



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	ITAM, Mexico City, Mexico
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1, 2019
Otago degree(s)	LLB, BA
Major(s)	Politics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
CSO 14045 Politica y Gobierno de Mexico	Spanish	POLS	
CSO 14096 Technology, Politics and War	English	POLS	
EIN 17303 Mexico-U.S-Canadian Relations	English	POLS	
EGN 11155 Nuevas Visiones Historia de Mexico	Spanish	POLS	
CLE 10518 Communication in Spanish III	Spanish		

Any comments about these papers?

Nuevas Visiones is an awesome class to take to immerse yourself in the history of the area. It's catered towards exchange students, so the teacher speaks slowly. Perfect for someone who wants to take a class in Spanish, yet isn't super confident.

I would also highly recommend Politica y Gobierno – it is a much more challenging class and the work load is quite big, but it is very rewarding. I'd recommend it to someone with intermediate level Spanish and above. The teacher – Denise Dresser – is a very famous political analyst.

The Spanish communication class, whilst not transferring credit back for most people, is an awesome way to get to know your fellow exchange students. I would recommend doing it even if you have a high level of Spanish.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

ITAM is very highly well-regarded school in Mexico. It is a private university, and because of this the students tend to be from much more wealthy families. This can create quite a bubble of privilege considering the inequality in Mexico. However, the students and staff are incredibly friendly and welcoming. They are very understanding of you being on exchange and wanting to travel etc. The classes are small, and often require a high level of class participation. The teachers are very passionate and do expect students to work hard.

The work load of my courses varied quite a lot. However, in comparison to Otago, the grading and workload was very manageable around the exploring and travelling.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I lived in Alpina 11, Tizapan. It was awesomely located – a 10-minute walk from ITAM. For the price you pay, the facilities and rooms were very good. I had a single room, using the shared bathrooms. It has a beautiful outdoor deck area for chilling, studying, and having friends over. I lived with a mixture of local Latin American students and foreigners, which was very helpful in terms of improving my Spanish! There were also students from other Universities living there.

Most of my close friends from my experience lived in Hidalgo 26 (a 5-minute walk away). This became very much my second home. This had a much more family vibe than Alpina – but I would say the facilities weren't as good for the price. I also had other friends living in other accommodation. Honestly, the accommodation is not the be all and end all. The exchange student family at ITAM tends to be quite small, so you end up making friends and hanging out in many different places. I would recommend, however, choosing an accommodation close to ITAM campus. Whilst areas like Condesa and Roma are amazing, the hassle of commuting across the city every day is quite draining.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

Accommodation: \$4,880 pesos per month – equivalent of \$390 NZD (\$97 per week)

Flights: \$2500 return

Insurance: \$1360 - I got zero-excess insurance which I would most definitely recommend. However, I would not recommend insuring through Allianz. I had my phone stolen, and their process was very tedious!

Food: I am not the best budget'er, but I would guess around \$500 pesos a week on average. This includes some weeks where you go out. In general, my food cost me very little – I would recommend shopping at the local market – El Mercado Tizapan. The fruit and vegetables are beautiful and fresh and the vendors are gorgeous people! Plus, it really makes you feel as though you are part of the community.

Travel: Buses cost around 100 pesos per hour of travel, and your average hostel ranges from 100-200 pesos per night in a dorm room. Depending on where you want to go, I'd recommend setting out a brief plan for the holidays etc at the beginning of the term. If you get in early flights can be super cheap. But, travel is definitely the money sucker. I would recommend finding travel buddies with similar budget/travel styles.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

I got myself Kiwibank travel cards, however I found it easiest just to use my NZ Visa debit card. Most of Mexican life is handled in cash. The ATM's at ITAM have a really good rate.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

The tourist visa allows you to stay in the country for 180 days. Even though I arrived in Mexico on the 20th of November, 2018, for a month and a half of travel before Uni, and I had an open plan to stay in Central America for a month after studies, the Mexican Embassy advised me against getting a Student Visa. Their official advice was to leave the country and come back in if I needed to re-start my 180 days.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

ITAM provides exchange students with an option of using their insurance. This is not mandatory. However, you must give them proof that you have your own insurance if you do not use theirs.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

Whilst I started the semester going to salsa lessons, unfortunately it clashed with classes a few days a week. But I had friends who continued on and found it an awesome experience! Especially in making Mexican friends. I'd recommend exchange students try to at least go along to a couple of classes.

There were lots of other clubs and sports teams, as well as a gym, yoga lessons, and music rooms.

What was the university/ city like?

ITAM is a very small, private university. It is renown and quite a privilege to attend. Like is said, it can be a bit of a privileged bubble, but everyone is incredibly friendly. Just make sure you explore other parts so that you get a taste of everything Mexico has to offer.

Mexico City is crazy, and very big! But it is also an exciting and awesome place to live. It's filled with things to do, and even if you spent all of your time in the city, I guarantee you won't get bored.

Condesa and Roma are beautiful neighbourhoods which are more affluent and hipster. I really loved the Centro Historico as well.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

Travel and explore as much as you can. You'll only regret it in the end if you don't. I travelled all over Mexico. My favourite states being Chiapas and Oaxaca. I also went to Baja California Sur, which was a crazy experience – so different from the southern part of the country. Chiapas is full of jungles and waterfalls, with Palenque probably being my favourite spot. Oaxaca has some of the most amazing food – you have to try mole and chapulines – and awesome mezcal (a more smokey version of

tequila). It also has a huge variety of landscapes, from the dry centre, the beautiful mountains, and then the coast. My recommendations are San Jose del Pacifico in the mountains on your way to the coast, and Mazunte – small hippie beach town.

I also loved San Miguel de Allende, although there are a lot of gringos! It has beautiful buildings and little cafes.

I travelled for a month and a half before I started my studies, through the south of Mexico and Guatemala. I loved the cenotes in the Yucatan area, especially staying in the hippie town of Tulum.

I would also highly recommend Guatemala as well! It is an absolutely gorgeous country. I loved this 6-day jungle hike I did to Mayan ruins called El Mirador, and staying on the lake side of Lake Atitlan – in San Marcos.

Any tips for future students?

Do not stress about university took much – take it from someone who made the mistake at first.

Otago teaches us well and the ITAM teachers are super understanding of the experience we come on exchange to have.

Soak it all in! It will be one of the most incredible experiences of your life. Open your mind to a very different way of life, and make friends with all the locals you can!

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

I adored my experience in Mexico! It became my home, buying my daily mangos from the gorgeous couple who owned the local tienda, buying my vegetables from the lovely old man at the Tizapan Market, and learning the Mexican lingo – “whey” = “dude” “no mames” = “no way”. Mexico is most definitely a challenge, and exchange is not always easy. However, you make the most amazing friends who are also in the same crazy boat. You are submersed in the most vibrant, welcoming and also over-whelming culture and way of life, and almost every day is a sensory overload. But that is the beauty of Mexico, it is unapologetically Mexico.

ITAM offered an intriguing look into a section of Mexican life, which made for interesting comparisons with the poverty you see around you in other parts of the city and country. However, the academics they offer is very high-quality and the teachers are incredibly passionate. I loved taking papers about the history and political set up of a country so completely different from that of New Zealand. It really helped to ground my experience.

Mexico will always be a second home for me, and I will definitely be going back!



