



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM)
Semester & Year of Exchange	First semester, 2019
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Double major in English literature and Spanish

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Politics and Government of Mexico	Spanish		6
Technology Politics and War	English		6
New Historic Visions of Mexico	Spanish		6
Selected Topics of Africa	Spanish		Dropped

Any comments about these papers?

Politics and Government of Mexico is an extremely tough class, especially if your Spanish is not excellent. The professor does not teach for the benefit of the exchange students and there for does not slow down her speech or use powerpoint for her lectures; the class is more discussion focused. However, learning about Mexico's current political climate is very rewarding, especially in understanding why the country is the way it is. But I will warn you, the professor has high expectations of her students and there are a lot of readings involved.

Technology and War was my favourite class: taught completely in English by a charismatic and funny lecturer, this class was every exchange students "safe zone" with her work load being very minimal yet her class content being extremely interesting. I would recommend this class without a doubt, even if it has nothing to do with your degree. There are very few assignments and the professor is extremely warm and helpful, even with things outside of the classroom (she offered advice when my phone was stolen and even invited the Kiwi exchange students to be in her husband's rugby team).

New Historic Visions of Mexico is an exchange student staple at ITAM: many students take it to improve their Spanish as she speaks slowly and clearly for everyone to understand. She is also extremely understanding in students missing classes to travel (not all lecturers are) and even encourages you to see the sights. Again, it is also rewarding understanding the history of Mexico since it does a lot to explain modern social issues within the country.

Selected Topics of Africa was a paper I had to drop after my first class as the teacher spoke little to no English and wouldn't allow me to hand in papers in English. I imagine that this paper would be interesting but only take it if your written and listening Spanish is incredible (his first language is French, so this language can also apply). All my other classes that were in Spanish, allowed me to hand in assignments in English.

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

The teaching style at ITAM is much more interactive with a lot of grades depending on participation. The classes are also a lot smaller with attendance being a mandatory (you may only miss six classes, or you fail) there for they resemble more of a high school atmosphere. I found this teaching style both rewarding yet frustrating as the lecturers get to know the students better, yet you feel restricted in your possibilities to travel. I found the semester to be more work than expected however after the final exams, I realized how much information I had learned and obtained so in the end, I imagine there teaching style is actually very effective.

Accommodation

I lived in a 12 roomed house called Hidalgo 26, also known as the "party house." It is a five minute walk from ITAM and just in front of a market with plenty of taco vendors. I loved living here as it was all exchange students who were all keen to make friends and travel in the weekends. If you don't like drinking four times a week, I would not recommend this house. Every room comes with a bathroom and a small kitchen, so you have your own space. The rooms are also cleaned once a week and the landlord is very professional and quick to respond to complaints. I made life-long friends living in this house and would recommend it to anyone going to Mexico for a more social experience rather than an academic experience.

Money matters

My basic costs changed every week, depending if I travelled on the weekends or not. My room costed around \$130 per week (internet and energy included), groceries were around \$50 per week, depending if I was lazy that week and ate out a lot and I gave myself around \$50 dollars for fun, including alcohol, club entries and tourist activities. Like I said, this changed every week depending on my mood and what activities were on, however Mexico is generally very cheap and you will be surprised at how far your money can stretch depending on what you want to do while you are there.

Not many places in Mexico take card (and if they do, they usually charge you extra) meaning withdrawing cash and stashing most of it away, was the common method. There are ATMs in ITAM with low withdraw rates which everyone used. I never heard of anyone having a problem with this method.

Visas & Insurance

Insurance is mandatory with exchange; however, the Visa is not. I didn't get a Visa since you can be there for six months without one. If you do plan on staying a little longer, you can also just leave the country to visit Guatemala or the U.S and renew your six-month visa on return. However, I don't imagine that this is effective if you are doing a year long exchange (all the year long exchange students had visas).

You had to have insurance to go ITAM. I went with 1Cover insurance who were very effective when my phone was stolen however ITAM also offer their own insurance if the other companies are not appealing to you.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

Many students took the salsa classes offered twice a week during lunch break, however not many people committed. I didn't take any extra-curricular activities as I was more interested in traveling during my weekends and didn't want commitments. However, many of the boys in my house formed their own football team and participated in tournaments. I imagine that this is possible for any sports or social activities that are offered.

What was the university/ city like?

The university was a huge contrast to Otago, with smaller class sizes and schedules starting from 7.00AM and going until 10.00PM. Some papers will only have one class a week but be scheduled for 3 hours, while the others will offer two classes a week which go for an hour and half. The city itself is insane. It is extremely polluted and crowded but I adored it. There is always something to do, and always some bizarre sights to see. You have to prepared for extremes in Mexico City (wealth, poverty, traffic, population, cuisine); there is not a lot there that resembles New Zealand in Mexico city.

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

If you live around ITAM, I would recommend shopping at the Tizapán market; they are very friendly and may even give you a cheeky lolly while you wait to pay. Don't be afraid to try every strange Mexican dish that is offered to you, you may be surprised at what you like (e.g. Mezcal, Mole, Nopal, Chilaquiles). Make sure you do a Lucha Libre night as well. We went with about 15 other students and it was one of my favourite nights in Mexico City. In the first couple of weeks you will find yourself ticking off all the main tourist attractions in the city so don't stress about missing out on any of those. However, in terms of places to travel I would recommend the state of Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Chiapas and Yucatan. Also places such as Saladitas in Guerrero, the small-town of Tequila outside of Guadalajara, San Miguel in Guanajuato and Taxco, the silver capital. It all depends on what you are interested in and what you want out of your exchange.

Any tips for future students?

If you are feeling hesitant about heading to Mexico for exchange, I urge you to put aside your fears and just go for it. There are aspects that are shocking at first however you learn to adapt and just go with the flow. I would recommend knowing at least a small amount of Spanish before going as Mexico City is not so touristic and many small food venders will not speak Spanish. People are also a

lot friendlier when they see that you are trying to make an effort to speak there language, even if it is a pathetic attempt (trust me, I had a lot of experience here).

Overall Experience

The most difficult part of this whole experience was leaving Mexico and the friends I had made there. The country has my heart and I will go back without a doubt. I have travelled to many Latin American countries in the past and Mexico was my favourite in terms of activities and sites it had to offer. The process to go to ITAM was very smooth and the exchange office there is very organised. It was one of the best experiences of my life and I would recommend Mexico as an exchange destination to anyone who is looking for a unique and rewarding semester.



