

## Safety First: Vamos a Mexico! (News/Editorial)



If I wasn't already in Mexico I might think twice about coming at all, what with the non-stop grandmotherly US State Department warnings (you can almost hear the click of their cane and the wag of their finger) and the ignorantly hyperbolic CNN hand-wringing every hour on the hour.

Luckily, I entered Mexico in December, so I was already happily and safely here when all the current fear-mongering started. Since crossing the border I've been traveling by car from north to south, east to west, coast to central highlands as part of my Trans-Americas Journey. And guess what? I've yet to see, sense or smell even a whiff of the "drug war dangers" that keep hogging the headlines (and I'm a NYC native, so my

shenanigans-sensors are pretty astute).

Yes, the border areas I've passed through on my way south from Texas are plagued by violence of all sorts, but unless you're in the market for half price Viagra you're not coming to Mexico to hang out in Juarez or Tijuana or any of the other border towns anyway. People looking for the food, beaches, *Pueblo Magicos*, mariachis, *charros*, volcanoes, museums, tequila, shopping, seashore, sunshine and smiles that make Mexico so special fly into the country and bypass the whole border scene altogether.

Despite the current headlines, once you get even a few dozen miles south of the border Mexico remains the destination we know and love: affordable, warm (I'm talking about the weather and the locals) and as safe, if not safer, than many other travel destination. Get hundreds or even thousands of miles south of the border to the destinations everyone is being so alarmist about right now (including Cancun and Puerto Vallarta) and the biggest threat to tourists remains spring break binge drinking not the drug cartels.

All travel comes with a certain amount of risk but compared to the well documented travel dangers in other parts of the world—adept pickpockets in India, tourist-specific attacks in Egypt (including one that just killed a number of German travelers) and the epidemic of hotel room voyeurism in the US for example—the current advisories about Mexico seem hysterical at best, malicious at worst.

As the warnings go on and on, propagated by media reports that rarely dig for first hand truths, I can't help but question whether the US State Department is more concerned about keeping the millions of dollars in spring break spending inside US border where it can help prop up the troubled US economy than it is about spring breaker safety in destinations hundreds of miles away from the drug violence they warn of.

We may never know the answer to that question. However, after more than three months in Mexico, I can address the safety question by telling you that dozens of the country's beaches, towns, cities, attractions, restaurants, spas, hotels and resorts that I've visited have proven to be 100% incident free. My visiting in-laws felt safe enough in Mexico City over Christmas, for example, to go for their daily walk at 6 am every morning by themselves in pre-dawn light.

Mexico is also remarkably un-crowded right now (sadly, those safety warning seem to be hitting the target with some travelers—*Time* magazine recently reported that visitation is down more than 20% from last year in some regions) and an even bigger bargain than normal since the peso is currently bouncing between 14 and 15 to the dollar vs. 11 pesos to the dollar at the beginning of the year.

I can also answer another question: Where to stay once you get here?

While Europe and the US have long had a plethora of hotel groups reliably and efficiently cataloging and quality-controlling their best boutique properties in one easy -to-book place, destinations like Mexico have been less organized about showcasing their growing boutique hotel and resort options. That's what makes [Mexico Boutique Hotels](#) (MBH) such a useful tool.



Established in 1999, MBH rigorously selects and regularly inspects a stable of more than 40 boutique hotels (between 4 and 50 rooms each) in 26 different destinations across Mexico—from Cabo to Mexico City to Oaxaca to Patzcuaro. Some are modern and sleek urban icons, others are historically elegant restored rural haciendas. Still more are chic beach hideaways. Many have award winning restaurants and spas.

Each property is given a detailed page on the MBH web site including key words (rustic, casual, secluded, sophisticated, eclectic, spacious) that really imparts a sense of the personality of each place along with photos and honest and specific information about the hotel , the destination it's located in and what kind of traveler it's best suited to. If the lobby bar is a late night hot spot that generates noise until 4 am, they'll tell you before you check in expecting to catch up on your sleep.

MBH also provides insider suggestions about what to do, see, eat and buy in and around each hotel, guarantees the best rate (if the individual property you're interested in is running a special rate, they'll match it) and offers free Vacation Designers who can work up a custom itinerary that will let you tour a number of cities and a number of MBH hotels if you're lucky enough to have the time for more than a long weekend in scary old Mexico.

They even have a Global Concierge named Rocío Martinez Quinta who's at your service (in perfect English as well as Spanish) to answer any questions and take care of everything (from what to pack to driving directions to organizing special in-room amenities) before and during your stay.

Part of Rocío's job is also to follow up with MBH clients to make sure each experience was flawless. In almost ten years of doing that not one single guest has ever reported a safety or security problem or issue at any MBH hotel—including their eight properties in and around Puerto Vallarta where many of the current State Department warnings have been focused.

This leaves just one final question that only you can answer: ¿Qué usted está esperando?

NOTE: A comment on this article in [Mexico Premiere](#).

The [real numbers on safety in Mexico](#) by a former 60 Minutes producer.