

## HELPFUL HINTS

The following information will hopefully provide you some of what you will want to know before you visit us in Mexico. For those of you who have not visited Mexico before, or have only been across the border into Tijuana or some of the other border towns, please note Cancun and the Riviera Maya is now the wealthiest part of Mexico and much nicer than the border towns.

### BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME

YOU MUST HAVE A VALID PASSPORT TO ENTER MEXICO. It is important that the expiration date be more than 6 months from the date of your travel.

### WEATHER AND CLOTHING

The weather from December through February is warm during the day (average 85) and cool at night (60). The temperature can be very changeable. When a cold front goes through you will want a sweatshirt, sweater or jacket and socks. There is always a chance of rain but it never seems to last for long. Think "layers" for clothes: like a tank top under a T-shirt under a windbreaker. Peeling off layers as the temperature changes is the easiest way to be prepared. You will only need casual clothes, most people do fine with a very limited wardrobe. PACK LIGHT! Life is very casual here.

March and April are warmer, especially at night, and May and June are getting hot and humid. By July and August the summer heat is on full throttle: highs in the high 90's and lows in the high 80's and very humid. Sandals or "flip flops" are the norm. It's nice to have a pair of sneakers or walking shoes to climb the ruins or to put on when the temperature drops. Bring suntan lotion and Aloe for sunburn; buying it in Mexico is expensive. The sun gets very hot here during the day and you will burn VERY quickly. Some form of hat is also recommended.

### TIME ZONE

The Cancun area is on Central Time, same as Minnesota and the Midwest.

### MONEY EXCHANGE

Don't worry about getting pesos until you get to Puerto Morelos; stores and restaurants take US dollars (but probably not Canadian?) Switch to using pesos as soon as you can, you will get more "bang for your buck." The exchange rate rides around 14 pesos to the US dollar.

If you change currency into pesos at a Cambio window (change window) COUNT YOUR MONEY VERY CAREFULLY AND CHECK THE MATH ON THE ADDING MACHINE TAPE. Some of the Cambio cashiers are hoping you aren't careful and they may cheat you. **DO NOT BRING TRAVELER'S CHECKS.** The Cambios won't take them anymore and the stores and restaurants never do so the only place to cash them is a bank and even some of them do not take them.

### ATM'S AND BANKING

There are no banks in Puerto Morelos. There are, however, two ATM machines and a currency exchange window (Cambio) in the center of town (the second ATM is up on the highway.) You get the best exchange rate, usually, with your ATM card.

### WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO THE COUNTRY – COMPUTERS, ETC

The rule is one each of any electronic equipment (camera, video camera, computer, I Pod, etc.) per person for personal use only. Do not bring anything still in its retail box, they will assume it is new and for re-sale and charge you duty.

### ELECTRICAL SERVICE

The electrical service is the same as the US & Canada so you can use all of your electrical items here.

### ARRIVING AT ABBEY DEL SOL

If you do not have Jin pick you up at the airport then please go to the office at Abbey del Sol Too. If no one is there then use the black phone sitting on the counter (or in its cradle on top of the LARGE desk) and call one of the staff on their cell phones listed on the small sign. As a last resort go to Abbey del Sol One (4 doors down on the other side of the street) and ring the bell by the larger iron gate that opens onto our welcome courtyard (the bell at the smaller front door gate is for our larger apartment and Jin won't hear it). Jin and his family live in the house in the back left of our property. Jin and his brother Freddy speak English. Please be sure to let us know about what time you will be arriving.

## CANCUN AIRPORT

### **KEEP THE SMALL WHITE FORM THEY GIVE YOU AT IMMIGRATION, YOU WILL NEED IT WHEN YOU LEAVE.**

Cancun airport is a large, modern airport with three terminals. There is a new International Terminal, #3 for the non-charter flights. Charter flights now fly into Terminal #2. Depending on the season, and how busy the airport is, your plane will either connect to the same kind of jet-way you use to board your plane at home or your plane will park on the tarmac and you will exit the plane by stairs and board a bus to be taken to the terminal.

Be prepared for warm weather! I suggest you bring a pair of shorts, sandals and a tank top or T-Shirt on the plane with you and change in the toilet before you land. Once you are off the plane you will go through immigration first and customs second. The immigration agent will look at your papers and ask you how long you will be here and where you will be staying. General answers are fine. They speak English. Then you collect your luggage from the luggage carousels. If you have a lot of luggage free handcars are available irregularly – if they haven't brought them from outside to the carousel area you are on your own.

You will see everyone moving toward the same exit where the customs officials are. There is a traffic light that flashes either red or green when you push the button. Each family has to push the button as they go through customs. If you get a green light you just walk through. If you get a red light you will have your luggage inspected. Once you are through customs you can get a porter to help you with your luggage. You tip them what you would at home (one to five dollars depending on the number of pieces you have brought). The porters take dollars or pesos. If you arrive on Saturday or Sunday there will be long lines and larger crowds so expect clearing Immigration and Customs to take one to two hours. Processing on week days usually goes a little faster; perhaps 30 - 60 minutes.

## AVOID THE INDIVIDUALS SELLING INFORMATION IN THE EXIT CORRIDOR

As you leave the customs area you will see many booths along each side of the exit corridor with men and women in official looking shirts trying to get your attention. They will give you tourist information but what they are really trying to get you to do is visit a time share at one of the big resort complexes. My advice is to avoid them. They are nice and they can be helpful, but they will also try to talk you into what was, for us, the most horrible day imaginable touring one of the huge resorts and being pressured to buy a time share unit. They tell you they will give you all sorts of free tickets and discounts on tourist attractions. It isn't worth it; trust me.

## AIR PORT TRANSFER

If you need a ride from the airport one of our staff can pick you up. We charge \$40, (taxi are \$80) for airport pickup and \$30 for airport return. Email me and let me know if you would like this service and I can give you more details.

## TAXIS

If you would rather take a taxi be prepared for the regulated fare from the airport of \$80 USD (plus a tip); there is an airport surcharge when the taxis exit the airport, that is why it is more expensive to leave than to return. There is an official taxi service now at the airport and you go to the taxi window to hire a taxi.

Don't be afraid of being "taken for a ride." The road to Puerto Morales is straight out to Highway 307 and South 10 miles (15km). There aren't any other routes. As long as the taxi bears right (south) toward Chetumal, Playa del Carmen and Tulum you are fine. Cancun is to the north (left) and the Hotel Zone is straight ahead.

In Puerto Morelos you will find many taxis if you don't feel like walking for \$2 US or \$20 pesos.

## BUSES

If you want a more "native" experience, you can take a bus and taxi combination from the airport that will cost you about \$8 each. It takes a lot long but it will save you money. There is a bus ticket window in the hallway just before you leave the terminal. Ask for the ADO line that goes directly to the Puerto Morelos stop on the highway. (Do not take the local bus, MAYAB, it makes frequent stops and is very crowded.) The last bus leaves the airport at 9:30 p.m.

The bus will drop you at the light on the highway next to the turn off for Puerto Morelos. There will be taxis there waiting to take you the 2 miles into town and to our house. The taxi costs about \$2 and the bus fare is about \$6.50. You need to tip the bus driver for handling your bags (50 cents or 5 pesos) as well as the taxi driver. There aren't always taxis waiting so you may need to wait for awhile.

The ADO bus is a great way to get to Playa del Carmen or to Cancun. They are very nice buses; similar to a tourist bus in the states, and it is only \$19 pesos (\$1.50US) to ride it.

## CAR RENTAL

Our recommendation is that you get to PM some other way than renting a car, get to the property, get settled in and get a feel for the town, then rent a car in town. Check at the office for the latest information about renting a car. If you rent your car at Cancun airport you can choose from Alamo, National, Dollar, Budget, Executive, and Thrifty and inexpensive local rental

companies you'll find on the internet. Car rental stations are close to the main terminal so if you don't have much luggage you can walk to them, otherwise you have to take a transport bus for a short ride. If you make your reservations before you arrive be sure to call the 800 line in the U.S. to confirm your reservation. Reservations made online tend to not get registered at the Cancun offices of the rental companies. Bring a copy of your reservation. Be patient when you pick up your car, it can take quite awhile. They are not speedy here in Mexico.

Basic car insurance is required by Mexican law to be included with every rental. Many of the rental agents in Cancun will tell you it isn't and try to push you to get more insurance. It is up to you how covered you want to be. Puerto Morelos is a pretty safe town and, during the day, Cancun is too. We have been told that none of your American insurance will apply down here, so please check on this carefully.

One very good reason to NOT rent a car at the airport is because there is a police check point on the highway just as you exit the airport going south and they occasionally pull over the unsuspecting tourist in rental cars. All they want is money and it is a real racket here (see next item.) Having Jin pick you up means you won't have to deal with the police on your own if at all.

### POLICE CHECKPOINTS

You will notice when you are in Mexico that there is a high policed presence everywhere. When you are driving in the vicinity of the airport there is an area where police are occasionally pulling people over. Also on the way down to Playa del Carmen; WATCH YOUR SPEED!! Tourists driving rental cars are often picked on since they usually don't know the local laws. All the police want is a bribe. Everyone not using their seatbelts is a popular excuse for pulling you over, so make sure everyone in the car has their seat belt on. Our best advice to you is to be very conscious of the speed limits when you are traveling and particularly near the airport turn-off.

If you are pulled over they will ask for your Driver's License and will tell you they will impound the car and take you to the police station. This is all part of an act that leads to asking you for money. If you are sure you weren't speeding or doing anything wrong then get the number of the police car and ask nicely for an official traffic violation ticket so you can go to the police station and take care of it right away. This should call their bluff since stopping people just to get money is illegal. The police aren't supposed to take any money.

Sometimes it is easier to just decide to pay something and say "Is there anything I can do to avoid giving you my license and going to the station?" If they say "yes" and ask for \$5000 pesos (\$500 US) just tell them you don't have that kind of money, would \$5 US do? If you are Canadian tell them you only have a few Canadian dollars and haven't gotten any pesos yet. You can also try playing dumb and pretending you do not understand what they are saying or what they want. There is a chance they will get bored and let you go without having to pay. Speaking Spanish doesn't seem to help. If you are tied up for an unreasonable length of time give Jin a call on his cell: 044-998-115-2244. Don't get angry with the police - that really can get you in hot water.

### WHAT IS PROVIDED AT OUR PROPERTIES

Sheets, beach towels, bath and hand towels and wash cloths are provided. Each unit has a hair dryer and bar soap. There are basic cooking utensils and dishes in your kitchen, and a blender, toaster and coffee maker. If you need anything else please ask us and we'll do our best to accommodate you. Every apartment has a microwave except Casa Anita.

### BABY CRIB AND BEDS

We have a port-a-crib available for use. We do not have bedding for it so you will have to bring your own. Our mattresses are firm. If you need a foam mattress cover to make it a bit softer, ask at the office.

### DRINKING WATER

You will be provided with a large 5 gallon bottle of filtered water when you arrive. The first one is free and each additional bottle can be purchased for \$4. Do not drink out of the tap. Brushing your teeth with the water is fine.

Concerns about the safety of the water: The Cancun area is the most prosperous part of Mexico and their livelihood depends on keeping the tourists healthy. All the restaurants use filtered water for the ice cubes and drinking water. Do not drink any water out of any tap - not even ours. At our house we have not had any trouble with using the water to brush our teeth.

### MAID AND LAUNDRY SERVICE

If you are staying with us for a week or less there is no maid service. You can ask for clean towels whenever you want. If you stay with us for 2 weeks or more your apartment will be cleaned every seventh day at no cost. If you would like additional cleaning it is \$15 a time. Laundry service is available for \$4/ load.

## RESTAURANTS

There are a surprising number of restaurants in Puerto Morelos for such a little town that cater to many tastes. Some of the restaurants are listed on our website. Prices range from a moderate (\$6 a meal) to expensive (\$50 a meal.) Tipping is similar to the US.

## GROCERY STORES and DRUG STORES

There is a small grocery/liquor store in Puerto Morelos that has all the basics. For anyone serious about doing their own cooking I would recommend a trip to Costco, Sam's Club or Wal-Mart in Cancun or Wal-Mart and the Mega store in Playa del Carmen to get your groceries. We can help arrange a shopping tour for you for a reasonable fee if you don't have a rental car or want to take the bus. There is also a very basic pharmacy (farmacia) off the town square next to the church.

## MARKETS AND OTHER THINGS OF INTEREST

There is a local produce market in Puerto Morales every Wednesday morning where you can purchase excellent fruits and vegetables. The market sets up on the south side of the Church in the town square at 7:30am is there till around noontime.

You will also hear a vendor on a loud speaker in the neighborhood most days who sells oranges, mangoes and pineapples from the back of his truck. His produce is usually good and inexpensive.

There is also a jungle market on the west side of the highway on Wednesday's where you can get good produce and handicrafts and a walking tour of the "Colonia" part of the town were all the local Mexican residences buy their fruit, veggies and meat.

Also on Wednesdays you can attend a Spa Day in the jungle. The local Mayan women offer such services as pedicures, manicures, massages and facials. Stop by our office for directions and more information.

## SIGHTSEEING AND TOURS

We have developed relationships with various people in town so that we can arrange the nicest and most cost effective tour or sightseeing trip for you. Some options are snorkeling on the reef or in a calm lagoon; swimming in a crystal clear spring fed cenote; seeing the ruins at Tulum or Ek Balam; horseback riding on the beach; visiting Playa del Carmen to wander the pedestrian only boulevard with great shops and restaurants; or taking a trip into the market in Cancun. These are just a few of the highlights. Once you get settled check in at the Abbey office to explore your options. We have a white board there where the next few days' activities are posted.

## NIGHT LIFE

There is very little in the way of nightlife in our sleepy little town. There are 4 or 5 nice bars that are open until 1 a.m. A couple of the bars have music Thurs, Fri, Sat. and sometimes Sunday. Most people go into Cancun or Playa del Carmen if they want activity after 10 p.m.

Playa del Carmen is my first recommendation. You can stroll up and down the cobblestone "pedestrian only" boulevard and stop at any restaurant, bar or shop that grabs your fancy. It's about 12 blocks long and fun. Playa del Carmen is about 30 minutes south of us. You can take a taxi there for \$30 or a bus for \$2.

Cancun's hotel zone is also a possibility for nightlife if you like more noise and glitz. Personally I think it's too expensive to put up with the crowds, but it might be just the thing for you.

## BATHROOMS AND SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Be prepared for challenging bathroom situations in many places throughout Mexico. It is getting better but it often is not what you may be used to. For the women: occasionally there are no toilet seats or toilet paper unless you buy it from the person taking care of the toilets. This usually costs 2 to 5 pesos (20 to 50 cents.) Always have small change with you in Mexico as it seems everyone needs to be tipped. Bathrooms can usually be found at the Pemex gas stations (the only kind of gas station in Mexico) and at any of the big stores such as Wal-Mart, Costco, and the 4 Mexican "big box" stores.

Everyone in our town is on a septic system, as are most places in Cancun. This means that you are always asked to throw your used toilet paper in the trash can next to the toilet instead of in the toilet bowl. Never put tampons, pads or diapers in a toilet or there may be disastrous consequences! This takes a little getting used to but it is quite normal in Mexico. And so we ask you to refrain from putting paper or other products into our septic system please.

## SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE AND GETTING TO KNOW THE LOCALS

If you can attempt to speak Spanish it is always appreciated. About 25% of the locals you meet will speak English. For many Mayan is their first language, Spanish their second and English their third. The most important thing to remember is to be friendly and respectful and people will respond in kind. The people here love it if you try to speak their language and will try to help you learn more if you are open to it.

Mexico is a poor country and the Mexican's have tremendous pride. They very much want what the tourists have and are hoping to build friendships so that more of the American lifestyle can be theirs. However at the same time they want to retain their heritage and customs. Being sensitive to this dilemma will help you make friends and be treated well. However, be aware that many poor Mexicans see tourists as a source of revenue and the only reason they are friendly is to get your money.

### CELL PHONES

If you plan to bring a cell phone to Mexico you should check with your provider to make sure that service is available to you in Mexico and that you will not incur exorbitant roaming charges if you use it. You may be able to purchase a SIM card here for about 150 pesos which will give you 300 minutes or so of airtime. If your service does work in Mexico you may need to enter a long distance code of 001 prior to the number you enter. It is also possible to buy a "no contract" cell phone for \$350p (about \$30US) that you can use while in Mexico.

### EMERGENCY NUMBERS

We have a Vonage phone in our office with a Minnesota number. If you would like to give an emergency number to someone it is 1-651-690-3937. They would dial it just as if were dialing Minnesota. They can leave a message if it isn't answered and Abby will be sure to get the message to you. Both Puerto Morelos and Minnesota are central time. Abby has a Blackberry cell phone and gets emails immediately wherever she is so that can be a good way to contact us.

Another option is to dial Jin's cell phone: 011-52-1-998-115-2244 or the office phone 011-52-998-871-0127.

### DRIVING DIRECTIONS TO ABBEY DEL SOL ONE OR ABBEY TOO

Both of our properties are on the same street, Av. Niños Heroes, and just 4 doors apart on opposite sides of the street. You will see Abbey del Sol Too first on your left and then Abbey del Sol One on your right.

There is one road out of the airport that takes you to the main highway #307; bear right and take the exit that says Playa del Carmen, Tulum and Chetumal, do not follow the signs to Cancun

At the first light, about 20 minutes south, turn left onto the main road to Puerto Morelos.

Take the first left as you come into town onto our street, Av. Niños Heroes. About 8 blocks down look on the left for Abbey del Sol Too and then 4 doors down on the other side of the street, Abbey One. Both properties are painted yellow with blue trim.

To see the town square and get a better sense of the town you can also take the second left as you come into town onto Av. Rojo Gomez, the main boulevard. You would then take a left five or six blocks down, go over one block and then turn right onto our street and drive to our house.