

EMBASSY

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Mexicans declare 'surprise, anger' at visa application process

By [Anca Gurzu](#)

Depressing. That's the word that comes to Brenda Kuri Tiscareño's mind when she remembers learning she wouldn't be able to visit

Her four-day tourist visa to Canada had been rejected. Immigration officers said she did not have sufficient funds for her stay and for her trip.

Ms. Kuri has been working for the Mexican government for two years promoting her country internationally, especially in the Asia

Yet, she has a particularly strong connection to Canada: The 26-year-old attended high school in Quebec City from 2001 to 2003, applied for permanent residence, but eventually decided to move back to Mexico for personal reasons.

Two months ago, Ms. Kuri applied for a visa to visit Canada at the beginning of April.

Along with the standard application form, passport, photographs and regular fees, she supplied a bevy of additional required documents: her leave of absence and indicating her title and salary; bank statements showing her financial history for the last six months; recent certificate to prove her assets in Mexico. She also indicated she would bring \$3,000 with her for the four-day vacation.

A "detailed travel itinerary" was also highlighted as mandatory in the application checklist. Ms. Kuri had reserved her plane ticket.

"I only had a reservation, but the [immigration officer] said she needed to see the ticket," Ms. Kuri recalls. "It's a circle. If you don't have a ticket, they won't give you the visa."

Ms. Kuri isn't sure how much the fact she didn't have a plane ticket factored into the immigration officer's decision, but she says she

"I think I perfectly showed I don't want to live there and that I am perfectly installed in my country," she says.

"Mexicans are very important to Canada and they are just making it harder for us," she says.

Ms. Kuri's frustration echoes that of other Mexican travellers. Immigration Minister Jason Kenney announced the imposition of visa requirements on Mexican claimants coming from the country.

After having enjoyed a visa-free regime with Canada for many years, Mexicans have been battling a cumbersome visa application causing economic and diplomatic damage as well.

Enrique Olvera, chef and owner of the famous Mexican restaurant Pujol, was invited to prepare a guest chef dinner at a Montreal restaurant. Mr. Olvera said financial compensation was not part of the event.

He applied for a single-entry, five-day visa, but after having provided all the necessary details about his Mexican businesses, was refused.

There wasn't sufficient time to apply for one, so Mr. Olvera and his sous-chef—who had bought their plane tickets in advance as they had to travel to Mexico—were stranded.

Many Mexicans have taken the travel itinerary requirement to mean they must purchase tickets before applying for a visa—perhaps as they did with Ms. Kuri.

A request for clarification from Citizenship and Immigration Canada on the need to have a purchased ticket was not provided before the application.

"It was more of a surprise, and then a little bit of anger, but you have more things to do rather than spending your emotions on that. I want to get back [to Canada]. I wouldn't travel there for my personal vacation."

The visa application process has also hit Emma Eileen Jackson de Diaz, a Canadian-born Alberta resident who married Mexican chef Enrique Olvera.

Mr. Diaz had been trying to apply for a visitor visa to see his pregnant wife in Canada, after being forced to return to Mexico because of lack of documents highlighting their long-term plan to move to Mexico—and even Ms. Jackson's first ultrasound—Mr. Diaz's application was refused.

"The application process definitely works as a deterrent for people who want to visit Canada," said one official at the Mexican Embassy in Ottawa.

This deterrence has certainly been felt in the tourism industry. The number of Mexican travellers to Canada each month has decreased significantly since August 2009, after the visa imposition, according to Statistics Canada figures. In February of this year, that number stood at 9,400.

"It definitely is a deterrent," said Randy Williams, former president of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, now CEO of Tourism Canada. "Even if it is to complete, even if it is a one-pager that asks for your name, it is more of a deterrent than it was before."

Mr. Williams said the tourism industry would like to see Mexican visitation numbers moving upwards again, but he said he understands the need for security.

The Canadian visa application process is not more difficult for Mexico than for other countries, he added.

"Canada is certainly not picking on the Mexican people and being more punitive with them," Mr. Williams said, pointing to similar requirements for other countries.

Mexican travellers, who are not used to such stringent visa requirements, repeatedly compare the Canadian application process with the U.S. visitor visa.

Documents mandatory for the Canadian application, such as bank statements, pay slips, copies of property and vehicle registration, are not required for the U.S. visa.

applying for an American visa.

Although US immigration officers encourage any additional information, the decision to grant a visa is mainly based on an in-person interview. In-person visa applicants automatically obtain 10-year visas, even if—hypothetically—their vacation is only a month long.

Carlo Dade, executive director of the Canadian Foundation of the Americas and co-chief of the Canada-Mexico Initiative, said Mexico's visa application form, "but your annoyance doesn't last beyond the time it takes to answer that question."

By imposing such stringent visa requirements, Canada is turning away potential Mexican travellers who might not want to go through the process.

"Mexicans get a visa with the US because they know they will use it for work," Mr. Dade said.

But not Canada, he said, "so our ability to attract people to come up was to some degree predicated on the lack of a visa. Our competition is on the same footing as the US."

agurzu@embassymag.ca

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