



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo De México
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1 2019
Otago degree(s)	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
CSO11012 Classical Political Theory II	English		
CSO14096 Technology War and Politics	English		
EIN17303 Mexico-USA-Canada Relations	English		
CLE10517 Communication in Spanish II	Spanish		

Any comments about these papers?

Mexico-USA-Canada Relations was more generally about Latin America-USA relations, with little mention of Canada. However, it was taught by a guest professor from the United States, so it could be different normally. It was a very interesting paper, and it covered far more than the contemporary situation.

Classical Political Theory II covers numerous political philosophers between the 17th and 19th centuries, such as Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx. It had two lessons a week, with one being a lecture and one being a discussion.

Communication in Spanish II covers the preterit and imperfect, subjunctive, etc. It is also completely in Spanish.

None of my classes had final exams, which allowed me to have more time to travel.

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

You are meant to contribute in discussions during class, although I did very little and still did well. I found the workload to be much easier than Otago, although I think I had easy classes compared to most people. Class sizes are also much smaller there than at Otago.

Accommodation

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

I stayed at Hidalgo 26. It is a 3 minute walk from ITAM, which is very convenient. It houses 12 people, all exchange students. This is a great way to meet a decent percentage of the exchange students, but you won't learn as much Spanish as you could somewhere else. Even French was spoken more than Spanish. The rooms varied in price and quality, but they all came with a small fridge, stove, and bathroom. However, there was only one washing machine between 12 people, which could be an issue at times. The landlord lives offsite but there is a housekeeper there. She doesn't speak English, which could be an issue if you have no Spanish skills. While I think these will be an issue no matter where you pick to live, there were barking dogs at night and a lot of other noises in the neighbourhood, such as ads on loudspeakers (emphasis on the loud). Their rubbish collection system also works by a guy walking up and down the street with a bell, often at 8am on a Saturday. Cockroaches were also a common sight, but this is apparently normal in the area. All in all, it was a good place to live.

Money matters

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

My weekly budget was far too inconsistent to be of any help.

Rent was 300 Euros per month (you could also choose to pay in a couple of other currencies).

My flight to Mexico was booked very late, and around New Year, so it was far more expensive than it needed to be.

Practically all food over there will be cheaper than in New Zealand. The Mexican food you will be buying is also vastly superior to the plastic rubbish we have. Just be careful, as some of it might make you sick, as happened to me on one occasion. Uber Eats is also cheap to use, depending on what you order.

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

I used a debit card and I had no issues. There are ATMs at ITAM that are reliable. Many places will not accept cards for payment so you will need to carry cash. Keep in mind that if you go to Cuba, your card probably won't work because of the U.S embargo. I know that a Westpac card won't.

Visas & Insurance

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

You can simply use a tourist visa that you receive when you land. It will last 180 days and can be renewed every time you leave and re-enter the country. Just take a trip to another country, if you plan on being there longer than 180 days, and you will be fine. However, if you are flying through the USA, you will need to get an ESTA. It can be done online but you have to pay a small fee. Acceptance also depends on your nationality and what countries you have visited in the past.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

No.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

The gym was very small and overcrowded, so I didn't bother with it. Salsa and football were the most common extra-curricular activities, but I didn't do them so I can't comment. There are a couple of trips at the start of the year that almost all the exchange students go on, but they are not organised by ITAM. They are definitely worth going on and are relatively cheap for what they include. My favourite one was to Acapulco, which included boat rides and releasing baby turtles into the ocean.

What was the university/ city like?

There is no shortage of things to do in Mexico City. Even after being there for a semester, I still feel like I just scratched the surface. Mexico City is the largest city in North America, with a population of over 20 million people. While this does make it an incredible city, with a lot of variety in its different areas, this comes with the typical downsides of horrendous traffic and pollution. There are also very few rubbish bins in public areas. The airport is also located within the city itself, so getting there and back is relatively inexpensive. Mexico City is also much warmer than Dunedin, but it isn't excessively hot, as I was worried it would be.

Regarding ITAM itself, the campus is very small, so going from one class to the next is easy. Students at ITAM tend to be among some of the wealthiest students in Mexico. Due to the election of Mexico's first left-wing President in decades, I was constantly told by them that Mexico was on the brink of collapse and I had picked a bad time to come. Nothing came of any of it, so don't worry if you arrive and are told similar things. ITAM produced many prominent Mexican politicians, including former President Felipe Calderon. Due to this reputation, I noticed I got occasional angry looks whenever I showed my student ID to get into museums etc. Your opinion on this really depends on your own background and views.

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

I went to Teotihuacan on my second day in Mexico and was easily one of the best places I went in my whole time there. The anthropology museum in Mexico City, the biggest museum in the country, took me two full day trips to get around, but was well worth it. Outside of Mexico City, I would

highly recommend the state of Veracruz. The city, of the same name, is home to so much Mexican history, the highlight being the San Juan de Ulua fort. Further north in the state are the El Tajin ruins, another must see. The Yucatan peninsula is another highlight, with the archaeological site of Tulum being my favourite place there. Oaxaca and Chiapas are two more states worth going to.

Any tips for future students?

If you're busing around Mexico, you will likely be using ADO buses. Use Clickbus to buy ADO bus tickets. The ADO website does not accept foreign cards. Keep in mind there are many stations across the city, and it is easy to end up at the wrong one.

If you want to go to the Frida Kahlo museum, buy your tickets online. I went one day, realised I would have to queue for about 6 hours, and decided to come back another day. It is probably the most popular tourist destination in Mexico City, and is always crowded. No other museums I went to had this problem.

Take your ITAM student ID with you wherever you go, as most places let students enter free or discounted.

Enrol in the maximum number of classes possible, because it is difficult to enrol once the semester starts, but it is very easy to drop classes.

Overall Experience

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

Mexico offers something for everyone. It has great food, beaches, nature, history, archaeology, and so much more. Many people are put off by the negative portrayals given by the media, but Mexico is not as dangerous as people make it out to be. I arrived in Mexico as a fairly non self-reliant person, and I survived. I could barely envision navigating my way around the airport, but by the end of my exchange I was able to organise trips to multiple cities and countries with ease. Going on exchange has been one of the greatest opportunities I have had in life so far, and I strongly recommend doing it.



Teotihuacan



One of the baby turtles released in Acapulco



Las Coloradas pink lake



Chichen Itza



Painting by Frida Kahlo



Monte Alban