

ARK & TENT



Uniting people & animals...through travel

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DRIVING TO MEXICO WITH "THE BARKERS"*Or: How to Make Friends in a Foreign Country & Keep your Dogs Safe and Happy***By Dawn Becerra**

It's always a plus to have children traveling with you when you visit Mexico. Mexicans are in love with children. Their culture and their actions all revolve around the care and love for their children, and they're not shy in their admiration of yours. The thing is, we don't have children of the regular sort; ours are canines...

In Mexico, dogs are generally kept as guards for houses, not as beloved members of the family - though that's changing slowly as people discover the joy and love a pet can bring. The funny thing is that you if you're a foreigner, most Mexicans will accept that you treat your dog as lovingly as a child. (My personal feeling is that seeing how someone from another culture treats their dog helps people learn that four-legged animals are just as deserving of our respect as a fellow human being.)

If you're thinking about making a journey south of the border, and (like us) you'd like to take your dog(s) with you, consider the following "doggie diary" to make your trip run as smoothly as possible:

We drove to Oaxaca, Mexico with our two small dogs this past winter. Before we left the U.S., we visited the vet for all their immunizations. We also brought several months worth of all their medication (including heart worm and flea and tick supplements.) The vet provided us with a certificate we'd need for crossing the border, which had to be issued within a preset number of days before we drove across.

As always, we brought an airplane-approved carrier with us just in case something happened and we had to fly back. (We can also use it as a kennel because the dogs feel comfortable and safe in it.) You can't bring meat or meat products into Mexico, so if you want your pet to be comfortable and not have



to suffer the change of food the day they arrive, be sure to start changing it a few weeks before you go. The food that's available in most of Mexico, even in the little stores, is Pedigree in cans (usually chicken, or pollo) and Purina dry food. There are others, but they're not readily available. Personally, we sneak in our Charley Bear treats in a oyster cracker box (they look like oyster crackers), but the flour-based dog bones made by Purina and Pedigree are available in most Mexican stores.

We made sure to bring an extra leash - most notably a retractable leash, as they're not available in Mexico. We also brought toys, and their beds. Just like I would at home, I kept a lightweight non-tip water bowl and a plastic bowl with their dry food inside of a plastic bag under the passenger seat, and a box of plastic bags I use to pick up after them.

While we were traveling, when we stopped to walk the dogs, we carried either a long stick or a few rocks in our pockets. Mexican dogs are very skittish with people, and react by running away if you throw a small rock by them and say "Vet-tay!" in a loud voice (*vete* in Spanish means: "go away"). They'll react to the loud sound and the rock hitting the ground next to them, which is obviously sufficient to chase them away. There are a lot of stray dogs in Mexico, and the best thing is to just run them off.

As tempting as it might be: don't take in a Mexican street dog unless you've really thought through what it will mean to you and your American dogs. They'll probably have worms, fleas, and other diseases, so be careful. (I have to turn my head and not look at many of the strays; they break my heart.)

We love our dogs, and we love to take them with us. Our trips to Mexico are so much more enjoyable when we don't leave them behind in Minnesota, and end up worrying about them so far away from us. We sometimes have to leave them with doggy-sitters in Mexico when we sightsee (ask around - someone will always be willing to make a few pesos), but they are often with us, and I know they love the trips. Just like you would at home, be sure not to leave them in the car when it's hot, make sure they have water and food en route, and you'll all have a great trip.



So even though Manuel and I don't have kids in the traditional sense, we nevertheless experience the joy of having kids in Mexico play with us and our two dogs. They want to pet them, and play with them, which I personally consider good, international public relations.

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