

ITAM

Mexico Semester 1 2016

BCom- Marketing and Accounting & DipLang Spanish



Mexico! If you're up for an adventure, Mexico is the place to go. With more than just tequila and tacos, you can roam free, discovering places you've never dreamed of. My time in Mexico was incredible and I wouldn't hesitate to repeat my semester abroad. Mexicans are the craziest, most energetic and warmest people I have ever met. You will be surprised at the hospitality and make lifelong friends in no time.

I arrived in Mexico City after two months of travelling throughout South America including Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru. If you have time before it is a great opportunity to travel before the semester begins as one semester is not enough time to explore all of the amazing places Latin America offers. I was lucky enough to spend another month after the exchange climbing volcanoes in Guatemala and volunteering in a hostel in Chiapas, the most southern state of Mexico. The best plan for travel is no plan, you are bound to meet people on exchange who want to travel afterwards as well! Don't worry if you don't speak any Spanish. As long as you know, "una cerveza por favor" and "donde estan los banos" you will breeze through the semester. Most of the students at ITAM speak English and you will pick up the key phrases in the first few weeks. Also everyone is super helpful if you ever need help with translating something.



Mexico has the most diverse range of landscapes you could imagine! From colonial towns such as Guanajuato and San Miguel de Allende to virgin beaches like Puerto Escondido you will never run out of places to visit at the weekends or end of semester vacations. I was fortunate to have the Spring Break experience and yes, I decided to take the plunge and vacation in Cancun along with thousands of gringos. There are much nicer beaches than Cancun such as Playa del Carmen and Tulum but the nightlife in Cancun is something you should experience.



You will come to realise that we have been living a lie with the Mexican cuisine we eat in New Zealand. Nachos are a foreign menu item and don't ever expect to see a hard shell taco. The food is delicious and cheap, so don't go to Mexico with the intention of eating lightly. You will be surprised how many tacos you will consume during your time in Mexico, not only are they cheaper than cooking, you will always be asked to go out for dinner- and saying "no" to a Mexican is impossible. If you don't like spicy foods, you might face some challenges, literally everything in Mexico contains chilling; the candy and even some types of shampoo. I also ate a lot from the local market where you can find every type of fruit and vegetable. Get to know the local market owners- they will end up giving you discounts and generous amounts of fruit as well!

Don't stress about the accommodation, every exchange student will find a place to live. The three most popular houses are Hidalgo 92, Hidalgo 26 and Alpina 11. I was in Hidalgo 92. It has a mixture of Mexicans and exchange students. Hidalgo 26 is full of exchange students so English is the common language. In 92 we had a communal kitchen whereas in 26 the rooms are bigger with a small kitchen unit. Both Hidalgo 26 and 92 are the hosts for most of the parties during the semester but the landlord at 92 is slightly stricter, he even kicked one of my roomies out of the house but luckily with some negotiating he was able to return. Alpina is much stricter as there is a 24/7 guard so they weren't allowed parties.



Although the Mexican lifestyle is generally laid-back, ITAM was an exception. The classes are a lot more stimulating than Otago, with only 30 people in the classes, they are much more interactive and a large portion of the grade is based on participation. I chose to take all of my classes in Spanish to improve my language however I would not recommend studying in Spanish unless you already have a reasonable level. It can be challenging at times due to excessive amounts of reading and class presentations. Although most of the teachers were “buena onda” (good value) a phrase you will quickly learn and were very helpful towards exchange students.

What else did I love about ITAM? Make the most of the extra-curriculum activities at ITAM- you will never get the chance to do some of them in New Zealand. No matter how bad your co-ordination is, you have to try the salsa class. Not only is it entertaining but it’s also an asset to have when you go clubbing. I also attended cheerleading classes, and joined the volleyball team.



Even after I get back, people ask me why I chose to go to such a “dangerous” country. The truth is, the media only portrays the extreme cases in Mexico and skips the positive aspects such as the amazing culture and incredible places. Being a tourist, you should never worry. The only thing that I would warn you about is you are going to stand out. Sometimes you’ll get weird looks or people will toot at you on the street but most of the time everyone wants to meet a foreign person.

Don’t hesitate... If you have a sense of adventure and are ready for the experience of a lifetime, Mexico is the place for you!