



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	ITAM – México
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 (August – December) 2018
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Major in Spanish

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Communication in Spanish III (CLE10518)	Spanish	SPAN300	18
Política y Gobierno de Mexico	Spanish	SPAN300	18
Historia del Arte en Mexico	Spanish	SPAN300	18
Nuevas Visiones Historia de Mexico 1810 – 2000 (EGN-11155)	Spanish	SPAN200	18

Any comments about these papers?

- Política y gobierno is a very demanding course. It is with a very famous teacher in Mexico, and requires a lot of reading. Instead of a final exam, we did two take home exams which requires writing three essays. I preferred this to a final exam but you do have to make sure you are up to date throughout the whole semester otherwise the essays will be really difficult.
- Historia del arte - we had excursions to different museums every second week which was really good to explore the city. I found it quite hard being in Spanish because the grammar is very specific. The class was once a week for 3 hours (as opposed to two times a week for 1.5). A lot of memorising.
- Nuevas visiones – My favorite class. Specially designed for foreign students and helped me understand my other classes because covers the general history of Mexico. I would recommend this class and it is not too demanding. The teacher is lovely too and super understanding that you are an exchange student and want to travel etc. so you are allowed to miss the odd class. This is also a good class to take if you want to take a material in Spanish but are not too confident, because she speaks really slow and clearly.
- Communication in Spanish – Good, you sit a test on orientation week to determine what class you will be in. My class was level C1 (DELE).

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

The university is really difficult and the work load is a lot. I was expecting an easy last semester of study – especially because I only took four papers (equivalent to three Otago) to finish my degree. Personally, I wouldn't recommend taking 5 ITAM papers and from what I have heard, economics is really difficult. Midterm exams are held on Saturdays so be careful with your travel plans, you really have to work around the university calendar. Also, the final exams are compulsory (if you fail, you fail the whole paper), so can make travelling at the end of the semester a little difficult to organise as the timetable comes out late.

The class sizes are small and require participation. There can sometimes be surprise tests and assistance is mandatory.

Overall, ITAM is a really reputable university in Mexico and very academic. It is within the top 5% of business schools in the world (Beta Gamma sigma) and the students work very hard. It is certainly a privilege to study at ITAM, and it is not a true reflection of the real Mexico. You will be with students who are among the top 5% of rich in the country, have their own cars etc. – but in reality inequality, poverty and corruption is a real thing here. So beware that it is a bit of a bubble.

Accommodation

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

I stayed at a house offered by ITAM university. The information came out about a month before going to Mexico and it was offered on a first in first served basis. Then you were put in touch with the landlord to coordinate the contract. I opted for accommodation away from San Angel (where the university is), in an area called Coyoacan. I didn't expect to be on campus every day because my workload seemed so light compared to what I would do at Otago, so didn't want to be living right next to the uni.

Getting to uni was no issue. I took the ITAM bus every day from Miguel Angel de Quevedo (Metro) which was only a 10 min walk from my house, however majority of exchange students live right beside the uni in places like ALAPINA or HILDAGO.

Coyoacan is a really awesome area, I would really recommend living there if you can! It is super authentic Mexican, really safe, and close to public transport. I don't regret choosing a house here at all and a lot of my friends said they wished they considered it too.

If you are looking for a bit more independence and not too keen on being with exchange students 24/7 or living right by the uni, I would encourage exploring Coyoacan, Condesa, Polanco or Roma. You will need to travel but in the long term I think it is worth it. The Metro is fine, just take care of your things and no pasa nada 😊

Money matters

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

Accommodation = \$5800 Peso a Month

Transport to uni = Free, ITAM bus (leaves from X2 metro stations)

Food = Depends where you shop. I lived beside a supermarket called LaComer – roughly 300-500 peso a week. It is SUPER cheap to eat in Mexico, almost cheaper to buy than to cook.

Food at uni = 50-70 Peso, coffee = 30 Peso

Metro = 5 peso (6 peso metrobus)

Phone plan = 200 peso a month

Weekend travel = depends where you go, but you can get a bus to Puebla or Taxco (for example) for about 200-300 peso one way.

Uber = Cheap, depends on time/location, can pay from 40 – 150 peso

Visa = Didn't need one, you will get a 6 month tourist visa

Insurance = can't remember as I did a full year exchange, first in Chile. I went with southern health travel insurance and think it was around \$500 for the full year.

Flights = Expensive because I was disorganised. Better to pay for a return flight (flexi) than buy individual flights. N.B. If you fly through states, you will need a visa!

**** My goal was to try live off 300 peso a day = roughly 170 NZD a week (not including accom). This was really realistic. Some days you spend less, some days more, especially if you travel in weekends ****

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

I just used my ANZ visa debit and had no issues. The Uni has ATM's with the lowest fees (about 30 peso to withdrawal up to 8000 Peso). My bank charged a charge from home. But if you get an account with Westpac or Santander would be a good idea because I don't think there is a fee.

Visas & Insurance

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

No – you get 6 months as a tourist. Can leave and cross the border if you really need. I had an issue entering Mexico because I had not bought a flight to leave (at the end of the exchange, I was unsure what I wanted to do and still hadn't bought a return flight to NZ). They wouldn't let me board my flight from Peru – Mexico without proof that I would not stay longer than the 6month allowance. So I bought a flight to Colombia. This is normal. I recommend buying your return flight, make it flexi, and you can change it. It also works out to be a lot cheaper.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes – requirements no different to Otago.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Salsa classes. I did pilates and Yoga.

The uni is very academic, they do not have a lot of sports opportunities and you really have to look for them if you want to do one. Also the gym is tiny, I subscribed in a gym near my house and also lived near Parquet Viveros so went running a lot.

In terms of social events – there are a lot of exchange parties organised by the university (on facebook), I really recommend going. They are on Thursday nights usually and a good way to meet people.

What was the university/ city like?

INCREDIBLE. You have to go! The city is enormous, and the altitude/pollution can be quite obvious but I would return to Mexico city in a heartbeat. The culture is so strong, the food is amazing, all I can really say is that you have to come and experience it for yourself.

There is an endless amount of travel options and trips you can do, a semester really is not enough. My favourite trips were to the 'pueblos magicos' which are always on the outskirts of the larger cities e.g. Tepoztlan, Taxco. Travel in Mex is also really easy, you just need to hop on a bus and go, but there is also really cheap flights if you plan ahead.

In terms of the culture – the Mexicans are the most friendly people I have met! I completed my first semester in Chile and found it really hard to make Chilean friends. So going to Mexico, I expected the same kind of situation (to make mostly exchange friends), but the Mexicans are so welcoming and always invite you to do things/travel/eat. I can guarantee you will make lots of Mexican friends at ITAM and around the city.

In terms of security – Mexico has a reputation for being super dangerous. Especially because NZ is so far away, we rely heavily on the Media and only seem to hear the bad things e.g. drug trafficking, corruption, kidnapping. But in reality, Mexico is an amazing city, of course you have to take care, but it is no more dangerous than any other place in my opinion. If you have a run in with the police – yes you might have to pay, and yes you need to take care on the metro and take public transport at safe times. But I really encourage you to go to Mexico and ignore the bad stories that might be a put off.

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

Mexico city: COYOACAN (you have to go, try the churros and chocolate caliente from El Jarocho and visit the house of Frida Kahlo), centro historico, Parque Mexicana, Condesa and Polanco for cafes and shopping etc, La Reforma. Parque Chapultepec (go to the museum of modern art and museum of anthropology), visit the museums and murals around the city – they are incredible. Eat the street food e.g. there is a really good food market in Coyoacan where you can get tacos/quesadillas, aguas frescas. Go to a lucha libre! Cineteca in coyoacan.

Go to the pyramids in Teotihuacan

Also go on the trip to Ximilco run by the university in the first week, it is like an orientation thing

Travel places: ANYWHERE! I went:

- Puebla/cholula (2 nights)
- Guadalajara (4 nights)
- Guanajuato and San Miguel de Allende (MUST VISIT) – if you can, go for dia de la independencia
- San Luis de Posote – casa de Eduardo
- Hidalgo – Grutas de Tolantongo and Pachuca
- Oaxaca – amazing for dia de los Muertos
- Puerto Escondido – You have to go! It is incredible
- San Jose de los Cabos
- Cancun (Tulum, Holbox are the best – don't spend too much time in Cancun it is very touristy)
- Tepoztlan and Taxco (pueblos magicos)
- Monterrey (went for a marathon)

I recommend going down to Chiapas, I didn't get time but really regret it and it sounds amazing.

Any tips for future students?

I really recommend going on exchange. I did two semesters abroad, and Chile and Mex are both very different and equally incredible experiences. Mexico is amazing and I couldn't recommend enough to go 😊 If you have any questions or doubts, feel free to get in touch, I am always happy to help.

I also think that ITAM is a very easy university to organise an exchange with. The process was super simple and the exchange office is very organised.

Public transport is pretty good – don't be afraid to take the metro etc.

Overall Experience

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

Exchange was the best thing I could have done during my Otago degree. It has exceeded my expectations and I have met the most amazing people. I would highly recommend going.



