



## Tips on Studying Abroad at Monterrey Tec (Summer Program) in Mexico

Want to know what it's like to study abroad? Want to know what your peers think? Your fellow Georgia Tech students who have previously gone on this exchange program gave their opinions so that future participants have the inside scoop on their host institution and host country.

### Preparation & Getting Started

- An accompanying GT professor helped students register for classes and get credit transfer approvals.
- The program director visited one of my INTA classes to advertise the Monterrey program, and I thought it sounded like a great opportunity to do my first study abroad. The Monterrey program was appealing to me because it was only 6 weeks during the summer and because it was in Mexico, which is similar enough to the U.S. that I wouldn't feel totally out of

place, yet it was also vastly different that I'd learn new things.



### Classes

- Classes are small, 20 or less students. (Contemporary Mexico had 21 students, Latin American Society and Culture had 15.)
- Classes combined American students (both students from Georgia Tech and students from other universities) as well as Mexican students from Tec de Monterrey.
- Class assignments included lectures, films, field trips, student-led presentations, mid-terms, finals, and papers, and blogs.
- Both of my classes were relatively easy, which gave me time to explore the city of Monterrey and learn survival skills outside of the classroom. I also learned more than I anticipated about the culture and history of Mexico, which helped me to understand the experiences I had outside the classroom in Mexico.
- Contemporary Mexico required several nights a week of reading 20 or more pages, and it also required time spent doing outside research for the blogs and essays. Latin American Society and Culture required outside time spent on extra credit and group presentations. Neither class had a difficult course load, so it made both classes enjoyable.

### Transportation & Travel

- Make sure your visa is valid for the amount of time you plan on staying. Correcting it is quite a hassle.
- You take taxis EVERYWHERE in Mexico. The fares are cheap, and the drivers get you to where you need to go, even though the driving is scary.
- You can also take the public bus, which is cheap but not necessarily safe.
- You can take planes to other Mexican cities for under \$100. We traveled 10 hours to Guanajuato by bus, which was interesting but also easy for 21 students traveling together.
- I would not recommend driving yourself anywhere because it is dangerous.
- Definitely check out El Centro de Monterrey, the top of El Obsipado and La Bandera n Monterrey. There are also a few mountains in the city which you can hike up and see a great view. El Colla de Coballo has an amazing hike with a waterfall. You can bungee jump there. I heard the Garcia Caves are awesome but I didn't visit them.
- You HAVE to visit Guanajuato—it is the most charming little town and it is full of historical value!
- I brought my passport and used it often, but that was also because I didn't have my drivers license with me. You receive a visa when you arrive, but I never needed it, not even when I returned to the U.S.



\*These comments do not reflect the views of GT's Office of International Education. They are based on students' individual opinions and are, therefore, not necessarily representative of all student experiences.

## Housing

- Dorms (Las Residencias at Tec de Monterrey) are on-campus suites.
- The dorms were incredibly nice. They were set up in a suite fashion, with 2 people sharing a room and a bathroom, and then sharing a kitchen area with the other 2 people in your suite.
- The rooms were very nice and we also had maid service every weekday.
- The dorms had a movie theater, a work out room, laundry service, a convenience store, and excellent security precautions.



## Communication

- Phone cards can be purchased at convenience stores such as Oxxo.
- Keeping in touch is easiest via the internet.
- Internet is available in the dorms.
- American phones don't work well down there (you can receive and send text messages to the U.S. but to make calls is very expensive). You can buy Mexican phones for not a lot of money and then buy minutes, but I'd only recommend that if you have a lot of Mexican friends to call or are going to stay in Mexico for awhile.
- I got by using other people's Mexican phones and emailing or Facebooking people.
- Tec has its own computer lab on campus and there's also an internet café next to campus. I brought my laptop and Ethernet cord and I got wireless everywhere on campus. However, printing is a complicated process and I ended up going to the internet cafes to print papers.
- My parents called me because it was cheaper than calling them, and I text messaged a bit. Mostly I kept in contact with everyone through the internet.

## Food

- A meal plan is provided, but some students bought food at a grocery and made their own meals in their kitchen suite. It is a wise idea to buy groceries because you'll save money and you won't have to go out every time you want a snack. There were 2 grocery stores very close to campus and a convenience store in the dorms, as well as another one right across the street.
- Food was very cheap in Mexico! There are plenty of restaurants that serve great, inexpensive food close to campus. Nicer restaurants are downtown; getting a taxi down there is cheap as well.
- There are several inexpensive taco stands that serve the best tacos I have ever tasted in my life!
- There are about 10 great restaurants and taco stands within walking distance from the campus.
- Eat out to get a good taste of real Mexican cuisine, but also make sure you buy groceries or else you'll go broke.
- From what I heard on-campus food was pretty good, although I never ate at any of the various restaurants or dining facilities on campus. There was a Starbucks on campus that saved my life!
- Eat at Tacos Martha, which is a block from the dorms. Jac & Ray is a great European sandwich restaurant. La Barca serves excellent salads and pizza if you're craving some American-style food, but the service is slow. Das Beerhaus is an interesting place to eat at. There are also several nice restaurants downtown in an area called Barrio Antiguo. Please, please, never eat at Bennigan's or Domino's or Chile's if you want to be respected as an international traveler.



## Finances

- Debit cards are acceptable for purchases and can be used in ATMs.
- I spent a little more than \$800.
- If you want to save money, don't eat out and don't spend a lot of money at clubs.
- Not a lot of places take credit cards aside from grocery stores and restaurants.
- Definitely pay with cash as much as possible, but be careful not to carry too much on you at one time.

## Cultural Differences

- Mexicans are extremely inclusive and are willing to talk to foreigners.
- Some students find the difference in hygiene a little shocking.
- The best part of my study abroad experience was making friends with awesome people from around the world, experiencing the real Mexico, learning and understanding the Mexican culture and history, and traveling to Guanajuato besides Monterrey to add more local color to the experience.
- Sometimes I tried to speak to the locals in Spanish and they couldn't understand me.
- Also, seeing the taxi drivers drive horribly and manage not to get into accidents was shocking.
- I witnessed general procrastination, which made it seem less efficient than what I'm used to.
- It was great meeting all of the interesting Mexican students and elders, bonding with our Mexican classmates at a pool party, and traveling to Guanajuato to see the more typical side of Mexico and not just the business and industrial side that Monterrey offers.
- At the end, I understood and appreciated the Mexican people for who they are.
- Sometimes, I was called a *gringa*, but I didn't mind because I expected a general feeling of hatred towards Americans. Mexicans have a love-hate relationship with Americans, so that was odd to experience firsthand.
- Getting adjusted to a new culture just takes time. The more you travel the easier it is. But it also greatly helps if you make a point to venture out from the dorms, meet new people, and try new things, and attempt to be as Mexican as possible.



## Packing

- Make sure to take a bathing suit, water bottle, and sunglasses.
- Bring plenty of clothes that are light-weight but nice. Mexicans dress a lot nicer than Americans for everything. Even if you think you're dressed up, you're not. Bring clothes to go out in (halter tops or dresses for girls, button down shirts for guys).
- Also pack exercise clothes.
- Also bring DVDs or books because you'll have plenty of downtime.
- Don't take a lot of stuff because you'll bring home a ton of souvenirs, but pack the essentials.
- Bring lots of pants because it's not common for Mexicans to wear shorts.
- Remember that although Mexico in general is very poor and has a lot of crime, Monterrey is very wealthy, so you won't stand out as much as you would anywhere else if you're wearing nice clothes.
- It rained 2 days out of the 6 weeks I was there, but it poured, so bring an umbrella! Also it's very hot and humid, but the dorms and classrooms and some restaurants have AC, so bring light-weight clothes and some layers.

## Lifestyle

- It is easy to meet other students, especially because of dorm life, orientation, and on-campus activities such as salsa lessons.
- I socialized with American, international, and local students. I met some amazing people in Monterrey through school, and through going out at night and socializing with the locals my own age.
- There were several classes offered (i.e. a cooking class and various dance classes).
- There was a gym on campus, and in the dorms there was an outdoor pool, a work out room and a movie theater. Go to the pool as often as you can because it's too hot to just sit around. Also, you'll come back really tan and all of your American friends will be jealous.
- The campus had a workout gym, an athletic gym, a track, a bank, several restaurants, Starbucks, a copy center and a pool.
- I learned a lot of Spanish. Mostly slang and local dialect, but I definitely improved my speaking and listening skills.

## Participant Profiles

Please see information of contributing students below. If a blog or website is listed, feel free to take a look! Also, if an e-mail address is listed, you may contact that student if you have any questions about their study abroad experience.

INTA & Spanish, Summer 2007

INTA, Summer 2007