

The Ensenada Paperwork Cha-Cha

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Bright and early Monday morning we were out to do the paperwork Cha-Cha. This is John Raines term, and I can't think of a more apt one. This is like a board game where you advance several squares, then draw a penalty card and have to go back a few. Then you pay some money, then you walk several miles...well, here's how it actually went.

The first stop was at the Baja Naval Marina office to pay our berth rent for two nights. Of course there was nobody in the office. So we thought we'd go to immigration and do the berth rent thing afterward. At immigration, the officer was a little on the salty side when he found out we hadn't filled out our tourist visa cards. The Marina office would normally give you those and help you fill them out when you checked in. Oh, well. He gave us some and we filled them out (incorrectly, of course, on my part, causing some additional growling) and then he gave us a voucher to take to the Military Bank (and that bank only) to pay the immigration fee of \$390 pesos. This is a 10 or 12 block walk each way. He kept our Passports to ensure that we would return, and we did, after stopping at another bank to raid the ATM and get 3000 pesos in cash to continue the process.

With our immigration visas in our hands, it's on to the Port Captain, next door to immigration. Here our earlier transgression of not paying for the berth caught up with us. We needed a voucher from Baja Naval that the berth fees were paid before the Port Captain's office could complete the paper work. So it's back to Baja Naval, about a 6-7 block walk, and this time, he's there. We fill out forms, pay the fees, walk back to the Port Captain's office with the voucher, receive another voucher, and hike off to the bank to pay the Port fees. (Different bank; this one has to be Banamex). This is another 10-12 blocks each way. The fee is 447 pesos. Back we come to the Port Captain's office where we are directed to a different window and our papers are collected. But we're not done yet. We're to come back after 1:30PM to pick them up; they cannot be completed while we wait. (They didn't say anything about closing early.)

Russ has to get a Mexican Provisional Amateur Radio Permit. This office, SCT, is about 20 blocks away from where we have been doing business all morning, so we walk part way and take a cab the rest. Last year, this was a slam-dunk. This year, the woman behind the SCT desk is completely befuddled by our request. I lay out last year's documents, and copies of all of this year's papers. She shuffles through them, making additional copies of some, making piles containing duplicates of some, none of others, then re-shuffles them into other piles, then consults a manual of sorts, and finally goes to the phone to call for help. Half an hour passes. She continues to shuffle the papers into different piles and different orders. There's another woman that seems to be attached to the office, but she spends most of the time outside, coming into the office only to fish out some candy from a jar, offering us some in the process, and going back outside again. We are the only customers. Finally the 'Jefe' arrives. He takes her piles, re-sorts

them into what he needs, gives us back some, and completes the forms on the computer. He's very friendly, bantering with me and calling me "Russ".

Another fee, another bank. Only Banamex will do, about 14 blocks from the SCT office. We take our voucher and walk, asking directions twice on the way and finally find a Banamex. (Different one; the one we used before is on the opposite end of town now.) This time we are lightened by 847 Pesos. The SCT office closes at 2:30PM, and by now it's after Noon, so we catch a cab back with our voucher and make him wait while we run in, hand over the voucher and retrieve our papers. Done!

Now we have time for lunch. But during our fish tacos we begin to worry that the Port Captain's office might also close at 2:30PM. We hit the Internet café across the street for a quick e-mail retrieval, then hike back (about 12 blocks) to the Port Captain's office and arrive at 2:15. Sure enough, they close at 2:30. We just made it. After filling out and signing yet another form, we are handed our documents for clearance into Mexico and for continuing on from Ensenada to our next port of call, Mazatlan.

But wait! First we have to go back to immigration with their required (and they aren't kidding!) copy of our exit papers.

We have walked over 5 miles today. The total hit for fees, lunch, cab fare and Internet time comes to just over 3000 pesos; almost 300 dollars. Some of this will repeat in other ports, some will not. There is an "API" fee that we have usually paid in other ports that we seem to have avoided here. The radio license is a one time thing, good for 180 days. The visits to immigration, the Port Captain, and the banks will be repeated at other ports, though only the Port Captains charge a fee. In Ixtapa and Mazatlan, they seem to be able to do the whole immigration-port captain thing at the Marina office for a total of \$15 US each way with no walking and in 5 minutes. In La Paz it's \$25. And no visits to the bank. Life is a mystery.

The End