

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BArch, MArch
Major(s)	Architecture
Exchange Institution	Universidad de Monterrey
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Tri 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	\$50NZD
Accommodation	\$350/month NZD
Return Airfare	\$2,600 NZD
Local Transportation	Buses (\$1.00NZD/ trip)
Meals	\$3.50NZD/ meal
Visa	\$35NZD
Health & Insurance	\$600NZD
Personal Spending	\$50-\$100NZD/week
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$20/month
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	I-Buddy trips (bus, accommodation, food etc.) \$400

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

They were as expected, if not cheaper. Living costs very, very cheap. Accommodation was only NZ \$90 a week and came with Furniture, bed and bedding, heatpumps, furniture etc.

There are events and weekend trips almost every weekend which can be an unplanned cost due to the frequency although they were definitely a great way to see the country.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

I personally used a NZ Debit card from my bank, this worked fine but take at least one spare card as can be very problematic if lost or stolen (it does happen).

NZ Banks have partner banks that if you use their atms there are lower fees, other than this try to take out a lot of cash at a time and keep it safe to avoid large withdrawal fees.

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

If you are there for a year I recommend creating a bank account with the universities on campus bank. This is relatively easy to do but does take time. If you are visiting for only 6 months (1 semester) I would advise to use a debit card and to keep a spare card safe at all times. Try to spend on experiences over materials, easier to travel and you come away with more. Don't get carried away with how cheap everything! Little purchases add up.

Bartering does happen but it takes practice. Try to visit markets with a local the first times you visit as they will show you how it is done.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

\$2 for coffee, \$1 for coke.

**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?

You don't need a visa, University will organize this for you on arrival

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

Do not worry too much until you get there. The Mexican embassy in Wellington will try to get you to buy a student visa before leaving, this is unnecessary. The university is very helpful with the process and have done in it a thousand times before so they know the best ways!

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?

Personal insurance is compulsory for UDEM. Try to get full cover due to the possible things that can happen. It is worth it.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

Personally I used southern cross and they were fine. But check what company your family is with as there are sometimes discounts etc.

**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>					
DA3000 Architectural Design integral 1	Spanish and English	Arci 411 Architecture design	24	4	This course was heavily design based and self taught by students supervised by a professor. It was predominantly taught in Spanish but

					everyone can speak English and are happy to help!
DA Architectural Analysis	English	Arci 451 Architectural history and research	12	3	
DA Urban Design	English/Spanish	SARC 461 Professional Practice	12	4	Very work intensive and practical, develops real world urban design skills.
Elective (Basic Spanish)	Spanish	Elective	12	5	This course is taken by all exchange students at either the beginner, intermediate or advanced level. Very helpful to help get your head around the language and culture. Taught through immersion so a lot of Spanish but it is fine to ask questions in English.

**VUW Trimester 2/YEAR**


**Course Registration/Enrolment**

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

UDEM's international department is outstanding. They will help you through every step of registration and will assign you to a buddy who really go out of their way to make sure you have sorted everything. If you don't speak Spanish the buddies will speak English.

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?

Be prepared to have to change courses. Personally I didn't have to but I did hear many exchange students did. It is relatively easy and UDEM will help you out.

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

It is very difficult to find information on the courses before arriving. It is also hard to gauge what other students think of the courses. When you arrive ask students in the same faculty what they think of certain professors or classes to make sure that you haven't picked any bad papers!

### **Academic Experience**

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

It was almost completely opposite to the Victoria academic experience, the teaching style is very high-school like and taught in class rooms. This can be tricky to begin with but you understand pretty fast how it works. Dealing with both Spanish and English can be tricky at times as you can have many varying translations to the same course outline depending on who you ask.

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?

As stated above, the teaching style is very different to Vic. The professors will spontaneously give 3 day assignments and this is normal. It is a very high-school style approach with attendance and course commitment.

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?

The courses I took were perfect for fulfilling my required points and having enough time to socialize (sufficiently). Be prepared to have to work very hard at points, but also look at it as freeing up time for other activities and travel.

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

Stay open minded, the grading system is very different and just showing up counts towards your grades. If you are worried about passing make sure you engage both the professor and fellow students to compare your progress and standards against them. It is very hard to fail the courses but you do need to show sufficient interest into the topics.

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

UDEM recently completed the new architecture and design school; this has incredible state of the art facilities for student use. The computers at the university are very bad. It is 100% necessary to bring your own laptop because of this (especially to run architectural/ design specific programs).

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 played on duolingo before leaving and it helped a little with getting your head around the sentence structure etc. UDEM provides fantastic language courses that count towards your average. These courses aren't focused on testing you but helping you. Most students at the university could speak a little English and are normally happy to help!

### **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Apartment, non-university.

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

Pros: Cheap, warm, appliances included, furniture included, bedding included, cheap power and internet, opportunity to meet flatmates, situated in a local student area (Dunedin esque), no curfews etc.

Cons: Off campus (10min walk), a lot of parties around (noise).

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Apartment/ flat.

How early can you move into accommodation?

On our arrival day we went with our I-buddy and found one within an hour (very different to NZ).

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

Cook for yourself in flat. Supermarket is very close and pretty cheap. University has cafeteria but is relatively expensive. There are many taco stalls and burger places where entire meals cost no more than \$4.

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

The university help you find accommodation as soon as you arrive if not before. These apartments are great and privately owned. Try to find accommodation inbetween the supermarket (soriana) and Calle Jimenez (big student area). Alternatively, there is a complex on the other side of the river called Privada Antigua. This is like living in the halls at vic but in private apartments. Privada Antigua has full time security and is almost entirely occupied by students.

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

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

Very easy. Mexicans are unbelievably friendly people. You will meet friends through classes and other exchange students from other parts of Mexico (some of which you will travel and visit).

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

It can be intimidating to begin with but you will adjust quickly. You learn the mannerisms and social norms fast and people will advise you what to do and what not to do very fast.

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

Language is obviously the biggest, try to take a basic Spanish course before going and you will be surprised at how much it helps. For me it helped to drop my guard and take myself to the markets or events alone to force myself to learn quickly.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The food and the people. Unbelievable flavours and insanely cheap. The people are the most kindest, honest and welcoming people you will ever meet. They may not have a lot in places but they will do anything to make yourself feel comfortable.

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?

If physically disabled (eg. Wheelchair bound) I would not recommend Mexico as a whole, the infrastructure is shocking and completely un-accessible for handicapped people.

For the most being gay, lesbian etc. would not be problematic. Mexico is a heavily catholic country and can be considered anti equal rights but is for the most part accepting of everyone. If you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender my only advise is to respect their opinion and they will respect you. It can be difficult coping with these cultural differences but the university does provide plenty of counseling services if students feel they want it.

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

Personally no, although I had a few African-French friends who did. This was not out of hate or derogatory on the Mexican side but only because it is very rare to find European, Asian or any other non Latino people in Mexico.

### **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?

There are many extra curricular activities available. Personally I signed up to play football (which I have never played before) and had the time of my life. It is a great way of meeting friends and bonding with other students.

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

UDEM has a bunch of separate student organization who organize weekend trips to various attractions around the country. I heavily recommend getting involved in these trips as you will meet a lot of other students from other universities and locals who come along. They will take you to places with local knowledge which generally makes it cheaper and the provide the buses, food, drinks and accommodation.

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

There were not great numbers of exchange students working there, although with permission the university did allow students to sell goods, baking etc.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

For students studying for a year there are courses that involve helping the local community, and from there establishing connections to work.

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

<b>1</b>	<b>Laptop</b>
<b>2</b>	Camera

3	Hot and Cold clothes (winter is like wellington)
4	Togs
5	Jandals

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

1	Don't turn down opportunities
2	Travel when you get the chance
3	Pay for experiences, not things.
4	Do as the locals do
5	Make friends, the world will seem a lot smaller upon returning.

### Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Dive amongst the reefs
2	Surf the pacific
3	Climb mountains
4	Eat cactus in the desert
5	Eat with the locals

### H: Personal Experience

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

This exchange to UDEM was an amazing experience with it's ups and downs. The university life over in Monterrey is completely different to Victoria but super welcoming. The amount of things to see in do in Mexico is incredible and even after a full on 6 months I want to go back and stay for longer. The locals are unbelievably friendly and welcoming, although a lot don't have a lot to give they will always make sure you are comfortable.

There were dangerous areas but nothing like what you hear in the news. The University provides unbelievable support for adjusting to their culture and language. The oe is the perfect mix of uni, travelling and partying and the type of students from around the world that arrive at UDEM are adventurous and fun loving. I cannot wait to go back, my interpretation of Mexico as a country is completely flipped and you really come back considering it to be a second home!







