

Business visitors who meet the above criteria must complete a *Forma Migratoria de Negocios (FMN)*, business form. These can be obtained from travel agents, airlines, and Mexican immigration officers at ports of entry. An *FMN* is valid for 30 days and can be extended once for an additional 30 days, provided that the circumstances of entry to Mexico have not changed. The *FMN* must be returned to immigration officers upon departure from Mexico.

Many Canadian business people enter Mexico as tourists on their first orientation visit. Subsequent visits for the purpose of conducting business should be covered by a business visitor application, because contracts signed by the visitor could be broken if he or she is not legally eligible to conduct business at the time.

Business Etiquette

Canadians who travel to Mexico for business purposes should bear in mind that they are operating in a different culture. Becoming familiar with Mexican business culture is worth the effort. Among other benefits, it may help to identify opportunities. Mexicans take an easy-going approach to doing business although they retain certain formalities. The most important feature of the Mexican way of doing business is the tacit understanding that family and social obligations take precedence over business.

Sometimes, visitors misinterpret the *mañana* attitude as laziness or procrastination. A more accurate interpretation is that there is a sense of priorities, and leisure ranks prominently. The traditional Mexican lunch is a good example. Most businesses close for lunch every day between 14:00 and 16:00. Conversation during this period rarely focusses on the specifics of business. Discussion of family and friends takes precedence. But it is a

mistake to conclude that the lunch has nothing to do with business. Mexicans like to do business with people they know, and the casual atmosphere at lunch provides an opportunity to assess visitors and get to know them better. A visitor's ability to relax and focus on family and social concerns will play well in the eyes of a Mexican.

Conversely, any sign of impatience or rush will be negatively perceived. For Mexicans, social life focusses on family — usually the extended family — and an attempt to place business ahead of family may be taken as an insult. Traditionally, a man is the head of the family, but women are held in equally high esteem as the mother figure. Elders are respected and revered, something children are taught from an early age.

Foreigners should expect lunch to run at least two hours and not be surprised if it stretches to four. Acceptable topics of conversation include general discussion of business, world news, family and mutual friends. Specific business matters should be addressed only if the Mexican host raises them. Inappropriate subjects include death, money problems and gossip. The issue of who picks up the bill is similar to the Canadian custom. A friendly jostle over the bill may be appropriate, but at the first sign of the host taking offense, the foreigner should be quick to concede graciously.

Another important aspect of building business ties in Mexico is a demonstrated willingness to appreciate the country's culture and language. The time taken to learn even a few Spanish basics will be appreciated. Mexicans are proud of their heritage, and efforts should be made to become familiar with some aspects of the country. Visitors will be asked whether they have taken the time to enjoy some of the local culture, so it may be wise to arrive at a destination

a day early to take in the local offerings. Canadian visitors should be aware that they may be lumped with Americans in the minds of some Mexicans. Americans are sometimes considered arrogant, ostentatious and loud. It does not take much effort to dispel these preconceived notions and to earn the respect of Mexican hosts.

Regarding formal business protocol, a few simple rules apply. Upon meeting, handshakes are the norm. First names are not used until the visitor is specifically invited to do so. Mexicans place high value on titles and status. Business cards should stress the holder's rank and be printed in Spanish or both English and Spanish. Despite the formal nature of the initial meeting, business in Mexico quickly becomes social.

Notwithstanding Mexico's image as a macho society, women wanting to do business there need not be intimidated. The male domination of Mexican business is a fact of life, but women are afforded respect, especially if they demonstrate rank or status within their own organizations. Mexicans respect decision-making clout, regardless of the gender of the person involved. The substance of a business proposition is equally important for women and men.

WHERE TO GO FOR ASSISTANCE

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)

DFAIT is the Canadian federal government department most directly responsible for trade development. The **InfoCentre** should be the first contact point for advice on how to start exporting. It provides information on export-related programs and services, acts as an entry point to DFAIT's trade