THE NOMAD STREET GUIDE

30 words to survive & thrive.

Street-smart Spanish for talking prices, reading the room, and moving through Latin America with confidence.

30 TERMS
4 situations
0 textbook fluff

READ THIS FIRST Slang changes fast—and by country. Check the location tags before testing a new phrase.

01 Money & Street Smarts

Know the number before you nod

01 Plata

WIDELY USED

☕ Café & Coworking

Money—the everyday alternative to dinero.

LOCAL TIP "No tengo plata" sounds natural. Keep the amount you carry to yourself.

02 Lana

MEX

🏠 Landlords & WhatsApp

Cash or money.

LOCAL TIP Great with friends. In formal shops, stick with "¿cuánto cuesta?"

03 Lucas

SOUTH AMERICA

🚕 Ubers & Transport

Units of money, often thousands.

LOCAL TIP The value shifts by country. Confirm the full number before paying.

⚠ Local code: "Lucas" changes value by country—confirm the exact amount.

04 Feria

MEX

🛍 Markets & Cash

Cash, coins, or small change.

LOCAL TIP "¿Traes feria?" means "Do you have change?" It can also mean a market.

05 Barato / caro

WIDELY USED

🛍 Markets & Cash

Cheap / expensive. Your essential price check.

LOCAL TIP "Está caro" challenges a price without accusing anyone. Keep it light.

06 Regatear

WIDELY USED

🛍 Markets & Cash

To bargain or negotiate.

LOCAL TIP Fine at markets, not menu-priced restaurants. Try "¿Me lo deja en…?"

07 Cambio / vuelto

WIDELY USED

🚕 Ubers & Transport

The money you should get back.

LOCAL TIP Cambio travels widely; vuelto is common farther south. Count it before leaving.

08 ¿Cuánto es lo menos?

WIDELY USED

🛍 Markets & Cash

What's your lowest price?

LOCAL TIP Use it after showing real interest—not as your opening line.

02 Social & Nightlife

Read the room, then join it

09 Parche

COL

🍻 Social & Nightlife

A crew, hangout, or casual plan.

LOCAL TIP "¿Cuál es el parche?" asks what the plan is.

10 Rumba

CARIBBEAN · COL

🍻 Social & Nightlife

A party or a night out.

LOCAL TIP "Ir de rumba" means going out to party.

11 Chela

MEX · ANDES

🍻 Social & Nightlife

Beer.

LOCAL TIP In Argentina, you'll hear birra more often.

12 Buena onda

WIDELY USED

🍻 Social & Nightlife

Cool, friendly, or giving good energy.

LOCAL TIP A safe compliment: "Este lugar tiene buena onda."

13 Ligar

VARIES

🍻 Social & Nightlife

To flirt, connect, or hook up.

LOCAL TIP The meaning changes by country. Don't imply more than happened.

⚠ Read the room: The implication ranges from flirting to hooking up.

14 Tranqui

WIDELY USED

☕ Café & Coworking

Chill, relaxed, no problem.

LOCAL TIP Short for tranquilo/a. Casual settings only.

15 De una

COL · ANDES

🍻 Social & Nightlife

Absolutely; right away; I'm in.

LOCAL TIP "¿Vamos?" — "De una."

16 ¿Qué onda?

MEX · C. AMERICA

🍻 Social & Nightlife

What's up? What's the vibe?

LOCAL TIP Keep it casual—this isn't your business-meeting opener.

03 Everyday Survival

Move smarter, miss less

17 Chamba

MEX · PERU

☕ Café & Coworking

Work or a job.

LOCAL TIP "Busco chamba" means you're looking for work.

18 Jale

MEX

☕ Café & Coworking

A job, gig, or task.

LOCAL TIP Context matters—it can also mean pulling something.

19 Camello

COL

☕ Café & Coworking

Hard work or a job.

LOCAL TIP "Conseguir camello" means finding work, not a camel.

⚠ Local code: Use this for work in Colombia; elsewhere it may just mean camel.

20 Colectivo

SOUTH AMERICA

🚕 Ubers & Transport

Shared public transport.

LOCAL TIP The vehicle varies. Ask where it stops and when you pay.

21 Pilas

COL · ECU

🚕 Ubers & Transport

Stay alert; pay attention; move.

LOCAL TIP "¡Pilas!" can be advice—or an urgent warning.

22 Ahorita

WIDELY USED

🏠 Landlords & WhatsApp

Now, soon, later—or a vague future.

LOCAL TIP Never assume immediately. Ask "¿En cuántos minutos?"

23 Mande

MEX

🏠 Landlords & WhatsApp

Pardon? or Yes? when called.

LOCAL TIP A polite, normal response—not automatically submissive.

24 Vale

SPAIN · UNDERSTOOD

🏠 Landlords & WhatsApp

Okay, agreed, sounds good.

LOCAL TIP Dale or listo often sounds more local in Latin America.

04 Crucial Filler Words

Sound human, not textbook

25 Pues

WIDELY USED

☕ Café & Coworking

Well, then, so—conversational glue.

LOCAL TIP "Pues, no sé" lands softer than a blunt "No sé."

26 O sea

WIDELY USED

🏠 Landlords & WhatsApp

I mean; in other words; basically.

LOCAL TIP Perfect for clarifying. Too much sounds like saying "like" nonstop.

27 Igual

WIDELY USED

🏠 Landlords & WhatsApp

Anyway, still, perhaps, or same.

LOCAL TIP "Igual voy" often means "I'm going anyway."

28 Dale

S. CONE · CARIBBEAN

🏠 Landlords & WhatsApp

Go ahead, okay, let's do it.

LOCAL TIP Tone decides whether it means encouragement or agreement.

29 Listo

WIDELY USED

🚕 Ubers & Transport

Ready, done, settled, understood.

LOCAL TIP In Colombia, "Listo, nos vemos" neatly closes the conversation.

30 Ni modo

MEX · C. AMERICA

🍻 Social & Nightlife

Oh well; nothing can be done.

LOCAL TIP Use for small setbacks—not someone's genuinely bad news.

TAKE IT TO THE STREET

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