow up to 30 percent occupancy in his establishments, so to help make up for lost revenue, he started a [handmade-pasta delivery service](#) and also teaches online cooking classes.

Calderón doesn't discourage visitors to Mexico because he feels the country is handling its coronavirus outbreak better than the United States.

"The economy in Mexico depends on tourism, not only in hotels but restaurants and everything else," Calderón says. "To tell the truth I recommend everybody come to Mexico because everywhere you go, hotels, restaurants, even sites that you want to visit, everybody is conscious to protect themselves. Everybody tests your temperature, gives you [hand sanitizer]. Everybody is trying to do their best to make the situation not spread even more."

What tour guides say

Bill Esparza, the James Beard award-winning author of the book "L.A. Mexicano" and co-founder of the food-tour company [Club Tengo Hambre](#), says visitors are welcome in his eyes but should know they're coming at their own risk. Having traveled throughout Mexico during the pandemic, Esparza, who lives in Los Angeles but travels to Mexico regularly for work, found that coronavirus precautions varied from state to state. Some Mexican communities were entirely closed to outsiders, some had strict curfews, and others seemed to not have any restrictions.



He says overall, people are just figuring out how to make it through the crisis, including his tour guides.

“People are anxious to work, and, of course, they’re taking their own precautions,” he says. “We’re here to safely take people around, and the vendors want customers. They want to sell tacos, and restaurants want to sell food. Mexico does have protocols and safety requirements for these places, and they’re doing their best.”

Not all tour operations are back up and running.

[Intrepid Travel](#), which does small-group adventure travel, is still monitoring data and assessing the pandemic regularly to determine when it can relaunch its Mexico tours. The company is developing new covid-19 protocols and figuring out how to handle logistics (such as buses and group lodging and PPE distribution) in a pandemic. It’s hoping that if cases continue to drop, they can host a few tours in late November or December.

In the meantime, Intrepid’s guides have had to figure out other sources of income while tours remain on hold. Carlos Cardona, Intrepid’s general manager of operations in Central America and Mexico, says some guides have started selling jewelry, one went back to his family’s farm to sell honey, and others are using their English skills at call centers.

Cardona doesn’t discourage travelers from visiting Mexico now, but he recommends Americans consult their physicians first to determine if they’re healthy enough to take the risk of traveling, as well as consult the State Department recommendations.

What tourism boards say

Rocio Lancaster, the tourism undersecretary for the state of Jalisco, says that while they’re aware they must be concerned for the safety of tourism employees, there are also many families that depend on tourism for their economic survival.

“What we can do is just make sure we have the right measures and protect the tourists and the locals,” Lancaster says, noting that Jalisco was granted a [Safe Travels Stamp](#) from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) for its coronavirus prevention procedures. “We just want to be conscious of the situation we’re living, but I would say that we are eager to welcome people from the U.S.”

Lancaster also recommends that visitors read the [covid-19 Q&A](#) before their trip.

Michelle Fridman, the tourism secretary of the state of Yucatán, says the region took strict actions at the beginning of the pandemic, shutting down nearly every aspect of tourism for six months. Fridman says more than 1,200 tourism companies and guides have qualified for the region’s new biosecurity risk prevention certification to promote covid-safe practices.

Fridman wants Americans to feel welcome to come to Mexico, as long as they’re willing to follow the new restrictions in place.



“We want to do this responsibly and have a sustainable reopening for everyone,” she says. “I cannot say we’re out of covid — of course every country in the world has or is exposed to covid — but we are a safe destination and want to keep it that way.”

What hotels say

To salvage what business they could during the pandemic, many hotels throughout Mexico moved quickly to welcome visitors as safely as possible.

Giorgio Brignone, the director of Careyes Mexico, says both domestic and American guests have been slowly returning to the luxury property in the state of Jalisco since it reopened with reduced capacity and [new safety protocols](#) in June.

“Americans are more than welcome,” Brignone says. “[Locals] realize America is a very important market for Mexico.”

At the reopened [Viceroy Los Cabos](#), guests can book a sanitized Tesla driven by masked drivers for rides to and from the airport. Masks are required on the property, and the hotel has installed glass partitions at lobby desks and placed stickers around that remind people to social distance.

The hotel’s regional managing director, Peter Bowling, hopes Americans will return this fall and winter to relax and make up for their lost vacation time this year.

“But still, we’ve got to be very much aware that the virus is increasing in certain parts of the world, and we take it very seriously,” Bowling says, adding that visitors should show respect to locals by following coronavirus safety precautions.