

Mexico Approves New Online Permit for U.S. Boats



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SAN DIEGO -- Just weeks ago, obtaining an FMM (Mexico immigration form) to permit fishing from a U.S. boat in Mexico waters meant traveling all the way to Ensenada. That didn't make much sense to many Southern California boaters -- especially those on day trips, who simply wanted to enjoy a fishing trip within a few miles of the border, off Los Coronados islands.

In a meeting between U.S. and Mexico representatives at SeaWorld San Diego Oct. 17, it was announced that U.S. boaters can now purchase a permit for entering waters just across the border, with the click of a mouse.

"We are very happy that the first step is already done -- and what we want to do, at the Mexican Tourism Office, is expedite the process for boaters," said Mexican Tourism Board of Director Jorge Gamboa.

Gamboa was present at the Oct. 17 event, along with top ranking Mexican Tourism officials -- including Director of Migratory Resolutions Hugo Pacheco, Director of Migratory Revenue Elizabeth Hernandez, Federal Officer of Baja California Rodolfo Pacheco, and Head of Economic and Political Affairs Alberto Gonzales. Officials were either present or participating via webcam.

"I believe this is an incredible market -- and we are more than happy to accommodate (U.S.) boaters into our waters," Gamboa added, describing what Mexico has termed as the "Paisano Program."

Representatives from the San Diego City Council and the San Diego Port Commission, several U.S. Senate and Congressional representatives' staff members, and about 100 company owners and boating groups were present at the event.

Many of the U.S. participants live part-time in Mexico, and said they are happy to see some information about the rules being given to the public. Questions answered included how U.S. boaters will now be able to purchase permits.

Boaters can visit inm.gov.mx to apply for, purchase and print out a \$23 185-day, single-entry tourist permit, which will allow them to fish aboard their U.S. boat in Mexican waters from 0-12 miles from shore or land masses. As before, Mexican fishing licenses and passports are also required for those aboard.

Although currently the only document that can be used in the permit process is a passport, Sport fishing Association of California president Ken Franke and other U.S. representatives are working toward expanding options.

"We'd like to make it so that you could use any form of government issued I.D. -- like birth certificates and driver's licenses," Franke said.

He believes that the option will boost the number of people who cross the border to fish in Mexico.

"What they're also considering is a multiple-entry document, which would offer a savings to those who want to do (several) quick trips." Currently, each permit expires when the permit holder leaves Mexican waters.

"Overall, frankly speaking, this is a good thing," Franke said. "These are changing times, and we're encouraging people to visit Mexico both by water and land. There's a strong spirit of cooperation toward getting the country's tourism back on track."

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