

Welcome to Mexico

By Victoria Schmidt

Mexican Currency



I admit it. I am dumbfounded by the currency of Mexico, coming from the USA where all currency was green and on cotton fiber and uniform size for the notes, and the coins while in various sizes, were uniform in color. The currency from my first trip to the ATM in Mexico reminded me of Monopoly money. The bills were various sizes, different colors and some of it felt like plastic.

As I began to accumulate them, the coins themselves were even more confusing. There were several different sizes but everything looks incredibly alike. The 1¢, 2¢ and 5¢ all looked the same to me at first glance, and I was constantly confused about the \$10 peso coin and the 10¢ coin until I realized the \$10 peso coin was big, and therefore worth more. Duh.

But now, nearly four years later, I have additional conundrums. Why does the Bank of Mexico

reissue money so frequently? There are two different sizes of \$100 and \$200 pesos notes...and several different designs. One design has no real obverse or reverse. Some \$200 peso notes have what looks like statues on both sides. And the \$500 peso notes have two different men on two different notes, and one has a woman on the opposite side. But at least so far, the colors have stayed consistent.

However, what drives me round the bend are the centavos! The newest issues of the 10¢ and 20¢ are the worst. They look like tiny buttons! The printing is so small I can't tell the difference between the 10¢ and 20¢, because the size seems virtually the same—miniscule! I can't even see them when I drop them on the floor!

Like everyone else in Mexico, I have that container where I collect the coins that are useless to carry, and wonder what I will do with them as they mount in numbers. Personally, I think the centavos are getting smaller because it costs more to produce them than they are actually worth. Ever curious, I looked up the content of the 1992 series 10¢. Ready? They're made of stainless steel, chromium, nickel, carbon, silicon manganese, sulfur, phosphorous and iron. Who knew so many items of the periodic table of elements could be fused into a tiny coin? I don't know what the more recent issues are made of, but I think the final products are more valuable as products used in arts and craft projects. Maybe they could be used to form chainmail.

No one I've met seems to be thrilled with these little nuisances. Most businesses round up or down to the nearest 50¢. Fine by me. Banks only take them because they have to, and did you know that Mexico doesn't use those wonderful little paper rolls to organize their coins? Nope. They use scotch tape. Imagine the dexterity it takes to roll ten 10¢ coins together? Those little buggers roll everywhere, and are so small they could be lost under a fingernail! Imagine being the unlucky employee at the bank that must roll those coins. I bet the tape is worth more than the coins by the time they get done with them!

Since most businesses seem to round to the nearest 50¢ perhaps the 10¢ and 20¢ should be permanently retired from circulation. Until then, I'm moving my stash into the empty five-gallon water bottle!