

million, its many narrow twisting streets, and its eccentric street names and numbering plan, the capital presents a challenge to Mexican drivers, let alone newcomers. Taxis are generally available and can be hailed on the street. The cheapest taxis are coloured yellow or green. The meter should be switched on but if it is not, settle the fare to the destination in advance. The more expensive taxis tend to gather in front of the hotels and do not have meters. Their fares should be negotiated in advance. You may find that the ride back to a hotel in a regular taxi costs far less than it did from the hotel. Fares rise by at least 10 percent and in some cases double after dark. The complexity of Mexico City's street plan can foil even its taxi drivers. To avoid excessive fares, consult a map before you get into a cab.

Time Zones

Most of the country is on Eastern Standard Time minus one hour. The far northwest of Mexico is on Pacific Time. Some northern border states have adopted Daylight Savings Time which advances the clocks by an hour between April and November.

Business Hours

Business hours usually run from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a two-hour lunch break. In some locations, especially Mexico City, lunch hours are staggered. In these cases, restaurants and other businesses may stay open throughout the day. The industrial city of Monterrey mirrors the business outlook and business hours of the U.S., reflecting its proximity to the Texas border. However, it is not unusual to find business people in their offices at 7 p.m. or 8 p.m. and meetings are sometimes scheduled at these times. Retailers are open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Some close during the lunch hour. Banking hours are normally from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. though some banks will also open from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. to handle certain kinds of transactions. Certain banks open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays as well as on Saturday mornings. Government offices are open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, but many government agencies have had their hours extended until 7 p.m. or 8 p.m. to better serve the public. Factories work eight shifts per week, beginning at 7 a.m. or 8 a.m., with half day shift on Saturday mornings.

Statutory Holidays

Mexicans celebrate nation-wide holidays on January 1 and 6, February 5, March 21, May 1 and 5, September 16, November 20, and December 25. December 1 is an obligatory holiday for the inauguration of a new president every six years, the last inauguration having occurred in 1988. Most religious holidays are frequently observed in private industry although not always in government offices. Such holidays include the Thursday and Friday of Easter week, All Saints' Day, (*Día del Muerto*) on November 1 and 2, and December 12.

Telephones and Faxes

Mexico's telecommunications infrastructure continues to have room for improvement. There are just under 11 million phones serving a population of 85 million; the system is overloaded and line quality tends to be poor. There is a long waiting list to get a telephone installed and thus there is strong demand for cellular telephones. The white pages of the telephone directory are reserved exclusively for personal listings. Business numbers will appear in the yellow pages which are organized according to trade. Few switchboard operators speak English and it may be best to find a Spanish speaking person to help you make the initial contact. Faxes are increasingly being used in the larger centres though performance is uncertain in more remote areas. It is advisable to call ahead and let the party know you are sending a fax to avoid it being misdirected or ignored.