



Answers to Frequently Asked Questions from Parents

The American Leadership Academy (ALA) exists to support programs that provide education and training for college students and alumni in the areas of leadership, scholarship, service, citizenship and free enterprise. The programs supported by the ALA will promote the value of education, ethics, leadership, citizenship, patriotism and service, and healthy and successful lifestyles. They also will provide marketable skills attendees can use immediately.

The current educational programs, held during winter and spring break periods in Los Cabos, Mexico, originated over 10 years ago. Since then, several thousand young men from campuses across the nation have participated in an outstanding educational experience. Many have returned to their campuses significantly changed and enthused, and we've received hundreds of letters and E-mails reinforcing that our program has a positive impact – from parents too!

As a parent, you may have questions about your son's travel to Mexico. Perhaps this is his first trip outside the U.S., or perhaps you've traveled to other areas in Mexico where health and safety were a concern. Let us try to anticipate and answer some of the questions you may have.

Q: Is travel to Mexico safe?

A: Travel to any foreign country has its challenges, but travel to Mexico – and Los Cabos in particular – has become a regular event for many in the U.S. Los Cabos has ten major airlines and a modern airport that service the region. As one of Mexico's most active and popular resort areas, the community is used to U.S. visitors and English is spoken widely. To many travelers, it is considered little more than "southern, Southern California". As an example, Cabo now has a Costco, Sam's Club, Wal-Mart, a Home Depot and OfficeMax to serve the community, as well as many of the usual U.S. fast food establishments.

NOTE: This year, there were many concerns about violence in Mexico related to drug cartels and also the outbreak of swine flu. Because Los Cabos is 1,000 miles south of the border (where much of the violence occurred) and over 300 miles from the Mexican mainland, it is insulated from most problems in the rest of the country. During the Spring Break season (January through April) of 2009, there were no reports of drug-related violence and no cases of swine flu reported in Los Cabos.

ALA students receive an orientation the day of arrival to acquaint them with the hotel policies, answer questions and outline expectations. We expect students to be good guests both at the hotel and in town. We let them know ALA and Phi Kappa Psi have an excellent reputation here and we expect they will live up to that. We also explain that, as with a visit to any unfamiliar city, they need to act responsibly, be aware of their surroundings, stay in groups and don't carry or "flash" large amounts of cash. There is crime in Los Cabos, as in any resort, but it is mostly petty crime on individuals.

Q: Is the water safe to drink? What about food?

A: Yes. Unlike some other areas in Mexico, the water system in Los Cabos is very modern and water and ice at hotels and restaurants is safe. Our hotel has a biologic and ultraviolet filtering system as an extra precaution. The food staff are licensed professionals and regular health and safety checks are done in the restaurant and bar areas. Food is purchased from proven suppliers.

Where there have been problems, they have been associated to tacos and hot dogs from street vendors in the towns, usually late at night, as bars and restaurants close. There are few health or licensing regulations for these food carts and students are warned during orientation to stay away from these vendors.

Q: What about alcohol?

A: The drinking age in Mexico is 18 and we expect all attendees to be 18 or older. Alcohol is sold and can be consumed at the hotel and at most other hotels, restaurants and clubs. If you have not done so before, this is an excellent opportunity to have a talk with your son about use and misuse of alcohol.

Students who choose to consume alcohol will be expected to do so responsibly. Public intoxication is a crime in Mexico and police are most vigilant during college break seasons. In addition, drunkenness, fighting or damaging property, or the possession of any illegal or controlled substance will be cause for the hotel to evict attendees and/or have them arrested.

Q: What about medical emergencies?

The local police and health care systems are very capable and often benefit from relationships with U.S. organizations. You should contact your health benefit provider/s before your son's trip, to ensure your family or his college health coverage is active while he is in Mexico. Then provide your son the instructions he needs to contact your provider, in case of injury. The ALA requests emergency contact information for all attendees during online registration, so we should have your information, in case we need to reach you. Also, it is important he alert us to any medical conditions that may limit his participation or require our assistance, such as food allergies, epilepsy, sleepwalking, etc. He may do so during his online registration.

NOTE: The ALA carries major emergency coverage only, which includes medical evacuation to the U.S. for life-threatening injuries that cannot be treated locally. This is not comprehensive coverage, so it doesn't help with broken bones or minor injuries. We can refer you to agents for an affordable short-term traveler's policy, if you do not have other health coverage.

Q: Where will my son stay?

A: Marbella Suites en la Playa is a private beachfront hotel about 20 minutes from the Los Cabos airport. Located mid-way between San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas, it is on the public bus line and convenient to many of the activities which make Los Cabos so popular to tourists. During the rest of the year, the hotel rents to the general public and to private and corporate groups. The ALA rents the hotel each year for its educational program weeks.

The hotel has 40 suite-style rooms, meeting facilities, a restaurant, pool and bar, fitness room, computer lab and a phone room where students can make **unlimited free calls back to the U.S.** One of the first requests we make when students arrive is that they call home to let their parents know they've arrived safely. We recommend they continue to check in during their stay.

Q: What is the ALA program like?

A: Unlike some leadership programs that keep participants tied up from dawn to dusk, the Cabo Leadership Experience provides about 4 hours of classes a day, usually from 10 AM to Noon and 1 to 3 PM. These sessions are led by CEOs, entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, scientists, educators and other proven professionals. We also have professional speakers join us on topics specific to college students and success.

The goal is to wake students up, show them how lucky they are to be in the U.S. educational system, help them identify and choose the best habits to make them successful in college and in life, and work with them – via alumni mentors, discussion, skill building and interaction with

peers – to develop focus, direction and an action plan for their success. Perhaps the most productive time will actually be outside the classroom, as they process the information with their peers and decide whether/how the concepts apply to them.

Free time is their own, to nap, enjoy the beach, or hop a bus and explore Los Cabos. There is great snorkeling, golf, ATVs, horseback riding, shopping – even sport fishing – a short ride from the hotel and the hotel staff can make recommendations, regardless of interests. All meals are provided at the hotel, and on some evenings the hotel provides a shuttle service to Cabo San Lucas and back, so they can visit downtown. These shuttles run from 9:30 PM to 1 or 2 AM and are operated by the same licensed provider used by many hotels on the tourist corridor.

Q: How can I reach him, if there is an emergency at home?

A: The hotel has a toll-free number for calls from the U.S. Complete contact information is as follows:

Marbella Suites en la Playa

Carret. Transpeninsular KM 17.5 S/N Col. Cabo Real

San Jose del Cabo, BCS 23450 MEXICO

Toll-Free Phone from U.S. (daytime – Mountain time zone): (866) 654-6160

Front Desk (24/7 or after-hours from U.S.): (520) 232-2506

Website: www.MarbellaSuites.com

Q: How much money should he bring? Does he need to convert his dollars?

A: Students are expected to furnish their airfare and bring spending money for entertainment purposes. Once arrived, the hotel provides room, board and ground transport during their stay, through a contract with the American Leadership Academy.

Depending upon a student's interest, the spending money he will need may range from \$100 to as much as \$1,000. For instance, golf at many of the resort courses is \$250. However, there are many low cost activities – snorkeling is free, ATVs, horseback riding, jet skis or parasailing all are about \$50 – much the same as U.S. resort areas. Food and drink are reasonable in Los Cabos, but prices are consistent with U.S. resorts, because the locals have discovered that's what Americans will pay. Most students arrive with \$100-\$200, then use their credit or ATM cards as needed.

It's not necessary to arrive in Los Cabos with pesos. Most restaurants and clubs take U.S. dollars (though at a low exchange rate), as well as most major credit cards. American Express cards and travelers checks are not as widely accepted as Visa and MasterCard, because of higher fees charged to redeem them. Also, most ATM cards will work in ATMs in Los Cabos. The bank ATMs are most reliable and will provide cash in pesos. The exchange rate will be the daily international banking rate, so is much better than currency exchange kiosks.

Contact Us.

If you have additional questions, we welcome your calls at 877-257-1458, or by E-mail at Info@AmericanLA.org. You may write us at P.O. Box 245, Zionsville, IN 46077-0245. Find out more about the ALA at our website at www.AmericanLA.org.

Additional Resources on Travel to Mexico/Los Cabos

http://www.visitmexico.com/wb2/Visitmexico/Visi_Home

<http://www.mexico.us/>

<http://www.bajainsider.com>

<http://www.loscabosguide.com/>

<http://www.caboweather.com/>