

Mexican Money Madness 1993:

Mexico's peso had inflated to about 3000 to the US dollar, so at the end of 1992 they just divided by 1000 and dropped the three zeros. The Nuevo Peso...N\$Peso....was about three-per-buck. All the paper currency had to be reprinted. The dollar was more valuable than ever, so the Mexicans had old pesos, new pesos, huge clunky coins (most big coins were old pesos, finally sold for scrap to China, and the small coins were new, I think), and US dollars in mixed circulation.

Since we were staying at Club Med, I carried a little zippered belt pouch with me that contained a mixture of Club Med bar beads, old and new peso coins, new paper pesos, traveler's checks, US paper money, US coins, a MasterCard, a Visa card and a little beach sand and a few gum wrappers, our room key and some Bullfrog sun-block.

Furthermore many cash registers had not been updated to accept the new pesos, so decimal points were often wandering around unsettled. Often a piece of chewing gum became the decimal point. And of course the exchange rate floated hourly and varied from place to place. And I sometimes used several types of currency in one deal (except maybe the Club Med bar beads). And the abbreviation for US dollars and Mexican pesos are identical. Yeh, okay *and* I didn't speak much Spanish, and in fact many of the salespeople were Mayan and many of them didn't speak Spanish or anything else I could recognize. And there was the third-world altered-reality of some things being ridiculously cheap and some thing being even pricier than in the US. Tolls on the fast empty toll road from Cancun to Merida, for example were twenty bucks or more.

Buying was further complicated by the cutthroat bargaining and the fact that small change was just a throwaway or a tip in most deals, by custom. Did I mention that the change was never offered in anything but a handful of Nuevo Pesos regardless of what form the original payment was in?

Thus, the calculations needed to pay for something were usually beyond my tropical sun-addled brain. This was a problem that I solved by either giving everyone \$20.00 US to start and hoping for the correct change (sometimes they wanted more money) or; holding all my money in various currencies in my open pouch and letting them root around and take what they wanted.

Both systems seemed to work well.

Eric