

Missions to Mexico

Training Resources

How to Relate to the People of Mexico

The following suggestions are offered to help you understand the people of Mexico and help you have a positive experience:

1. It is acceptable to express curiosity about the Mexican way of life. Your questions indicate an interest in their culture.
2. Don't make too many comparisons between Mexico and home. Constant comparisons which make Mexico seem inferior will eventually lead to resentment.
3. Try to understand strange customs, habits and ways of thinking. Just because something is different does not mean it is wrong. Whether or not it is immediately apparent, there are reasons why Mexicans do things a certain way. Respect cultural differences even when you can't understand them.
4. When you don't understand something and find it difficult to be respectful, then at least suppress your disapproval. Some customs have been around for centuries and no one likes to have a stranger mock their cherished traditions.
5. When you associate with the Mexican people, try and adopt their manners as much as possible. You will never become 100% Mexican, but trying will help you make friends and thus contribute to the ultimate success of your trip.
6. The bottom line is ... keep an open mind. Many aspects of the Mexican culture will interest, enchant or puzzle you. Recognize the differences and accept them without passing judgment.
7. Mexican laws differ from those in the United States. For example, it is against the law to preach in Mexico or hand out literature without an invitation from a resident in the community where you are assigned. This is why we do not openly display our Bibles and other literature when crossing the border. Also, it is against the law to have religious meetings on public school grounds. Therefore, we only hold meetings in the places designated by the contact that invited us. Because of the laws, we need to be careful when crossing the border, in either direction. The most important thing to remember is that you are not to speak unless spoken to by authorities at the border and then reply in a respectful manner. Please do not try to bring anything across the border illegally (firecrackers, knives, guns, drugs, etc.) - you can be arrested! You will be crossing the busiest border crossing in the world.
8. Familiarize yourself at least to some degree with the history of Mexico and the area to which you will be traveling.
9. Recognize and work with local leadership that is already established and esteemed by the people. We have worked hard to have a good name and ministry among the 80 plus churches we minister to. Please respect and ask any questions if you don't agree with something.
10. Remember that although you are in a foreign land, you will be respected for your own basic convictions. The adjustments to foreign mannerisms are not expected to alter your deep appreciation for our democratic ideologies.

Many foreigners are hungry for a share of your basic convictions; so share them. This cross-fertilization of ideas will give rise to new ideas in the minds of the people. The most important aspect of your outreach program is not the contribution which you make to a new and different culture. Become aware of the needs of the people and see how directly the gospel relates to the fulfillment of these needs. Keep your heart and mind open and allow the Holy Spirit to perform a work in you that will be lasting, motivating and life changing.

11. Show respect for older people. Stand up and be prepared to give an appropriate greeting (a nod, a handshake, a bow or whatever the specific culture expects). When circulating in a group, always take time to talk with older people.

12. Show respect for community leaders. Learn a few appropriate status titles (i.e. elder, brother, engineer, mayor or nurse), and use them when you address these people. In general, avoid calling people simply by their first names. Listen, and ask people what's courteous.

13. Avoid being alone with or talking at length with someone of the opposite sex, especially if this isn't the custom. Dress modestly, whatever that means locally. Again, don't be afraid to ask.

14. Americans tend to talk too much; so be sensitive to whether your new friends might like to express themselves, or whether they want to listen to you. Some people communicate through hints and metaphors, rather than frankness; some through satirical repartee and overstatements; some through stories. As a rule, well-told stories will be appreciated, including the stories of your life in Christ. Polish some of these anecdotes before you go.

15 Regarding time. Be flexible, not uptight. Go with the flow of the culture and ministry you're involved in.

16. Most people are more rooted in-groups and family units than we are, so don't treat a friend as an isolated individual. Ask about his or her family and friends, and try to get to know them. Learn to tolerate a crowd. Likewise, talk positively about your family, and be ready to show photos. (Keep in mind that many foreigners can't understand your testimony if you say negative things about your family.)

17. The big "No", "No!". Anger. In Mexico, many Asian cultures, and in some tribal ones, losing your temper is just about the greatest sin possible. Keep quiet. Defuse your explosive emotions in your journal or in prayer.

18. Be sure you don't offend people by taking photos of what they consider their private space or of what they consider to be a negative aspect for their country.

19. How to treat beggars. In Mexico, you will be a prime target for beggars. Many have learned that their generous friends to the North will give to anyone who appears in need. This wonderful characteristic, though, can actually be used against you and harm the people of Mexico. If you give to whomever appears needy, you'll actually teach and encourage them to continue begging. Many can earn more begging than by a regular job. Many will actually dress "poor" so you'll give them something. Many do not wear shoes, this is part of their culture. Be careful not to bring your culture down to Mexico and think that what is true in the U.S. is true in Mexico. If you feel compelled to give something, check it out first with us as site missionaries first.