

Colleges warn students about Mexico travel

PHOENIX The U.S. State Department and universities around the country are warning college students headed for Mexico for some spring-break partying of a surge in drug-related murder and mayhem south of the border.

"We're not necessarily telling students not to go, but we're going to certainly alert them," said Tom Dougan, vice president for student affairs at the University of Rhode Island. "There have been Americans kidnapped, and if you go you need to be very aware and very alert to this fact."

More than 100,000 high school- and college-age Americans travel to Mexican resort areas during spring break each year. Much of the drug violence is happening in border towns, and tourists have generally not been targeted, though there have been killings in the big spring-break resorts of Acapulco and Cancun, well away from the border.

The University of Arizona in Tucson is urging its approximately 37,000 students not to go to Mexico. Other universities in the Southwest and far beyond, including Penn State, Notre Dame, the University of Colorado and the University at Buffalo said they would call students' attention to the travel warning issued Feb. 20 by the State Department.

The State Department stopped short of warning spring breakers not to go to Mexico, but advised them to avoid areas of prostitution and drug-dealing and take other commonsense precautions.

"Sage advice," said Tom Mangan, a spokesman for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. "We have had documented violence, attacks, killings, shootouts with the drug cartels involving not only the military but law enforcement personnel. It is indiscriminate violence, and certainly innocent people have been caught up in that collateral damage."

Mexico's drug cartels are waging a bloody fight among themselves for smuggling routes and against government forces, carrying out massacres and dumping beheaded bodies in the streets. More than 6,000 people were killed in drug violence in Mexico last year.

But Mexican Attorney General Eduardo Medina Mora said in an interview with The Associated Press: "There is no major risk for students coming into Mexico in general terms. It is always important to advise the youngsters to behave."

Despite the bloodshed, the number of foreign tourists visiting Mexico surged to 23 million in 2008, up 5.9 percent from the year before, spurred in part by the tumbling value of the peso against the dollar, according to the country's Tourism Department. The

department estimates 80 percent of tourists in Mexico come from the United States.

"Cancun has always been one of our most popular destinations and that hasn't changed this year," said Patrick Evans of STA Travel, one of the biggest spring-break travel agencies. "Many of the packages we offer include lodging on the beach and in very nice resorts that take the utmost pride in making sure customers are safe."

Some students said the warnings are unlikely to deter them.

University of Arizona sophomore Daniel Wallace is going to Puerto Penasco, or Rocky Point, for spring break, saying he is not worried about violence there. Besides, the 19-year-old said: "It's relaxing, it's warm, I'm a big fan of the beach and the drinking age is lower. It's a fun place to go."

Amanda Corbett, a sophomore at North Carolina State, said she is going snowboarding in Virginia because she couldn't afford Cancun. But three of her roommates are going there.

"They really wanted to go," the 20-year-old said. "Honestly, they probably think nothing will happen to them. That's the way I would look at it."

"If anything is going to deter people," said Danielle Jones, a North Carolina State student who is staying close to home because of a family emergency, "it's the recession."

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090226/ap_on_re_us/spring_break_mexico_danger/print;_ylt=AjGttolaZ5uE744zU7deXrth2ocA;_ylu=X3oDMTB1MjgxN2UzBHBvcwMxNARzZWMDdG9vbHMtdG9wBHNSawNwcmludA--

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_3028.html

Travel Alert
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of Consular Affairs

This information is current as of today, Mon Mar 02 2009 07:30:02 GMT-0500 (EST).

Mexico

February 20, 2009

This Travel Alert updates security information for U.S. citizens traveling and living in Mexico. It supersedes the Travel Alert for Mexico dated October 15, 2008, and expires on August 20, 2009.

While millions of U.S. citizens safely visit Mexico each year (including thousands who cross the land border every day for study, tourism or business), violence in the country has increased recently. It is imperative that travelers understand the risks of travel to Mexico, how best to avoid dangerous situations, and whom to contact if one becomes a crime victim. Common-sense precautions such as visiting only legitimate business and tourist areas during daylight hours, and avoiding areas where prostitution and drug dealing might occur, can help ensure that travel to Mexico is safe and enjoyable.

Crime and Violence Throughout Mexico

The greatest increase in violence has occurred near the U.S. border. However, U.S. citizens traveling throughout Mexico should exercise caution in unfamiliar areas and be aware of their surroundings at all times. Mexican and foreign bystanders have been injured or killed in violent attacks in cities across the country, demonstrating the heightened risk of violence in public places. In recent years, dozens of U.S. citizens have been kidnapped across Mexico. Many of these cases remain unresolved. U.S. citizens who believe they are being targeted for kidnapping or other crimes should notify Mexican officials and the nearest American consulate or the Embassy as soon as possible, and should consider returning to the United States.

U.S. citizens should make every attempt to travel on main roads during daylight hours, particularly the toll ("cuota") roads, which generally are more secure. Occasionally, the U.S. Embassy and consulates advise their employees as well as private U.S. citizens to avoid certain areas, abstain from driving on certain roads because of dangerous conditions or criminal activity, or recommend driving during daylight hours only. When warranted, U.S. government employees are restricted from traveling to or within parts of Mexico without prior approval from their supervisors. When this happens, the Embassy or the affected consulate will alert the local U.S. citizen Warden network and post the information on their respective websites, indicating the nature of the concern and the expected time period for which the restriction will remain in place. U.S. citizen visitors

are encouraged to stay in the well-known tourist areas of the cities. Travelers should leave their itinerary with a friend or family member not traveling with them, avoid traveling alone, and should check with their cellular provider prior to departure to confirm that their cell phone is capable of roaming on GSM or 3G international networks. Do not display expensive-looking jewelry, large amounts of money, or other valuable items.

Violence Along the U.S. - Mexico Border

Mexican drug cartels are engaged in an increasingly violent conflict - both among themselves and with Mexican security services - for control of narcotics trafficking routes along the U.S.-Mexico border. In order to combat violence, the government of Mexico has deployed troops in various parts of the country. U.S. citizens should cooperate fully with official checkpoints when traveling on Mexican highways.

Some recent Mexican army and police confrontations with drug cartels have resembled small-unit combat, with cartels employing automatic weapons and grenades. Large firefights have taken place in many towns and cities across Mexico but most recently in northern Mexico, including Tijuana, Chihuahua City and Ciudad Juarez. During some of these incidents, U.S. citizens have been trapped and temporarily prevented from leaving the area. The U.S. Mission in Mexico currently restricts non-essential travel to the state of Durango and all parts of the state of Coahuila south of Mexican Highways 25 and 22 and the Alamos River for U.S. government employees assigned to Mexico. This restriction was implemented in light of the recent increase in assaults, murders, and kidnappings in those two states. The situation in northern Mexico remains fluid; the location and timing of future armed engagements cannot be predicted.

A number of areas along the border are experiencing rapid growth in the rates of many types of crime. Robberies, homicides, petty thefts, and carjackings have all increased over the last year across Mexico generally, with notable spikes in Tijuana and northern Baja California. Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana and Nogales are among the cities which have recently experienced public shootouts during daylight hours in shopping centers and other public venues. Criminals have followed and harassed U.S. citizens traveling in their vehicles in border areas including Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, and Tijuana.

The situation in Ciudad Juarez is of special concern. Mexican authorities report that more than 1,800 people have been killed in the city since January 2008. Additionally, this city of 1.6 million people experienced more than 17,000 car thefts and 1,650 carjackings in 2008. U.S. citizens should pay close attention to their surroundings while traveling in Ciudad Juarez, avoid isolated locations during late night and early morning hours, and remain alert to news reports. A recent series of muggings near the U.S. Consulate General in Ciudad Juarez targeted applicants for U.S. visas. Visa and other service seekers visiting the Consulate are encouraged to make arrangements to pay for those services using a non-cash method.

U.S. citizens are urged to be alert to safety and security concerns when visiting the border region. Criminals are armed with a wide array of sophisticated weapons. In some cases, assailants have worn full or partial police or military uniforms and have used vehicles that resemble police vehicles. While most crime victims are Mexican citizens, the uncertain security situation poses serious risks for U.S. citizens as well. U.S. citizen victims of crime in Mexico are urged to contact the consular section of the nearest U.S. consulate or Embassy for advice and assistance. Contact information is provided at the end of this message.

Demonstrations and Large Public Gatherings

Demonstrations occur frequently throughout Mexico and usually are peaceful. However, even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate to violence unexpectedly. Violent demonstrations have resulted in deaths, including that of an American citizen in Oaxaca in 2006. In 2008, a Mexican Independence Day celebration was the target of a violent attack. During demonstrations or law enforcement operations, U.S. citizens are advised to remain in their homes or hotels, avoid large crowds, and avoid the downtown and surrounding areas. Since the timing and routes of scheduled marches and demonstrations are always subject to change, U.S. citizens should monitor local media sources for new developments and exercise extreme caution while within the vicinity of protests. The Mexican Constitution prohibits political activities by foreigners, and such actions may result in detention and/or deportation. U.S. citizens are therefore advised to avoid participating in demonstrations or other activities that might be deemed political by Mexican authorities. As is always the case in any large gathering, U.S. citizens should remain alert to their surroundings.

Further Information

For more detailed information on staying safe in Mexico, please see the Mexico Country Specific Information at: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_970.html. Information on security and travel to popular tourist destinations is also provided in the publication: "Spring Break in Mexico- Know Before You Go!!" at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/spring_break_mexico/spring_break_mexico_2812.html. For the latest security information, U.S. citizens traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's internet web site at <http://travel.state.gov> where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Warnings, and Travel Alerts can be found. Up-to-date information on security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States and Canada, or, for callers from Mexico, a regular toll line at 001-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). American citizens traveling or residing overseas are encouraged to register with the appropriate U.S. Embassy or Consulate on the State Department's travel registration website at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/>.

For any emergencies involving U.S. citizens in Mexico, please contact the closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. The U.S. Embassy is located in Mexico City at Paseo de la Reforma 305, Colonia Cuauhtemoc, telephone from the United States: 011-52-55-5080-

2000; telephone within Mexico City: 5080-2000; telephone long distance within Mexico 01-55-5080-2000. You may also contact the Embassy by e-mail at: ccs@usembassy.net.mx. The Embassy's internet address is <http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/>.

Consulates:

Ciudad Juarez: Paseo de la Victoria 3650, tel. (52)(656) 227-3000.
<http://ciudadjuarez.usconsulate.gov>.
Guadalajara: Progreso 175, telephone (52)(333) 268-2100.
<http://guadalajara.usconsulate.gov/>.
Hermosillo: Avenida Monterrey 141, telephone (52)(662) 289-3500.
<http://hermosillo.usconsulate.gov>.
Matamoros: Avenida Primera 2002, telephone (52)(868) 812-4402.
<http://matamoros.usconsulate.gov>.
Merida: Calle 60 no. 338 k, telephone (52)(999) 942-5700. <http://merida.usconsulate.gov>.
Monterrey: Avenida Constitucion 411 Poniente, telephone (52)(818) 047-3100.
<http://monterrey.usconsulate.gov>.
Nogales: Calle San Jose, Nogales, Sonora, telephone (52)(631) 311-8150.
<http://nogales.usconsulate.gov>.
Nuevo Laredo: Calle Allende 3330, col. Jardin, telephone (52)(867) 714-0512.
<http://nuevolaredo.usconsulate.gov/>.
Tijuana: Tapachula 96, telephone (52)(664) 622-7400.
<http://tijuana.usconsulate.gov/service.html>.

Consular Agencies:

Acapulco: Hotel Continental Emporio, Costera Miguel Aleman 121 - local 14, telephone (52)(744) 484-0300 or (52)(744) 469-0556.
Cabo San Lucas: Blvd. Marina local c-4, Plaza Nautica, col. Centro, telephone (52)(624) 143-3566.
Cancún: Plaza Caracol two, second level, no. 320-323, Boulevard Kukulcan, km. 8.5, Zona Hotelera, telephone (52)(998) 883-0272.
Ciudad Acuña: Ocampo # 305, col. Centro, telephone (52)(877) 772-8661
Cozumel: Plaza Villa Mar en el Centro, Plaza Principal, (Parque Juárez between Melgar and 5th ave.) 2nd floor, locales #8 and 9, telephone (52)(987) 872-4574.
Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo: Hotel Fontan, Blvd. Ixtapa, telephone (52)(755) 553-2100.
Mazatlán: Hotel Playa Mazatlán, Playa Gaviotas #202, Zona Dorada, telephone (52)(669) 916-5889.
Oaxaca: Macedonio Alcalá no. 407, interior 20, telephone (52)(951) 514-3054 (52)(951) 516-2853.
Piedras Negras: Abasolo #211, Zona Centro, Piedras Negras, Coah., Tel. (878) 782-5586.
Playa del Carmen: "The Palapa," Calle 1 Sur, between Avenida 15 and Avenida 20, telephone (52)(984) 873-0303.
Puerto Vallarta: Paradise Plaza, Paseo de los Cocoteros #1, Local #4, Interior #17, Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit, telephone (52)(322) 222-0069.

Reynosa: Calle Monterrey #390, Esq. Sinaloa, Colonia Rodríguez, telephone: (52)(899) 923 - 9331

San Luis Potosí: Edificio "Las Terrazas", Avenida Venustiano Carranza 2076-41, Col. Polanco, telephone: (52)(444) 811-7802/7803.

San Miguel de Allende: Dr. Hernandez Macias #72, telephone (52)(415) 152-2357 or (52)(415) 152-0068.