

From San Diego to CCBC:Mexico

Before you leave

Be sure your arrival plans are set up. Who will meet you when and where? How will you contact the people you will be meeting? Bring your passport. If you are bringing a pet (be sure this is approved by your CCBC contact) bring their immunization papers.

Money: Bring all the cash you're planning to spend. ATMs are available, but there are fees. We don't recommend changing money in San Ysidro. There are too many scam places. Wait until Ensenada to get a better rate. The tollbooths and major stores take dollars and give a decent exchange rate. The tolls fluctuate, but the total cost each way is usually \$7 to \$8 USD.

Cargo: Do not attempt to carry any type of weapon into Mexico. Tools and small pocket knives are OK. There are many laws that govern the import of anything valuable. If you plan to carry lots of cash or anything obviously very valuable, please work with us ahead of time.

Visa: If you are staying more than two weeks in Ensenada, you should obtain a tourist visa upon entry. This costs about \$20 per person. See the directions as you cross the border for instructions on when and how to do this.

Auto insurance: Be sure to obtain Mexican auto insurance. Very few U.S. policies cover your liability in Mexico, so your best bet is to buy a policy from one of the many places near the border. It's cheap, and if you ever get in an accident in Mexico you will wish you had it. Consequences of not having it could include jail time.

Gas: It's a good idea to fill up in San Diego (maybe at the same time that you get insurance) so you can get straight to Ensenada (70 miles south of the border). Depending on how much driving you do during your stay, you may need to buy Pemex gas. They offer two grades: Magna (regular) and Premium. It's usually full service, so pull up to a pump and tell the attendant "X (dolares or pesos) de (Magna or Premium)." A tip (5-10 pesos) is usually a good idea, especially if he or she cleans your windshield.

Metric system: Please remember that as soon as you cross the border, speed limit signs (unless otherwise noted) are in KILOMETERS! A speed limit of 60 km/hr equals 35 mph, so beware.

Safety: We do not recommend driving at night for those of you who are not experienced driving in Mexico. If you must do it, be extra careful, allow plenty of distance in front of you, and drive slowly enough to stop within the reach of your headlights. You will almost certainly be surprised by something along the way.

Phones: If you need to call any U.S. number (including our cell phones) from within Mexico on your cell phone you will have to dial 001 before the area code and number. If your cell phone coverage is not available and you need to call us, you need to buy a phone card (LADATEL) from almost any corner store (\$3 USD is usually the cheapest), put it in a public phone, and dial one of our Mexico numbers. From outside Ensenada, dial 01-646-178-8120. From the outskirts of Ensenada you might need to dial 646-178-8120. From within Ensenada, just dial 178-8120. It generally works the same on your cell phone if you need to call our local line. [Please see your leader's guide for a complete list of our current phone numbers.]

Caravans: If you are traveling with 3 or more vehicles, be sure to make plans for keeping the group together. Walkie-talkies are highly recommended. The place you are most likely to get separated from one another is just after crossing the border, so drive slowly until you know everyone has made it through. You might get honked at, but that's OK. One strategy is to put a truck or a van in the lead and turn on the headlights of all the vehicles. Most likely this lead vehicle will have to go to secondary inspection and all of your vehicles should follow it so that you can stay together. With your headlights on, the guard will know that you are together and will pass you through as a group.

Border entry (no picture available yet)

Take I-5 (recommended) or I-805 to the San Ysidro border crossing. The left lane becomes a U-turn only lane, so stay out of it! Drive slowly through the gate and wait for a green or red light. You have to get pretty close to the light to trigger it, so don't be shy. It's very rare, but if you get a red light go to one of the customs inspection areas (one on each side of the road). Customs agents also randomly direct vehicles into the inspection area. If you have items that the customs authorities question, you may have to pay an import tax.

DO NOT offer to bribe a government official unless you feel it is a life-or-death emergency. If you will be taking the item back to the U.S., be sure to explain that to the agent. You should not be taxed for temporary imports.



As you continue through the border area, get over to the second-to-right lane. Do NOT take the very first exit to the right. You will soon be traveling up over a bridge that will have an additional lane join you on the right (shown in the picture). **MOVE IMMEDIATELY ALL THE WAY TO THE RIGHT AND INTO THE NEW RIGHT HAND LANE. TAKE THE FIRST RIGHT HAND EXIT AT THE TOP OF THE BRIDGE.** This exit is labeled “Rosarito/Ensenada/Scenic Road.” When in doubt, always travel toward Ensenada, and always on the *cuota*, or toll road, never on the *libre*, or free road.



If you made the exit, **SKIP THIS STEP.** If not, you get a second chance. Stay to the right and take the next exit. It will curve around under the bridge you were just on. Take the exit to Rosarito/Ensenada. If you somehow still manage to find yourself on your way to Tecate, Mexicali, Zona Rio, or Downtown Tijuana, don't panic. You're simply going in the opposite direction, so at your nearest convenience, turn around. If all else fails and you end up lost, ask a crowd of people “Ensenada?” with a confused look on your face and do the best you can with the directions they give you. Repeat as needed. If you're completely lost, call us.



You should now be on the road parallel with the U.S. border. Continue along the fence and up a very steep hill.



At the top of the hill the road will make a sharp turn to the left and then will drop down on a steep grade toward an overpass located near the bottom of the hill.

You must exit this road near the bottom of the hill and merge with often heavy traffic. Merging is a little different here. Consider it a yield. If you aren't going to make it into the lane, STOP. Then proceed when it's safe.



You will now go up another steep hill. Feel free to pass the traffic that is going to the Playas. They tend to stay in the right lane. By the way, the left lane is only for passing here. Drive in the right lane, pass on the left, and get back in the right lane.

As you continue around the curve, the road will straighten out. You will soon come to the first tollbooth.



The remaining portion of the Toll Road is a four-lane divided roadway all the way to Ensenada. The most difficult part of the journey is now behind you! Enjoy the view along the ocean, but beware of crews working on the road – they give less advance notice than you may be accustomed to.

The next tollbooth will be at the south end of Rosarito. The 7-11 and gas station on the right before the second toll booth is a good place to stop if needed.



Continue on down the toll road to the third toll booth, which is located at the North end of the Ensenada area.



This tollbooth has a bathroom, store, and pay phone on the right after the toll.



You will take the second marked exit from the highway after passing through the third tollbooth. The exit you are looking for is Tijuana Libre.

You will PASS the exit to San Miguel.



You will go under this overpass. Just past the overpass is the exit.



The Tijuana Libre exit loops around to the right.



Stay on the right hand side of the road. The lanes may not be marked, but this is a two-way road. Be VERY careful of oncoming traffic. They may not know it's a two-way road either.



As you approach the highway be careful of both oncoming and merging traffic at the same time.

Once you're on the highway you'll travel about two miles. You'll cross a bridge and begin going uphill.



Once you're on the highway you'll travel about 1.5 miles. You'll cross a bridge and begin going uphill.

Once you cross the bridge you're about 30 seconds away from the turn.

There is a big, rough turnout on the right. Slow down substantially before pulling off the highway.

There is a large dove sign at this turnout (be aware that signs may change).



Take the road at the back of the turnout.



Travel along this road 1.6 miles.

About halfway you'll drive over a wide creek bed. The creek is dry much of the year. If the creek is flowing strongly after heavy rains you should not attempt to cross it. However, if the water is clear and is calmly flowing, there should be no problem crossing it in the shallow ("rapid") section. Avoid very calm-looking pools, which are usually deep and muddy. Also avoid large rocks.



Immediately after the creek there is a fork in the road. Continue on the right-hand, wider fork. You will soon pass a gravel factory on the left.



The Bible College property begins at the large dove sign. Continue past this sign.



Enter the first gate on the right. Please close the gate behind you and park in the main parking area. If no one comes out to greet you, honk the horn a few times.