
Aspects of Mexican Culture

In these changing times, it is dangerous to generalize. But there are certain characteristics of Mexican culture that Canadians will inevitably encounter. The following sections summarize the more important elements.

Nationalism

Nationalism is fundamental to Mexican culture. Whereas Canadian national pride tends to be linked to current accomplishments, Mexican pride stems from its violent revolutionary history. A long history of foreign domination has left an indelible imprint on the nation's culture. Mexicans have historically mistrusted Americans and, to a lesser extent, foreigners in general. This attitude is one of the factors that have lead past governments to support a closed economy.

Because the borders have been essentially closed to foreign goods for such a long time, the quality and diversity of Mexican products have suffered. Consequently, Mexicans have come to regard foreign products as superior and to mistrust their own. This paradox between national pride and protectionism, combined with a preference for foreign goods, has caused great damage to Mexican industry. In Mexico someone that has a taste for foreign things is sometimes called a *malinchista*, after the Indian wife of Cortes.

Machismo

Women are well-respected in their role as mothers within the Mexican family. The worst possible insult to a Mexican man is to question his mother's honour. On the other hand, women have traditionally had a subservient role in Mexican society. Male dominance is particularly prevalent in the business world. The term *machismo* refers to an attitude of male chauvinism. *Macho* is the Spanish word for male, and it does not have the negative connotations in Mexico that it has in Canada.

Machismo reflects a general underestimation of the ability of women to care for themselves, and an overestimation of their need to be protected. This leads to chivalrous, but condescending, treatment of women. Mexican women usually expect this type of behavior, which is perceived as polite and masculine. On the other hand, the exaggerated masculinity involved is usually intended to impress other males rather than women.

Machismo is gradually disappearing from Mexican society and foreigners should not try to adopt this attitude as a means of fitting in. Women are playing more important roles in business, and foreign influences are starting to cause upper-class men to pay at least lip service to women's liberation. While a sexual double standard persists, Canadian visitors should avoid making assumptions about the role of any particular woman.