

EXPERIENCE REPORT

EXCHANGE SEMESTER IN MEXICO CITY

Mobility Program

-

Partner university

Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO), Mexico City

Study program

Architecture

Semester

3. Semester MSc Architecture

Overall impression

My exchange semester in Mexico City was so great that I decided to stay another semester for an internship and now, after completing my studies in Liechtenstein, will be moving permanently to Mexico City. I fell in love with this huge and vibrant city, its warm-hearted people, its rich culture, tasty food and lively architecture scene.

Immigration / arrival

Most European countries do not need a visa to enter México. Upon arrival, you get permission to stay as a tourist for 180 days. Have the confirmation of the partner uni ready to show if they ask you for it at the immigration, but it's usually not the case.

Room searching / stay

There are no student dormitories available, so most students live in shared flats. The university is located in the district of Santa Fé, which is the "business district" of Mexico City. It is not very pedestrian friendly, so I would recommend to look for a room in the central and safe zones of Roma, Condesa, San Miguel Chapultepec or Coyoacán. The IBERO also offers a supervised housing service where they organize a homestay with hostfamilies. To find a furnished room by yourself, you can check websites like dadaroom.com or various facebook groups (for example "Foreigners in Mexico City DF") where you can find many announcements. I recommend to rent an Airbnb for the first few weeks and then start looking once you are in the city.

Public transport

The university offers its own reliable and punctual bus system (IBERObus) to pick up and drop off students along various routes throughout the city. There are also several public transport options that are cheaper but less reliable - there are no time tables, you just stand on the street and wait for a bus to pass. Options include Metro, Metrobus, Ecobus, local buses and "peseros" (minivans). There are also taxi services like Uber, Didi or Beat that are accessible and safer than the city taxis, which I would not recommend. The best solution depends on where you will live. Using public transport in Mexico City is easy, but it will train your patience ;-).

Preparation for the studies

IBERO staff will send you a very informative booklet to prepare yourself for your stay once you are accepted. The study plan and course list is published online before every semester. During the introduction week, you will get a helpful step-by-step guide on how to select and register for your courses. During the first 2 weeks of the semester, you can still change some subjects if you don't like them.

Information about the university

Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO) is located in the district of Santa Fé in Mexico City. The campus is quite big and very beautiful, with gardens and communal areas. It is one of the most recognized private universities in the whole country and well known for its quality of studies.

Language course

Free Spanish courses are offered at the university for every level. There are intensive courses that take place for 2h every day, or conversation courses 2h twice a week, if you already have an intermediate to advanced level. Though there are some general subjects offered in English, almost all specific architecture-related subjects are held in Spanish, so I recommend a basic to intermediate level of Spanish. However, most teachers are flexible and will let you write assignments in English if you ask them.

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Studies at the university

The study plan in Mexico is not divided into Bachelor and Master, they get their diploma after 10 semesters. Being in my 3rd semester of Master, I was technically in their 9th semester, but I was free to choose subjects of any semester. The credit system is different from ours: 8 IBERO credits are equivalent to 6 ETCS. A minimum attendance of 80% is mandatory and will be checked by most professors.

Support at the university

The staff of the international office is extremely friendly and helpful. Florian, the head of the international office is a German, and Andrea who is responsible for all incoming students, has become one of my best friends. They provide you with helpful information and organize events and trips for exchange students throughout the semester, which are always very fun and a great opportunity to meet people and get to know the country. Through these events, I developed many friendships with fellow exchange students that enriched my experience a lot.

Comparison of universities

Whereas the dynamics and workload of the theoretical subjects is similar to UniLi, the design studios at IBERO usually have more students and are often done in groups. The atmosphere in general is less personal than at UniLi, which obviously has to do with the size of the university. The final reviews are done by handing in your material without a presentation. As much as I appreciate our universities personal and small atmosphere, I also enjoyed being in a more anonymous and lively ambience for a semester.

Budgeting

Depending on the area where you live, the costs for a room in a shared flat range approximately from 4'000 - 9'000 pesos (ca. 200 - 450 CHF) per month. Depending on your lifestyle, you can spend almost nothing on food from a local market and from taco stands, or you can have dinner in super fancy restaurants that cost almost the same as in Switzerland. I usually spent around 2000 pesos (100 CHF) on food. The restaurants I visited cost around half the price that you pay in Switzerland (a dinner for ca. 400-600 pesos for 2 people). In general I would say that you can live very well for around 600 CHF a month. I can recommend the credit card "Revolut" that lets you pay in foreign currencies with the daily exchange rate and without charging fees.

Life / leisure

Mexico City is huge and has to offer so many things to do in your free time. There are museums, cafés, bars, restaurants, art galleries, cinemas, parks, gyms, dance classes... you name it! I especially liked the vivid culture of Mexico which you can experience in ancient prehispanic ruins (Templo Mayor in the middle of the city center), the colonial buildings, the local food and handcraft markets and all the yummy food stands. There is literally something for everyone. One semester is never enough to enjoy all the city has to offer. Also, there are very good long-distance bus connections for weekend trips to other beautiful towns like San Miguel de Allende, Querétaro, Guanajuato, Morelia, Tepoztlán, Puebla and many more.

Safety

Many people are very concerned by the issue of safety in Mexico. Even though it obviously is a problematic topic country-wide, one can live a very calm life in Mexico City by taking some general personal safety measurements, like avoiding certain areas in the city, not showing off your valuables, not walking alone at night, holding on to your belongings in the Metro, and taking advices from local friends. I have never experienced any problems concerning my safety in a whole year.

