

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	LLB/ BA
Major(s)	Spanish and Chinese
Exchange Institution	Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 2, 2015

## B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	\$20
Accommodation	\$110 p/w
Return Airfare	Roughly \$3000, though travelled plenty before and after.
Local Transportation	You can get anywhere around the city for 50c.
Meals	\$50 – 100 p/w
Visa	Mexico does not require a visa for less than 6 months
Health & Insurance	\$1400
Personal Spending	\$100 p/w
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$5 p/w
Other fees (specify)	ITAM charge you \$20 for an ID card
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Few unexpected costs. Local food is very, very cheap in Mexico. However, imported food can be surprisingly expensive.

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

Cost of living was less than I originally budgeted for.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)? Mexico is a largely cash-run society. Fortunately my NZ bank has a partner bank in Mexico, so I was able to withdraw cash weekly, without incurring extra fees.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

Budget.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country? Less than \$1

**C: Visas & Insurance** *\*Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost? Fortunately you can stay in Mexico for up to six months without having to apply for a student visa. ITAM have an immigration office on site who are happy to help with the process if you decide to stay longer.

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost? ITAM requires each student to have insurance. They offer their own policy but I opted for private insurance as I was travelling before and after my exchange.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students? I used Allianz, which I bought in conjunction with STA travel. My experience was satisfactory. Having said that, I did experience some inconvenience.

In Mexico private healthcare require payment straight-away. This was an issue for me when I dislocated my shoulder, the hospital refused to take any action until I showed that I would pay the fees. This was irrespective of the fact that I presented them with my certificate of insurance and policy. Fortunately the exchange office at ITAM came to the hospital and pay my medical bills.

**D: Academics at Host University**

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
<b>VUW Trimester 1/YEAR</b>					

<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					
<i>Redacción Intensiva</i> (Intensive Writing)	Spanish	-	15	5	This was fantastic. The class is mandatory for all Mexicans and extremely well taught. My written Spanish improved greatly and I met many locals.
<i>América Latina</i> (Latin America Studies)	Spanish	-	15	4	The first half is very interesting and focuses on various Latin American Countries. Second half is less so; it analyses the region through a series of economic theories.
<i>Medio Oriente</i> (Middle Eastern Studies)	Spanish	-	15	5	Fascinating. This content is taught by whim of fluid class discussions. The class touches on very contemporary issues.
<i>Cine Mexicano</i> (Mexican Cinema)	Spanish	-	15	5	This course has, without a shadow of doubt, the smallest workload in ITAM. My semester of work was assessed by one 5-minute oral examination. The lecturer, Ignacio Durán Loera, is radical, outspoken, and incredibly interesting. Highly recommend.

### Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

Registration was straightforward. I elected my subjects a couple of weeks prior to study and when I arrived I made a couple of changes. Changing is easy but you have to do it within the first week of the semester so

good organisation is recommended. You are still able to drop courses well into the semester.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

I was able to study everything I wanted to study. My recommendation would be to have all your courses planned well in advance. Having said that, it is difficult to be 100% definitive as ITAM won't release the course lists until a week or two before classes begin.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

Study in Spanish! It can be challenging but incredibly rewarding. The lecturers are happy to cater for exchange students.

### **Academic Experience**

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

The classes varied in length and tended to be longer than at Victoria (one of my classes was four hours).

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?

The teaching was of a high quality. The workload was much less than Victoria and I felt far less pressured. Conversely, fellow exchange students who studied economics or computer science found the workload to be incredibly demanding.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

Four classes. I would highly recommend taking the Cinema and Writing classes. Cinema; as you learn lots about Mexican Culture. Writing; your Spanish will improve immensely.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

At ITAM you need to achieve 60% to pass. Attendance is required though they allow for a couple of absences. Just be aware of the course requirements and assessment dates. ITAM can be quite ruthless and is happy to fail students for not meeting terms requirements.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

ITAM is a private university; its facilities are fantastic.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

I had a few years of Spanish under my belt. Despite this, the Mexican accent and regional words can be a little difficult to adjust to. Everyone's in the same boat, and after a couple of weeks you'll be smashing out native phrases.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

As most New Zealanders at ITAM have, I stayed at Hidalgo 92, a 12-person flat, less than 5 minutes walk from University. ITAM doesn't have any halls or on site housing but it does have an arrangement with local landlords; exchange students get first pick.

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

I loved it. The flat was beautiful, and given 7 of my flat mates were Mexican, we spoke Spanish at home. We partied a lot and this was rarely an issue.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Live with Mexicans! You'll learn lots about the culture/ language.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Depends on the arrangement you have with your landlord. My landlord was very flexible.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

You're responsible for this yourself. In the end, I cooked only once or twice. Around ITAM are lots of fantastic food joints where you can eat very, very cheaply. I became fully invested in Mexican food.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

ITAM are helpful. Living closer to the centre, in la condesa or la roma, is popular for some expatriates but tends to be less authentic.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

Be super organised! Have your options in mind. The housing email comes super late (a month before classes start) and everybody tend to want to live in the Hidalgo houses (92, 92a, 92b).

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

I found Mexicans to be incredibly open, inviting and keen to hang out.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

I didn't have much trouble but had spent some time travelling through Latin America prior to my exchange. Mexico City can be quite daunting. It's very fast moving and, at times, intimidating. Once you become accustomed to this you appreciate its standing as one of the world's great cities.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Mexicans were extremely keen to impart their culture. Their open and hospitable nature made my exchange a very social one.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

Extremely well. The exchange office at ITAM are fantastic. When I dislocated my shoulder they came out to the hospital and paid my medical bills and gave me a ride home.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?

This is a hard question to assess, but I imagine they would be fairly hospitable. Mexico, however, doesn't enjoy as much tolerance as New Zealand society. It isn't a rare occurrence to hear derogatory things said about LGBT. Having said that, Mexico City has become far more progressive and tolerant in recent years.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

I, personally, faced nil discrimination. Despite this, the level of poverty in Mexico is jaw dropping, especially amongst the native peoples. ITAM is a private university, and its students tend to be upper class. The one big issue I had with this was a lack of general empathy, and even acknowledgement, of some of Mexico's plundered classes. At times I noticed a collective 'turning a blind eye' to poverty. This was disheartening.

## **G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

ITAM had an abundance of extra-curricular activities ranging from sports and the arts to ITAM MUNDO, a quasi United Nations assembly.

I played basketball and rugby. These experiences I found invaluable as far as becoming part of the local

student community there. I met many people and it was great to be a part of several other social circles as many exchange students huddle together. Both teams are very open to foreigners, especially the rugby team which loves having a kiwi in the team.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

Mexico City has it all: pyramids, galleries, bars, museums, sporting events and so on.

Otherwise, Mexico is blessed with some of the nicest beaches in the world: from La paz in Baja California, to the pacific breaks of Oaxaca, stretching to the vastly popular Caribbean coast and Yucatán Peninsula.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

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What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

These were seemingly available but mostly for students studying economics or management.

### 5 things to take to your host country or region

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### 5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

1	Live with Mexicans.
2	Study in Spanish.
3	Join a sports team.
4	Eat at the restaurants around ITAM daily.
5	Go to Awhihui, the student bar, at least twice a week.

### Top 5 Things to do

What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?

1	Speak Spanish, spend time with Mexicans, eat Mexican food.
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- 2 Celebrate Día de muertos in Oaxaca, or Chiapas.
- 3 Travel down the beautiful pacific coast.
- 4 Visit the magical colonial city of Guanajuato.
- 5 Invest yourself in Mexico City and learn about its rich history

### **H: Personal Experience**

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

Mexico, in western culture at least, has become a buzzword synonymous with drug trafficking, gang wars and civilian unrest. This is unfair. I rarely felt unsafe there. With appropriate caution, one can do anything with freedom.

My time in Mexico was a blur. It had its challenges but was easily the most rewarding experience of my life. I arrived not knowing a soul, and spent the whole time in the absence of any fellow countryman. This was insignificant to me. I found Mexicans to be beyond welcoming and my exchange was spent very socially. Mexican food and culture is blessed with great diversity. The country has golden beaches, dense jungle, desert plains and ancient ruins. It is jewel of Latin America and truly unique.



