

# LIFE AFTER DEPORTATION

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Being deported from the country you consider to be home – where your family is, where you grew up, where your life is – feels like losing everything. It is especially disorienting at first, when everything feels foreign and overwhelming. At least that's how I felt when I was deported to Mexico three years ago. I had grown up in the United States, where all my family lives.

This guide is designed to give practical advice to people facing deportation (and their family members). I've learned some lessons while trying to figure things out on my own, and the purpose of this book is to share resources and information with other people who find themselves in the same situation. Since I didn't grow up in Mexico, and I don't have family here anymore, it was a challenge to figure out the basics, like where to live, how to get an ID, and the best way to stay in touch with my family members in the U.S. My hope is that this book will make the process of adjustment easier for you.

Since this is a guide specifically for people deported to Mexico, it might seem strange that it is written in English. This guide is not necessary for people who grew up in Mexico – they know the basics. Instead, this information is geared for people like myself who don't know much (or anything) about how things work in Mexico. I've met a lot of deportees who grew up in the U.S. and don't speak much Spanish. Many of us are more used to communicating in English, so that's why I chose to write in English.

If you find additional information that you think would be useful for others, please email me at [joel@lifeafterdeportation.org](mailto:joel@lifeafterdeportation.org). For additional information, check out our website at [www.lifeafterdeportation.org](http://www.lifeafterdeportation.org). There you will find more information about deportation policy, other people's stories, and links to resources. I look forward to hearing about your experiences, and I wish you all the best as you adjust to your new life.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE DEPORTATION PROCESS**

Before I was deported, I remember trying to make plans with my family members who were going to pick me up. “What time should we get there?” my sister asked. “And where should we meet you?” I had no idea what to tell her, and no one from ICE or anywhere else gave me any details. The deportation process will vary depending on where you are coming from, and whether you are coming from a local jail, a prison, or directly from Immigration detention.

You may be able to ask ICE or prison officials for information about where you will be dropped off. They may provide you with information about the approximate time you will be released, but they may not. I was released in the morning, but I know that people are frequently dropped off in Tijuana in the middle of the night. The United States recently launched a pilot program to fly deportees to Mexico City so they are not concentrated in the border region, so this is another possibility.

If you are trying to meet family members, there are public telephone services that you will be able to use once you are released. At the bus station in Tijuana, for example, there is a stand that will allow you to call American phone numbers. They will take dollars, so as long as you have a little bit of money you will be able to make a phone call.

If you need to travel to another part of the country, you will need to get a bus ticket. If you have money, it's easy. If not, you can go to a Casa de Migrantes to seek assistance with applying for a subsidized bus ticket to return home. Chapter Two has more information about the locations of various Casas de Migrantes.

Otherwise, you may be able to ask for help from other people who are deported with you – if you are lucky, someone might be willing to help you buy a bus ticket. The best way to ensure you have some money is to ask a family member or friend to put some money on your books while you are still detained. When you are released, they should give you this money in cash.

## GETTING SETTLED

After you are dropped off in Mexico, you will have to decide where to go next. This decision may depend on whether you have family in Mexico. If you do, you may plan to travel towards them. Some people plan to stay near the border so that they can see their family members from the U.S.

### **SHELTERS**

If you need a place to go for a couple of weeks while you figure things out, the Casa del Migrante will provide you with meals and shelter for up to 14 days. They will also help you with purchasing a bus ticket to travel elsewhere in Mexico. Their website is: [www.migrante.com/mx](http://www.migrante.com/mx). They have houses in Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo, Tapachula, and other border cities. You can ask around for a local “Casa de Migrantes” and someone should be able to tell you how to find one.

Here is the contact information for some of the major cities:

#### **Tijuana**

Calle Galileo 239 Colonia Postal

Tijuana, Baja California 22350

Phone: 664-382-7685 and 664-682-5180

If calling from the U.S., dial 011-52 before the rest of the phone number.

#### **Tapachula**

Ave. Hidalgo s/n, Colonia San Antonio Cahoacan

Apartado Postal #87

C.P. 29700 Tapachula, Chis.

962-625-4812

## **Nuevo Laredo**

Madero #350

Colonia Viveros

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas

867-714-5611

If calling from the U.S., dial 011-52 before the rest of the phone number.

## **Women & Children**

For women and children, La Casa de Madre Asunta, which is down the street from the Casa de Migrantes in Tijuana, provides housing, food, and resources on a temporary basis.

Their address is Calle Galileo 2305

Colonia Postal

Tijuana, Baja California 22350

Phone number: 664-683-0575.



## **TRAVELING**

If you need to get farther south, you have two options: plane or bus. Of course you could also drive if you have a car, but bringing an American car into Mexico is a separate process. If you buy your ticket in advance, sometimes flying costs about the same as the bus. You will need an ID to get through airport security though. The other issue with flying is that Mexican airlines only allow you to check one bag weighing 25 kilos (50 pounds). Any excess baggage or weight is VERY EXPENSIVE. So if you're traveling with a lot of clothes or other things, it may be better to take the bus.

The buses have compartments underneath where the luggage is stored. You should keep an eye on your things at each stop. Bus tickets can easily be purchased at the "Central Camioneras" on the day that you want to leave. Buses depart throughout the day to all different parts of the country. You will have the choice between regular or "first class." Check out your options. The first class will have air-conditioning, which is nice if you're traveling through hot regions of the country.

## **STAYING NEAR THE BORDER**

Regardless of what your future plans are, some people decide to spend time with family near the border before moving on. Many of us decide to stay in the border region permanently because it is so much easier for family from the U.S. to visit.

Just south of Tijuana, Rosarito has some affordable hotels where you could stay for a few nights. Rosarito is only about 25 minutes south of the border, so it is easy to get to. You can also find monthly vacation rentals of houses or apartments if you want to stay for longer. Vacation rentals will cost more than a long-term rental and will range from \$400 to \$1200 per month, depending on the size, location, and deal you can find. Your family might want to check on craigslist for rental options.

Ensenada is about an hour south of the border. It is a bigger town than Rosarito, so there is more to do there. There is a marina where you can take the kids on boat rides for \$2 each. Ensenada has lots of hotels and vacation rentals as well, and it is an easy drive from the border.

If you decide to stay in the border area for longer, you can find a small apartment for as low as \$100 (US dollars) a month in some colonias in Tijuana and Rosarito. Apartments that are more similar to American standards can be found for as low as \$300 per month if you're lucky. This is reasonable if your family in the US plans to help you with rent. If you're on your own, it's hard to earn enough here to afford that kind of rent. A lot of full-time jobs pay around \$100 per week.

## **MOVING YOUR THINGS**

If you decide to want to move all of your things (furniture, electronics, etc.) to Mexico, you have a few options. The person bringing your things will likely be pulled over by Aduanas (Customs), and you will have to pay a percentage of the value of your things. There is an exception for Mexican citizens who are moving back to Mexico from the United States. You can send someone to the Mexican consulate in the U.S. with a list of everything you are bringing, and the value of each item. You can pay a fee, and they will give you a “Menaje de Casa.” You can present this Menaje de Casa to Aduanas, and you do not have to pay to import your items.

Alternatively, it may be easier to negotiate directly with the Customs officials when your items enter Mexico. You can print a list of the items and their values, or put together receipts showing low values for each item. Since you are charged a percentage of the value, this can help to reduce the amount you have to pay.

There are some moving companies that will handle the entire process for you, but they are pricey. Many people rent moving trucks and drive them into Mexico, although the contract will specify that you cannot leave the country with the truck. Sometimes people are turned around at the border, in which case they put their things into a temporary storage facility near the border (or they try again later in the day). It is common to see Uhaul trucks drive across the border without a problem.

## **BRINGING A CAR**

Different rules apply to bringing a car to Baja California and to the rest of the country. Also, there are different rules for U.S. and Mexican citizens. It is easy for an American to drive a car across the border and to stay in the “border region.” They can use their U.S. driver’s license with no problem.

It is a good idea to get Mexican car insurance because American insurance won’t cover the car in Mexico. Also, anyone driving in Mexico is required to have liability insurance. If you get into an accident and you don’t have insurance, the police can take you to jail. You can stay in jail until they determine who is at fault for the accident, which can be months. It is easy to get Mexican insurance. You can buy it by the day, week, month, or year. It is available either online at a variety of websites, including:

Alternatively, you can stop at one of the many places that sell insurance near the border. Although Americans are allowed to drive their cars in Mexico, technically

Mexicans are not. If you do not have an American driver's license and are stopped driving a car with American license plates, the police are allowed to impound the vehicle. Most of the time, you can avoid this problem by paying the police some money, but it is good to know.

Although it is easy to drive a car into the border region, it is more difficult to drive a car farther into the country. When you leave the designated border region, there will be an Aduanas (Customs) checkpoint. You will not be able to drive past that point with an American vehicle unless you provide the following:

-American Driver's License

-Pink slip in your name

-Deposit of

### **NATIONALIZING AN AMERICAN CAR**

The other alternative is to nationalize your vehicle – to get Mexican license plates. There are two ways of doing this: one is to get “placas fronterizas” that work only in Baja California and the most northern parts of Mexico; the other is to completely nationalize the car. Different rules apply to each, and they both cost money. There are agencies along the border that will handle the paperwork and car inspection for you. Only some vehicles qualify for the full nationalization, so you'll need to consult with an agency to see if it is possible to nationalize yours. If you want to avoid all of the hassle of bringing an American vehicle to Mexico, you could also buy a car once you get to Mexico. The problem is that cars cost more here.

# HOW TO OBTAIN THE DOCUMENTS YOU NEED

## IDENTIFICATION

In Mexico, it is important to carry identification. Police can take you to jail if you do not have an ID. If you have an ID from the United States, carry that until you get your Mexican paperwork in order. A driver's license, state ID card, or even a school ID should work for a while. If you don't have any ID from the U.S., here are a couple of suggestions:

1. Go to Casa de Migrantes or another migrant shelter and ask for assistance. They may be able to help you obtain a temporary ID card.
2. If you have a birth certificate and anything that can prove a temporary address, like a rental contract, you can go to a local governmental office to request a "Carta de Residencia." This is an official paper that can serve as a temporary ID.
3. You could also apply for a Credencial Elector. This is the most widely used ID in Mexico and are issued by the IFE. The problem is that you will need your birth certificate and some kind of ID in order to get the Credencial. You will need to get one at some point, but you may need to get another form of ID first.
4. You could also try to get a driver's license, but they will also want some sort of proof of residence. You will also have to pay for the license, pay for an eye examination, and find a Mexican car that you can use for the driving portion of the test. I paid a taxi driver to take my first driving test and used my Carta de Residencia and my birth certificate as my identification. Each office will vary, and you may need to plead your case to various people in the office.

I recommend trying these options in the order they are listed. When I was deported, I did not have any official ID from the U.S. because I had served twelve years in prison. I was locked up when I was sixteen years old, so I didn't even have an old driver's license. I had my Mexican birth certificate, a photocopy of a California ID with a picture of me as a kid, and an American marriage certificate with no photograph.

I didn't realize it was such a problem to be without an ID until one night when I was driving with my brother to drop my mother off at the bus station in Tijuana. She had come to visit and was returning to Los Angeles. We stopped at a routine military checkpoint that they had set up along the freeway, and the



soldiers asked for my ID. They threatened to take me to jail since I didn't have one.

So the next day, I started going to all of the government offices to try to get an ID. I was able to get a Carta de Residencia using my birth certificate, a business card that showed the address of the place I was renting for a month, my marriage certificate, and my wife's California driver's license that showed that her name matched with the marriage certificate. I told the man who worked there what had happened with the soldiers the night before, and he gave me the letter. This letter was then useful when I went to apply for other documents, like the Credencial Elector and a driver's license.

## **CURP**

Every Mexican citizen is assigned a unique identification number called a CURP. They will ask you for this number on everything – to open a bank account, to apply for a job, to get an ID, etc. The good news is that it is pretty easy to get. You can request it online using by entering some basic information about your birth date and place.

The process is more complex if for some reason your birth was never registered – this can happen since many of us (including myself) were not born in hospitals. If your parents did not specifically go to register your birth, there may not be a record of you. But as long as you have a birth certificate, it should be pretty easy to find out your CURP.

This is the website where you can register for your CURP: <http://consultas.curp.gob.mx/CurpSP/>

If you don't know your CURP, enter your name, birthdate, and the state where you were born into the bottom part of the form. After you do this, another screen will pop up with an electronic copy of your CURP. It will include your CURP number, as well as some additional information. There is a button that will appear at the top of the page that says "Imprimir Formato." This will allow you to print out your CURP.

If you don't have access to the internet to access your CURP, don't worry. There are lots of internet cafes where you can pay less than a dollar to use the computer for a few minutes. You can also ask someone who works in the Internet store to help you to use the computer if you are not familiar with using the internet.

## **CREDENCIAL ELECTOR**

This is the ID they will ask you for EVERYWHERE. It is issued by the “IFE” – the Instituto Federal de Elecciones and is essentially your voter registration card. But they use it like your driver’s license in the US. They will ask you for your Credencial to open a bank account, to apply for a job, for everything. You will need to go to the local IFE office to request a credencial. They have different requirements.

I got my first Credencial Elector in Oaxaca, and I thought I had all of my paperwork in order. Then they asked me for a “croquis.” I had never heard of a croquis. It turns out that it is a small map that you draw of the intersections surrounding a location. In this case, they wanted me to draw out a small map of the area where I lived. You never know what they might ask once you get there, but this is the basic paperwork you should bring:

## **BIRTH CERTIFICATE**

You will need an original copy of your birth certificate to obtain a passport or Credencial (which you’ll need in order to work). If you do not have your birth certificate, you have a few options:

1. You may travel to the city where you were born and obtain an original copy of your birth certificate in person from the local Oficina del Registro Civil. This can be expensive, depending on the distance you need to travel.
2. You can order a copy online from a business like Mexican Vital Records (<http://www.mexicanvitalrecords.com/birth.php>) which charges around \$70 for each birth certificate you order. This is probably cheaper than traveling to your birthplace.
3. I’ve spoken with some people who have called the Oficina del Registro Civil where their birth was registered and have asked them to mail them a copy of their birth certificate. If you can find someone who will help you, this is a cheaper option than #2.

# GETTING A JOB

Mexican wages are bad...really bad. But there are a lot of creative things people do to try to make things work.

## **Collections Work**

If you are in the border region, American debt collection agencies have established offices that specifically recruit english-speaking deportees to make collections calls. These jobs generally pay about \$125 per week, and you work 50 hours per week (Monday through Saturday). You may earn bonuses depending on how much debt you collect each week. Televisa also hires English-speakers and pays about the same wages. I have heard that they run background checks on employees in the United States.

## **Teaching English**

If you are a native English speaker, you might want to consider teaching English. American college kids move to Mexico to teach English, and the pay is better than a lot of other jobs. Pay rates range from \$50 to \$90 pesos per hour. Schools vary a lot in terms of what they require. Some schools will hire you to teach just because you speak English. Others will want you to become certified to teach English. If you plan to stay in Mexico for a while, this may be a good idea. There are different certification courses offered throughout the country, and they cost about \$1500 to \$2000 to complete. Your certification lasts forever, and you also qualify to travel to other countries to teach English. Mexican Universities often hire English teachers as well.

## **Tourist Industry & Timeshare Sales**

Tourism is a big industry in Mexico, and speaking English is important to resorts and other tourist services.

## **Restaurants / Bars**

Your wage in a restaurant or bar will be low, but if you work in a place with a lot of American clients, you may be able to make decent tips. Mexicans often don't tip, or they leave a maximum of ten percent. Americans, on the other hand, usually tip up to twenty percent. Some restaurants or bars will be happy to hire you because you speak English. If you try this option, I suggest you look for a restaurant or bar with American customers.