

Bonus 2: Your First Day Survival Checklist

Settle In Smoothly, Get Oriented, and Start Smart in Mexico

Use these day-one tips to help you arrive smoothly, get organized, and reduce unnecessary friction to help the rest of your stay flows more smoothly.

1. Smooth Your Arrival

Before you leave the airport or arrival point, make sure you have the essentials you may need if your battery drops, your signal fails, or you are suddenly too tired to think clearly.

Keep an arrival pack handy

Many experienced travelers keep a simple arrival pack in their carry-on so the most important details are easy to reach. Your arrival pack might include:

- passport
- hotel or host-family address
- booking confirmation
- accommodation phone number and WhatsApp information
- return or onward travel confirmation
- a credit card
- emergency contact information
- allergy or medical notes, if relevant
- a screenshot of your map pin

This is not over-preparing. It is what helps arrival feel calm instead of scrambled.

2. Get Connected Early

One of the fastest ways to lower first-day stress is to get your connectivity sorted before you wander too far. If you need data right away, activate your SIM or eSIM early. Before leaving a reliable Wi-Fi connection, make sure:

- your phone data works
- your map and ride apps are logged in
- your translation app is ready
- any banking or security verification works properly
- you have sent one quick “I landed” message

If possible, also download an offline map of your neighborhood. It is a small step that can save a surprising amount of stress later.

3. Get Money Sorted Early

For your first withdrawal, use an ATM inside a bank, airport, or another well-lit, staffed location. Try to:

- withdraw a modest amount first
- break one larger bill into smaller notes
- keep your daily spending cash separate from your backup cash

In Mexico, small bills are useful almost immediately. Water, snacks, tips, convenience stores, market stalls, and short everyday transactions all go more smoothly when you are not holding only large notes.

4. Have a Reliable Ride to Your Accommodation

Your first transportation decision should be the easy one, not your first Mexico adventure. Choose a reliable way to get to your accommodation, such as:

- an authorized taxi stand
- a hotel-arranged car
- a ride-hailing app
- public transit, if you already understand the route clearly

Using official and reliable transport removes unnecessary variables while you are still tired, overloaded, or unfamiliar with your surroundings.

5. Do a Simple Orientation Loop

Once you have arrived and settled in, take one short walk in daylight around your immediate area to make the neighborhood feel less abstract and more familiar.

During that loop, try to notice:

- one nearby landmark
- the nearest pharmacy
- a convenience store
- a nearby ATM
- the easiest route back to where you are staying

This is also the time to make sure you really know how to get back, not just in theory, but in practice.

6. Know How to Get Back — Especially at Night

Mexico gets much easier once you know how to return to your accommodation without stress.

Don't rely only on a street or hotel name. Save the address, keep the map pin handy, and know one nearby recognizable landmark. Practice saying your destination clearly or be ready to show it on your phone.

Before evening, decide:

- how you would get back after dark
- what your default ride option is
- if the route is simple and familiar enough to be practical

Night feels much easier when you have already made these decisions in daylight.

7. Build a Daily Mexico Kit

By the end of your first day, try to have a small set of basics to carry that make everyday movement easier. Your daily Mexico kit might include:

- a small amount of cash in mixed denominations
- one main card
- a backup card stored separately
- your hotel or host-family address written clearly
- a screenshot of your accommodation on your phone with a saved map pin
- a portable charger
- tissues
- hand sanitizer or wipes
- water, depending on your plans and local best practice
- a copy of your ID where appropriate, with the original kept secure unless needed

You don't need to carry everything you own, but these basics reduce hassle.

8. Commit a Few Polite Phrases to Memory

Even on day one, a little language effort goes a long way.

Try to memorize and use these right away:

- **Por favor** — *por fah-VOR* — Please
- **Gracias** — *GRAH-see-ahs* — Thank you
- **Disculpe** — *dees-KOOL-peh* — Excuse me
- **¿Cuánto cuesta?** — *KWAHN-toh KWEHS-tah* — How much does it cost?

These phrases are simple, useful, and immediately practical. More importantly, they help you move through the day with visible courtesy. In Mexico, a lot of everyday politeness is said out loud.

9. Keep Day One Simple

A good first day in Mexico usually looks organized, hydrated, connected, and low-drama, even if you're dragging from jet lag or time change. At the end of a successful first day:

- you are connected
- you have small cash
- you know how to get back
- you understand your immediate area a little
- you have a reliable ride option
- you have used a few polite phrases
- you are making simple decisions, not complicated ones

That is a very strong start.

Bottom Line

The best first day in Mexico is not the most exciting one. It is the one that leaves you feeling settled so that you can enjoy the rest of your trip.

The faster you get grounded, the faster Mexico starts feeling easier.



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Kristine Madera writes fiction and nonfiction shaped by travel, culture, and lived cross-cultural experience. Her work is grounded in curiosity, observation, and the belief that small acts of awareness can change the way we move through the world. Whether she is writing practical nonfiction or fiction, she is drawn to place, people, and the moments when cultures meet, clash, soften, and surprise us.