



MEXICO

Region: Central America

Official Language: Spanish

Population: 110.6 million (UN estimate 2010).

Currency: Mexican Peso (MXN)

Area: 1,958,201 sq km

Capital: Mexico City

Number of States: 31

Government: Federal Republic since 1917. Gained independence from Spain in 1821.

Religion: 88% Roman Catholic, 5% Protestant and 7% other denominations (INEGI estimate 2000)

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet has been designed to assist students of The University of Queensland who are planning to complete the study abroad program in Mexico. It contains practical, cultural and language-related information that is relevant to students.

For ease of reference some information in this booklet has been marked with symbols and put in highlight boxes :

 *Important tips.*

 *Interesting or unusual facts.*

 *Web links to relevant information.*

 *Glossaries and language information.*

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PRACTICAL TIPS

DRINKING WATER

The tap water in Mexico is not drinkable. Only drink bottled or purified water and be careful of drinks and ice that may contain tap water. Also be wary of salads or uncooked products that may have been washed with tap water.



! Only drink bottled or purified water and be careful of drinks and ice that may contain tap water.

Make sure you buy some disinfectant drops 'desinfectante' to disinfect any vegetables and fruits you buy. Simply add several drops to a sink of water and leave the items to soak for 15 minutes.

WEATHER

It is not always hot in Mexico. Weather can vary depending on your location and altitude and on the season, so make sure you are aware of the climate in your region and pack accordingly.

While temperatures vary over the year, Mexico has two main recognisable seasons, a rainy season and a dry season. The rainy season usually lasts from May through to September or October.

Hurricane season is from June to November, so during this time remember to check weather forecasts and ensure you have travel insurance, especially if you are visiting beach-side locations.

! Current weather and forecasts for Mexico: <http://weather.org/mexico.htm>

TIPPING

It is normal to tip for services in Mexico. Tipping is usually 10-15% of the total bill at restaurants. It is also normal to tip valets, maids, porters and attendants (at taxi ranks, fuel stations and in rest rooms).

TIME

Mexico uses three time zones: Central, Mountain and Pacific Standard Time. Mexico also observes daylight savings. You can use the below table to calculate time differences between Mexico and QLD, Australia.

! Current times in all major world cities: www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/

Mexican Time	> Which Mexican State Are You In? >	What time of year is it? >	Time in QLD, Australia
Monday 12:00pm (Midday)	Central Standard Time: A state other than the ones listed in the boxes below	Standard Time	Tuesday 4:00am (Add 16 hours)
		Daylight Savings Time	Tuesday 3:00am (Add 15 hours)
	Mountain Standard Time: Chihuahua, Nayarit, Sonora, Sinaloa and Baja California Sur	Standard Time	Tuesday 5:00am (Add 17 hours)
		Daylight Savings Time	Tuesday 4:00am (Add 16 hours)
	Pacific Standard Time: Baja California Norte	Standard Time	Tuesday 6:00am (Add 18 hours)
		Daylight Savings Time	Tuesday 5:00am (Add 17 hours)

Mexican Standard Time:
2:00am Last Sunday in October
> 2:00am First Sunday in April

Mexican Daylight Savings Time:
2:00am First Sunday in April
> 2:00am Last Sunday in October

PRACTICAL TIPS

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

BUS

The bus system in Mexico is extensive, cheap, and a good option for travel over longer distances if not travelling by air.

! Remember to show your student card to get transport discounts.

U Universities often offer 'unibus' services for students travelling to and from university.



METRO

Large cities, such as Mexico City, have public metro networks, though these often only service the centre of the city.

TAXI

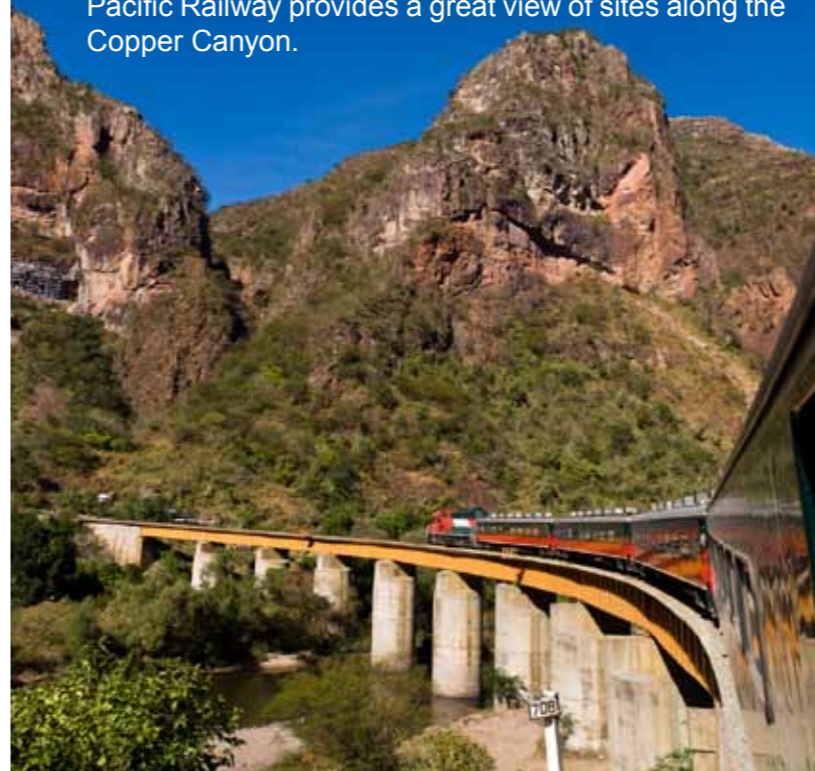
Taxis are often the cheapest, easiest and most efficient way to get around in Mexico for students. There are different types of taxis available:

- **Sitio Taxis (Radio Taxis)** - are the safe, recommended option. These taxis are recognisable by their antenna and are often dispatched by radio. Sitio taxis are allowed to charge a small premium above the meter, and can charge up to 10 percent extra at night.
- **Airport Taxis** - are official taxis at the airport. These have an aircraft symbol on the door of the vehicle and charge set prices for various destinations. You must prepay the fare inside the airport.
- **Street Taxis** - pick people up on the streets. Travellers have been robbed when using these taxis. Only use radio-despatched taxis, particularly in Mexico City.

! Never hail a taxi from the street.

TRAIN

Outside of the cities, there are only a few passenger trains in Mexico and these are primarily scenic tourist routes. These trains are a great way to see some of Mexico's impressive countryside. The Chihuahua Pacific Railway provides a great view of sites along the Copper Canyon.



LOW FARE AIRLINES

Viva Aerobus - www.vivaaerobus.com.mx

Volaris - www.volaris.com.mx

Interjet - www.interjet.com.mx

Aeromexico - www.aeromexico.com

Mexicana - www.mexicana.com

BUS LINES

For a full list of Mexican bus lines, information and website links:

http://www.mexperience.co.uk/directory/buses/bus_table.htm

TRAIN LINES

Copper Canyon Train -

<http://www.chepe.com.mx>

Tequila Express -

www.tequilaexpress.com.mx

PRACTICAL TIPS



POLITICS

Mexico is a federal republic. The president is directly elected by the people for a term of six years, and cannot be re-elected. The president appoints a cabinet of 17 secretaries to help govern.

There is also a congress, which consists of a senate and a chamber of deputies elected by the people. The state and local governments follow a similar system, with their own congresses, elected state governors and local mayors.



Mexico's official name is actually 'The United Mexican States' (*Estados Unidos Mexicanos*).

LAW

In Mexico, you can be arrested / fined for the following:

- Using a false ID (the minimum drinking age is 18)
- Urinating or spitting in public
- Public disturbances & public drunkenness
- Carrying an open alcohol container in public
- Nudity
- Littering
- Drink-driving
- Drug possession (of more than the minimum allowable amount of any substance - minimums are very low. Offences can lead to prison sentences)

If you are arrested, you can be jailed for 72 hours without charges being filed.

SAFETY

While Mexico is a beautiful country full of colour and culture, you have to be aware that there is crime too, so take the necessary precautions.

More than likely, you will have a safe and enjoyable time. However, should you find yourself in a threatening position, don't play the hero, stay calm and report the incident to the police as soon as you can.



! SAFETY TIPS

Taxis - You should only use radio-dispatched taxis (*sitios*), particularly in Mexico City. Use only official taxis from the airport after prepaying the fare inside the airport. Never hail a taxi from the street!

Valuables - Avoid wearing expensive jewellery and only carry as much money as you think you are going to spend.

Credit Cards - Write down your card number and relevant information and keep it in a safe place. If you lose the card, you can cancel it easily.

ATMs - Always be on guard when you approach a cash point and keep an eye on your wallet and bag at all times.

When Out at Night - Walk in well lit places and avoid deserted streets. If you are in a larger city consider asking a local which suburbs and areas to avoid visiting.

More safety advice and current warnings:
www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Mexico

PRACTICAL TIPS

PHONING

In the three largest cities of Mexico (Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey) the area code is two digits and phone numbers are eight digits, whereas in the rest of the country area codes are three digits and phone numbers are seven digits.

Phoning Another Region Within Mexico:

01 + Area Code (2 or 3 digits) + Phone Number (7 or 8 digits)

Phoning Mexico From Australia:

0011 + 52 + Area Code (2 or 3 digits - e.g. Mexico City = 55) + Phone Number (7 or 8 digits)

Phoning Australia from Mexico:

00 + 61 + State Code (1 digit state code without the 0 in front e.g. QLD = 7, or 4 for a mobile phone) + Phone Number (8 digits)

For Mexican area codes:
www.countrycallingcodes.com

USING A MOBILE PHONE IN MEXICO

Using your Australian mobile in Mexico is likely to be expensive and requires international roaming. If you want to use a mobile phone in Mexico, there are several cheaper options.

- Buy a mobile phone in Mexico.
- Bring an unlocked GSM phone and buy a SIM card in Mexico.
- Rent a mobile phone.

Using prepaid credit is the best option for exchange students because you are not locked into a plan. Once you have set up a prepaid account with a company, you can buy cards to top up your phone credit. Some companies will let you buy credit online.

More information and Mexican service providers:
www.mexperience.co.uk/guide/essentials/comms.htm



ELECTRICITY

Mexico uses plugs with two flat prongs - the same plugs that are used in the USA. Some plugs have a third circular earth prong, and adaptors can also be found for these. Mexican power outlets emit 110-120 Volts, whereas Australian outlets emit 220-240 Volts. This means that you will need to get a 'step-up transformer' as well as an adaptor to be able to use your Australian appliances.

! IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

030 - Local Time

040 - Information / Directory

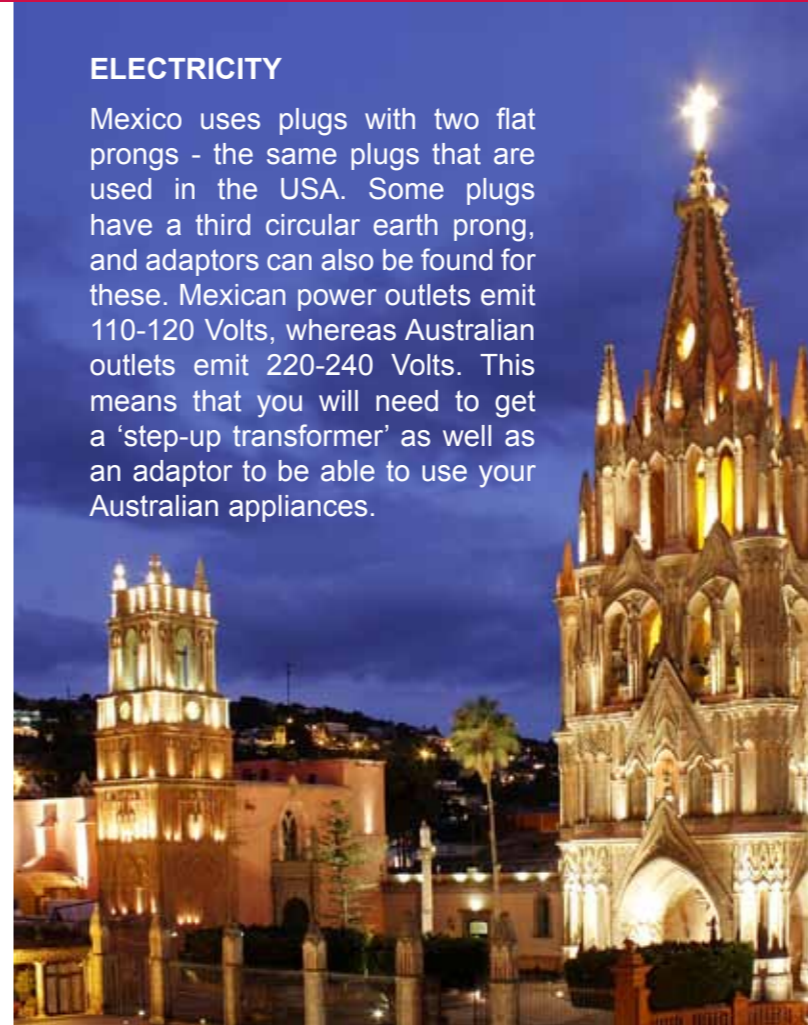
090 - Assisted International Collect Call

060 - Police

066 or 080 - Emergency Services

91 5250 0123 - Mexican Ministry of Tourism's emergency hotline

55 1101 2200 - Australian Embassy Mexico



CULTURE & CUSTOMS



CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING



"Culture is the lens through which we see the world."

[Kevin Arvuch, John Paul Lederach]

It is important not to view a person as a stereotype of a culture, but rather as an individual that is influenced by the values of the culture or cultures in which they grew up. If you understand and respect these cultural values, it is easier to avoid misunderstanding and conflict.

WHAT IS 'NORMAL'?

As someone who is influenced by your own culture and upbringing, you will judge behaviour as 'normal' or acceptable because of your own cultural values. Self-reflection is one of the best ways to understand cultural differences, so consider what some typical Australian values might be, how your behaviour and attitudes are influenced by these and how these might differ to those of your host culture. You can use the cultural values list on the opposite page to get ideas.

AUSTRALIANISMS

Here are a few Australian habits that are sometimes misinterpreted by or seem strange to other cultures:

- Poking fun at people and using sarcasm.
- Using 'sorry' frequently, often in minor situations where other cultures might use 'excuse-me'.
- Using first names and an informal tone even when speaking to figures of authority or strangers.
- Directness or frankness when speaking to others.

Don't stress about memorising long lists of customs and etiquette rules from your host country. You can often observe other people and follow their example, and simply understanding the core values of your host culture will help you judge appropriate behaviour.

CULTURE SHOCK

When studying abroad, students often experience an initial period of elation and excitement, followed by an emotional crash known as 'culture shock'. The constant challenge of new situations and obstacles can become exhausting and depressing. It is normal to experience this feeling and it usually improves over time once you start to feel more accustomed to the host country.



CULTURAL VALUES

Cultures often have different values or customs in relation to the following:

- Social hierarchies and authority.
- Family and family responsibilities.
- The degree of formality/informality required in different social situations.
- The importance of the individual as opposed to the group or community.
- Gender roles and interaction between people of different genders.
- Attitudes to time and the importance of the past, present and future.
- The importance of written codes, laws and contracts as opposed to verbal agreements and generally understood practices.

Try to recognise the positive intentions of the attitudes and customs of other cultures, rather than dismissing them as 'backward,' silly or archaic.

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

FAMILY

In general, Mexico is a conservative society with large extended families. Normally, the head of the family is the father, although matriarchal families are not unusual.

Whereas several years ago *machismo* was the norm, more and more women are now working and assuming authority in many aspects of the family. Additionally, a growing number of men are helping with the housework and children.



Personal space is often smaller in Mexico, so be aware that what might be an uncomfortable distance for you might be quite normal for someone else.

If you are living with a Mexican family it should be a rewarding experience. They will welcome and treat you warmly, but will also expect you to follow the rules in the household and to be informed of your whereabouts as much as possible.

Make sure you agree on timetables, sharing of the household chores and their view on friend visits. If you are going to be late for a meal or

stay out at night, let the family know beforehand.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

! *Try and speak some Spanish. Everyone will welcome and appreciate your effort!*

Greeting formalities are important in Mexico. It is polite to greet and say goodbye to each person individually (not to everyone as a group), normally with a handshake. Later on, when you become friendly



with someone, a hug and a pat on the back is well practised. Expressions like: 'thank you', 'bless you', 'good morning' and 'good night' are used frequently.

Titles are also used in formal situations, especially with older people as a sign of respect or when you are first introduced: *Señor*, *señora* or *señorita* followed by the surname. In Spanish there are two ways of addressing people - *usted* ('you' formal) and *tu* ('you' informal).

! *Make sure you use 'usted' when talking to older people, people you have just met or in formal situations.*



GLOSSARY

- Adiós / despedida* - Good-bye
- Buenos días* - Good morning
- Buenas noches* - Good night
- Estudiante de intercambio* - Exchange student
- Familia que hospeda* - Host family
- Gracias* - Thank you
- Hasta luego / hasta pronto* - See you soon
- Hola* - Hello
- Invitado/a* - Guest
- Me permite / disculpe* - Excuse-me
- Mucho gusto* - Pleased to meet you
- Perdón* - Sorry
- Salud* - Bless you (after sneezing)
- Tareas domésticas* - Housework
- Toque de queda* - Curfew



Latin American cultures tend to use an overlapping conversation pattern, so it is not necessarily unusual or rude for people to talk over one another during conversation.

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

GIFT GIVING

Gifts are seen as symbols of affection and appreciation in Mexican culture.

If you are invited to a house for dinner, it is a good idea to take a little present. Flowers, chocolates and wine are good choices. Unique small gifts from your own country are also a good idea.

! *If you are invited to a house for dinner, it is a good idea to take a little present.*

TRADITIONS

Mexican culture is rich and reflects the complexity of the country's history through the blending of Aztec and Spanish civilizations - Spain conquered Central America in the early 16th Century.

Religion plays a fundamental role in the lives of Mexicans. About 88 % of the Mexican population is considered Catholic and, regardless of whether people are practising Catholics, they usually join in religious

! *About 88% of the Mexican population is considered Catholic.*

festivities and celebrations with gusto.

PUNCTUALITY

Time is a very flexible thing in Mexico. Punctuality for social affairs is not that important. At a house party, you could show up 30 minutes after the time on the invitation and it would be fine. However, be careful with other celebrations that may involve religious or legal ceremonies because they are likely to start on time.

! *It is not unusual to show up late to a party.*



CULTURE & CUSTOMS

FIESTAS FOR ALL! - NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS

DÍA DE REYES

In the capital and the south it is customary to celebrate *El Día de Reyes*, The Epiphany, on January 6th.

Like the arrival of the wise men offering gifts for the baby Jesus, children wake up excited to find toys and gifts left by the *Reyes Magos*.

A special treat served on this day is the *Rosca de Reyes* - a crown-shaped sweet bread decorated with dried fruits. Tiny figures of baby Jesus are hidden in the dough before baking. Each person cuts his or her own slice and whoever gets a piece containing the figurine has to host another party on *Día de la Candelaria* (a

Saint day), on February 2nd.

EASTER

Pascua, Easter time, is the most important religious holiday of the year aside from Christmas.

Every community has unique traditions to celebrate *Semana Santa*, Holy Week, with live recreations of the passion of Christ, vigils and prayers that culminate in *Domingo de Gloria*, Easter Sunday.

PATRONS DAYS

Every city, town and village holds a yearly festival to commemorate their local patron saints. These festivities include large parades, fireworks and dance

competitions, as well as prayer, flower offerings and candle lighting in churches.

In the smaller towns and villages, football, boxing, cockfighting and amateur bullfighting are also celebrated during the festivities.

PIÑATAS

Piñatas are a must at many Mexican birthdays and celebrations, including religious festivities. These are made from paper maché, painted with bright colours and then filled with sweets and/or small toys. *Piñatas* are hung from the ceiling or trees with a rope and then children (and adults!) are blind-folded and take turns hitting it with a stick until it breaks open.



GLOSSARY

- El Día de Reyes* - The Epiphany
- El Día de Candelaria* - Saint day on February 2nd
- Domingo de Resurrección* - Easter Sunday
- Fiesta* - Festival / Party
- El Niño Dios* - Baby Jesus
- Pascua* - Easter time
- Reyes magos* - The three wise men
- Rosca de reyes* - King's bread / King's cake
- Semana santa* - Holy week
- Santo / Santa* - Saint
- Fuegos artificiales* - Fireworks

>> JANUARY

>> FEBRUARY

>> MARCH

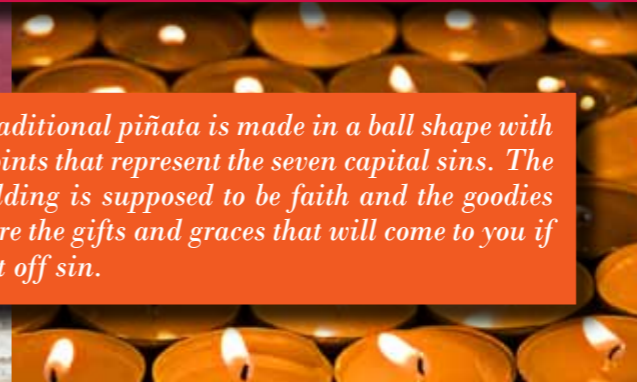
>> APRIL

>> MAY

>> JUNE

>> JULY

>> AUGUST



The traditional piñata is made in a ball shape with seven points that represent the seven capital sins. The blind-folding is supposed to be faith and the goodies inside are the gifts and graces that will come to you if you fight off sin.



CULTURE & CUSTOMS

¡VIVA MÉXICO! - INDEPENDENCE DAY

El Día de la Independencia is commemorated by Mexicans all over the world on September 16th.

Days before this celebration, streets, houses, buildings and cars are decorated with the three colours of the Mexican flag: green, white and red.

Children and adults gather on the evening of September 15th to participate in the collective fiesta, many of them dressed typically as *charros* or *chinas poblanas*.

Typical activities include eating *antojitos mexicanos*, drinking *ponche* (made with seasonal fruits), enjoying *mariachi* music and making as much noise as possible!

The President of Mexico delivers the *grito* or cry of Independence from the *Palacio Nacional* in the *Zócalo*, where the President's offices are located. Every Governor of State does the same in their local city.

At nearly midnight, the fiesta culminates when the crowd joins in with their leader proudly shouting out the names of the heroes of Mexican Independence, ending with ¡VIVA MÉXICO!. There is also usually an impressive display of fireworks to end the celebration.

EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

The Day of the Dead is one of the most traditional Mexican commemorations. Held on November 2nd, it is a blend of indigenous and Catholic beliefs.

Precolonial Mexican civilizations believed that death was only a transition between lives. Souls did not die but stayed in *Mictlan*, a place to rest for a while until the day they could return and visit their loved ones.

After Catholicism arrived, this celebration was set to coincide with November 1st, *El Día de los Santos*, or All Saints Day, when the souls of children are remembered.

El Día de los Muertos is not a sad affair but a happy and colourful one, where people remember their loved ones that passed away with altars and special flowers, food and sweets. Different regions celebrate in different ways, but generally it is a joyous celebration.



GLOSSARY

Antojitos mexicanos - Typical Mexican food

Charro - Mexican horseman or cowboy

Vestido de China poblana - A traditional Mexican dress

Cráneo - Skull

El Día de la Independencia - Independence day

El Día de los Muertos - The day of the dead

El Día de los Santos - All saint's day

Grito - The cry of independence

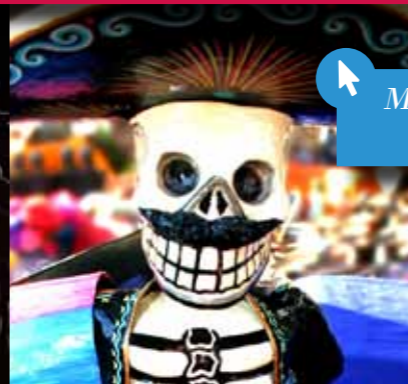
Ponche - Mexican fruit punch served hot

Zócalo - Main square

>> SEPTEMBER

>> OCTOBER

>> NOVEMBER



More information on the day of the dead:
www.dayofthedead.com

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

Publicly, in the media and in cultural places, *calaveras* are performed. These are short pieces of poetry mocking death and alluding to a particular person, usually 'very much alive' politicians!

Stalls sell sugar and chocolate skulls which are given to people with their name on them. You can also find crafts depicting skeletons doing daily activities like watching television or eating a meal.

VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE

The *Virgen de Guadalupe*, considered the Patroness of Mexico, is an icon that represents a famous apparition of the Virgin Mary. The feast day of Virgen de Guadalupe is December 12th.

The traditional story tells of an image appearing miraculously on the front of the cloak of a peasant called Juan Diego. It is perhaps the most popular religious image in Mexico, and the subject of pilgrimage.

Well before the big day, people tend to visit the streets near the *Basílica de Guadalupe*, where there are many stalls with *antojitos mexicanos* and souvenirs.

Religious fervour is also demonstrated by *matachines*, groups of people expressing their belief through dance.

CHRISTMAS

Christmas is a time for joyous celebrations that start with *Las Posadas*, pre-Christmas parties celebrated from December 16 to 24th. Mexicans perform

processions that re-enact Joseph and Mary's search for an inn. These processions end with a party.

Pastorelas (Shepherds Plays) are also staged at this time by both amateur and professional groups. These traditional theatrical presentations date back to Mexico's Colonial period when missionaries taught Catholicism through dramatizations of Biblical stories.

At home, the main decoration in the Christmas season is usually *el Nacimiento*, the nativity scene. Some families go to great length preparing these scenes, often on a large scale in front gardens.

Mexicans celebrate Christmas Eve, *La Noche Buena*, with a special dinner for family and friends, sometimes followed by a midnight mass and exchanges of gifts. The big party lasts until the early hours the following morning, so that *Navidad*, Christmas Day, is also a holiday and a day for the family and rest.

The tradition of Santa Claus is practised in the north, most probably due to its proximity to the United States.

NEW YEARS DAY

Año Nuevo, New Years Day, is a big celebration in Mexico. It is common for people to have a big fireworks display at home on New Year's Eve.



GLOSSARY

- Año Nuevo* - New Years Day
- Calaveras* - Short pieces of poetry mocking death
- Campesino/a* - Peasant
- Día de fiesta* - Feast day
- La Noche Buena* - Christmas eve
- Las Posadas* - pre-Christmas parties
- Luminarias / Farolitos* - Displays of candles inside paper shades
- Matachines* - Religious dancers
- Milagro* - Miracle
- Misa* - Mass
- Nacimiento* - Nativity scene
- Navidad* - Christmas day
- Nochevieja* - New Year's Eve
- Papá Noel* - Santa Claus
- Pastorelas* - Shepherds plays
- Peregrinación* - Pilgrimage
- Procesión* - Procession
- Regalo* - Gift
- Virgen de Guadalupe* - Mexican Virgin Mary

>> DECEMBER



More information on Mexican Celebration days:
www.inside-mexico.com/insidemexicoarticles.htm

THE DEGREE SYSTEM

The Mexican degree system is similar to the Australian system in that there are three main degree levels:

- Bachelor's Degree (*Licenciatura*)
- Master's Degree (*Maestría*)
- Doctorate (*Doctorado*)

The main difference between the systems is that a Mexican *Licenciatura* lasts longer than a typical Australian bachelor's degree, with students studying for 4, 5 or 6 years depending on the field of study.

HOW WILL MY UNIVERSITY SCHEDULE DIFFER IN MEXICO?

THE ACADEMIC YEAR

The Mexican academic year begins in August, but follows a similar pattern to that of Australian universities.

August - Semester 1 Begins

December - Mid-year break (approximately 1 month)

January - Semester 2 Begins

May to July - Summer Break (approximately 3 months)

As at Australian universities, students have the option of enrolling in one or two courses during the summer break as part of the summer semester.

UNIVERSITY CLASSES

Unlike the Australian system of 4 units per semester, a full-time study load in Mexico consists of 6 subjects per semester. Each subject usually has 3 hours of class time per

A full-time study load in Mexico consists of 6 subjects per semester.



week. Classes are not usually separated into lectures and tutorials, but rather are a combination of the two. Some subjects will have workshops and laboratory work. Examination is usually more regular throughout the Mexican academic year, with less emphasis on the final exams at the end of semester.

Some Mexican lecturers are happy to be addressed by first name, while others prefer the use of a formal title (i.e. 'Doctor,' 'Maestro,' 'Señor' or 'Señorita'). Observe how other students address the lecturer to determine which is most appropriate.

GLOSSARY

Educación Superior - Tertiary / Higher Education

Universidad - University

Licenciatura - Bachelor's Degree

Maestría - Masters

Doctorado - Doctorate

Dormitorios - Dormitories

Curso - Course

Unidad - Unit

Materia - Subject

Clase - Class / Lecture / Tutorial

Taller - Workshop

Trabajos / Tareas - Assignment

Examen - Exam

Profesor / Maestro - Lecturer / Professor

Estudiante - Student

Centro de atención a la comunidad estudiantil - Student centre

Centro Social - Student union

Sociedad de Estudiantes - Student society

Cafetería - Cafeteria





It is not common for Mexican students to work while studying, unless their employment is related to their field of study. However, exchange students will often work at a local bar or café to earn extra money.

Like most Mexicans, students enjoy watching national soccer league matches, whether in the stadium itself or in a bar or café.



WHAT DO MEXICAN STUDENTS DO WITH THEIR FREE TIME?

There are plenty of sporting and cultural activities that students can become involved in at Mexican universities. This includes dance, music, soccer, American football and variety of other activities. You can often try these out in the first few weeks of semester to decide if you want to sign up for the whole semester or not.

Mexican universities have football and soccer teams that will compete against other universities within Mexico, and students unsurprisingly enjoy seeing their team victorious!

*Information on UQ partner universities in Mexico:
www.uq.edu.au/uqabroad/mexico*

SIGN UP! - STUDENT SOCIETIES

Student societies in Mexico are often related to your chosen career or field of study, for example you might have a society for students studying to become medical doctors. These societies are very active and organise a wide range of events and initiatives. There are often some restrictions on who can join based on what you are studying, your grades or how long you have been studying. However, if you want to join a society most are not difficult to get into.



GLOSSARY

Escuela - Faculty

Departamentos - School (of University)

SCHOOLS AND FACULTIES:

Agricultura - Agriculture

Arquitectura - Architecture

Artes - Arts

Ciencias - Science

Ciencias de la Salud - Health Sciences

Ciencias Sociales - Social Sciences

Economía - Economics

Educación - Education

Finanzas - Finance

Ingeniería - Engineering

Leyes / Derecho - Law

Mercadotecnia - Marketing

Negocios - Business

Leyes / Derecho - Law

Tecnología / Informática - Information Technology

UNIVERSITY LIFE

CAMPUS FACILITIES

Mexican university campuses have similar facilities to those in Australia, with banks, ATMs, food outlets and sporting facilities readily available. There are often several different cafeterias and food outlets to choose from. Drinking alcohol on campus is usually not allowed, except on certain days or in special circumstances.

! *Make sure you have a student card as it will entitle you to a range of discounts for cinemas, transport and other services.*

UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION

ON CAMPUS

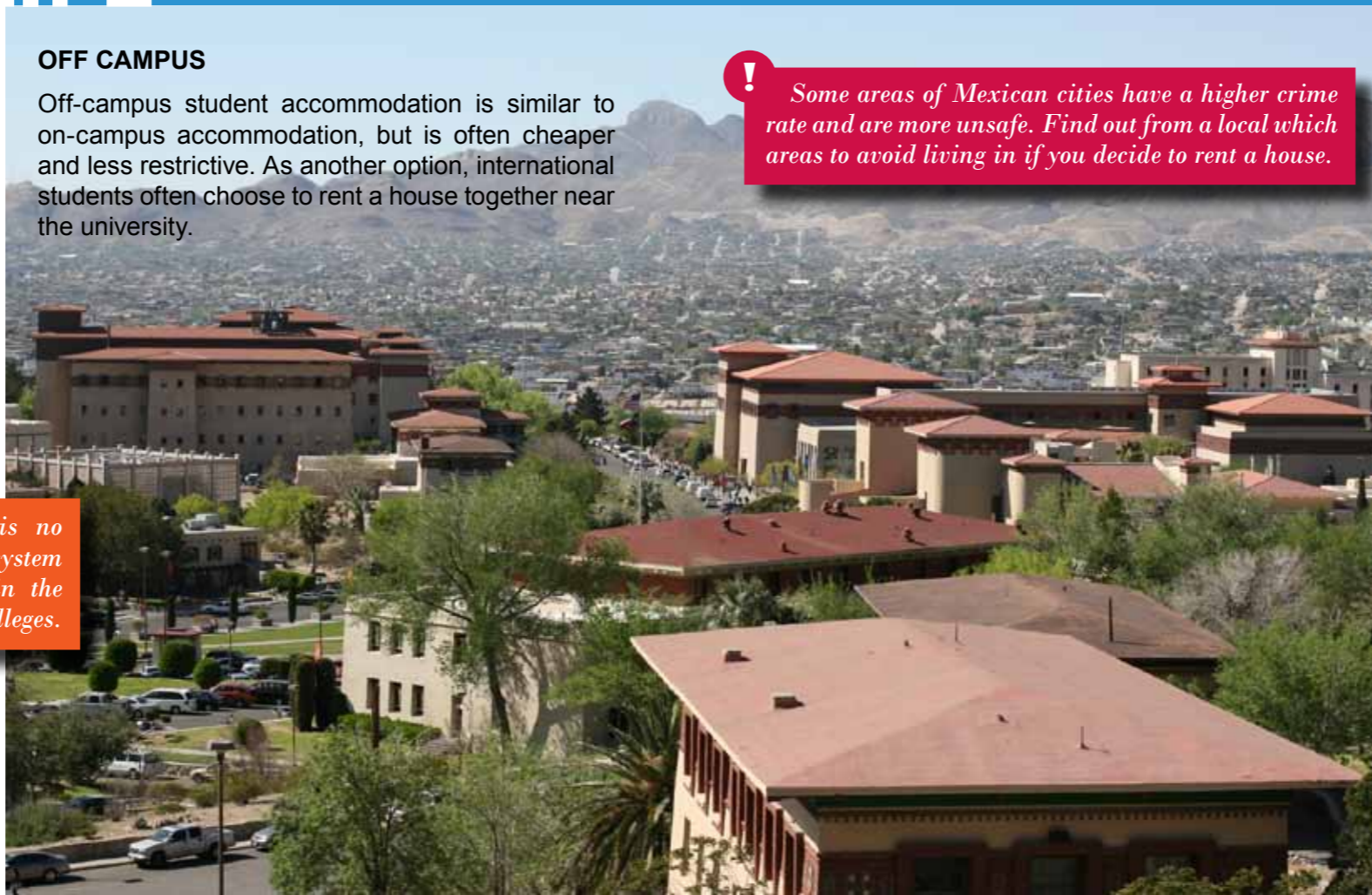
On-campus accommodation is a great way to meet people, especially if you don't already know anyone and are keen to make friends. This accommodation is usually dormitory style, with two-person bedrooms and communal bathrooms that are shared by several rooms. Be aware that there are usually restrictions relating to noise, parties and alcohol in this accommodation.

! *In Mexico there is no fraternity or sorority system (like you might find in the USA) associated with colleges.*

OFF CAMPUS

Off-campus student accommodation is similar to on-campus accommodation, but is often cheaper and less restrictive. As another option, international students often choose to rent a house together near the university.

! *Some areas of Mexican cities have a higher crime rate and are more unsafe. Find out from a local which areas to avoid living in if you decide to rent a house.*



! FREEBIES!

- Vouchers are usually given at universities at the beginning of semester. These can be for food, restaurants, dentists, haircuts and more.
- Many businesses offer online discounts. Check websites to print promotions and then take them with you for validation.
- Students can get considerable reductions just by showing their student card.
- Cinemas and museums have '2 for 1' days. Find out which day is '2 for 1' day in your area.
- Valets, or people who park cars may be happy to give you *pases cover* for bars or clubs.
- If you can prove it's your birthday, the majority of bars and clubs have great promotions, like a free bottle of rum, tequila shots or discounts.
- Find out on government websites about cultural events in your city. There are often many public exhibitions, theatre shows and concerts and these are free for everyone.
- Consider going outside the cities. Mexico has beautiful mountains, forests, beaches, rivers and lakes. Go for walks, cycle, water ski, swim ...you don't need a lot of money to have fun!



Real Mexican food is different from the 'Tex-Mex' food that is usually served at Mexican restaurants in other countries (however you can still find Tex-Mex food in the north of Mexico).



FOOD - MORE THAN CHILLI

In Mexico you can find all types of restaurants and international cuisine. Mexican food is delicious, inexpensive, varied and not always spicy.



If you have a sensitive stomach, stick to simple and traditional dishes for the first few days until your diet has grown accustomed to its new environment.

Basic staples of Mexican food include tortillas (made from maize or flour and used in many typical dishes or alongside meals) beans, chillies, *guacamole* (mashed

avocado with lime and coriander) *nopales* (prickly pear cactus) salsas and cheeses as well as meats, vegetables and salads.

Typical dishes are diverse and depend on the region you are in, but some that you are likely to encounter have been listed on the following page.

Enchiladas



Tamales



Tacos



Tostadas



Enchiladas with mole sauce



Ceviche



SOME TYPICAL DISHES

- *Tacos*: soft tortillas served with a variety of fillings.
- *Tostadas*: fried corn tortillas with assorted toppings.
- *Tamales*: cornmeal dough wrapped in corn or banana leaves; stuffed with chicken, pork or vegetables, and then steamed.
- *Tortas*: Mexican sandwiches or large rolls with assorted fillings.
- *Ceviche*: raw fish marinated in lime juice.
- *Chiles rellenos*: large poblano chillies stuffed with cheese or meat.
- *Enchiladas*: tortillas stuffed with vegetables, chicken or pork, and coated in a tomato and chilli sauce.
- *Quesadillas*: plain tortillas stuffed with cheese.
- *Mole sauce*: made with bitter chocolate, chillies and spices and served with turkey or chicken.
- *Pipián sauce*: made from pumpkin seeds.
- *Pibil*: pork or chicken marinated with orange and spices and then barbecued in banana leaves.



Traditionally, the main meal is taken mid-afternoon (2pm-4pm) and is often a social affair, with families or friends meeting to eat together. This is sometimes followed by a short siesta. Dinner usually starts after 8:00pm and could last until 11:00pm.

RESTAURANTS, MARKETS & STALLS

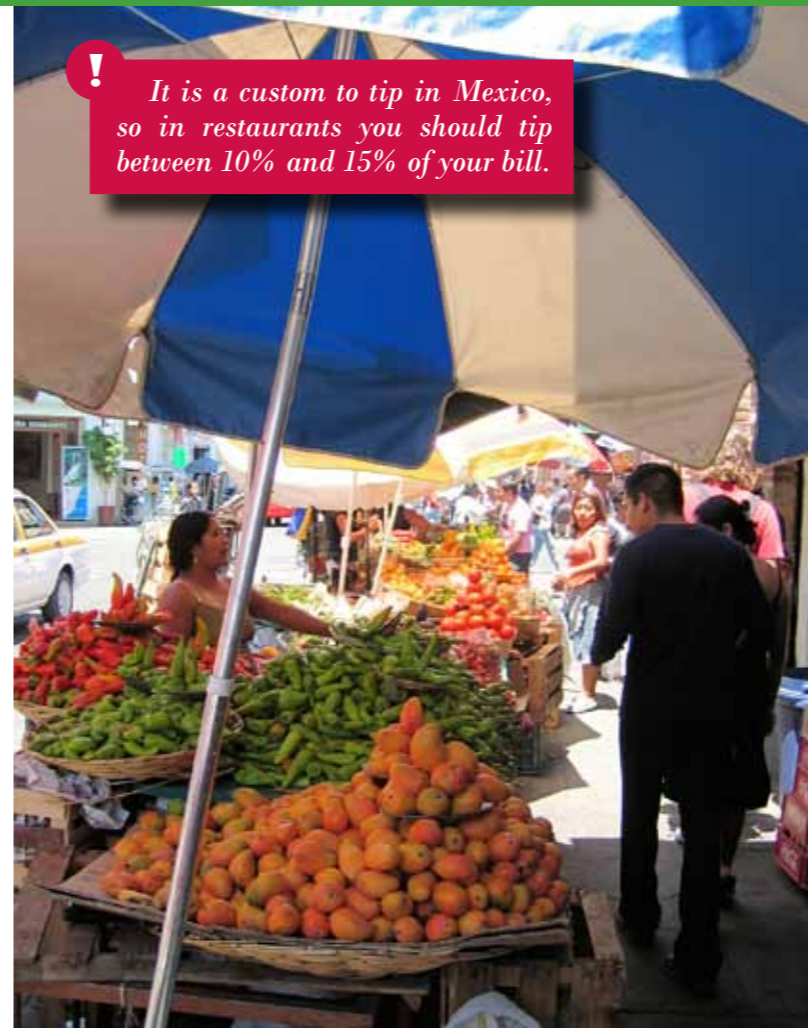
There are many good cafeterias, restaurants and even “buffet” places, where you pay a set price for all you can eat (sometimes homemade food) without having to spend a lot of money.

Taco stalls can be found everywhere in Mexico and the good news is that many are open until the early hours of the morning! Try and go to the established ones as they are likely to be safer and more reliable in terms of food quality. *Tacos al pastor*, *tacos de carne asada*, *tacos árabes* or *tacos de barbacoa* are just a few of the varieties.

Open markets are also a great option for a cheap and typical breakfast or lunch. You can sit and watch the locals prepare your food while enjoying a cold drink.

If you want to eat in a popular restaurant, a reservation is important. Many feature live entertainment in the evenings and some of them are even visited by local mariachi bands or musicians that could serenade your table for a small price.

When going out to a restaurant, if you don't want to be sent away at the door, you should dress appropriately (no thongs). Guys, don't forget your shirt, long pants and shoes.



It is a custom to tip in Mexico, so in restaurants you should tip between 10% and 15% of your bill.

SOME TRADITIONAL SWEETS:

- *Churros*: long doughnuts covered with sugar and sometimes filled with chocolate or *cajeta* (goat's milk caramel).
- *Capirotada*: bread pudding Mexican style.
- *Flan*: crème caramel.
- *Buñuelos*: flat fritter sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar.



DRINKS ANYONE?

You should drink bottled water, but in established restaurants you could try any of the *aguas frescas* like *horchata*, *jamaica*, *aguamiel*, *agave juice* or *tamarindo*.

For alcoholic drinks, chilled local beers are good. *Tequila* is of course the most famous Mexican drink, and

traditionally should be drunk straight and sipped slowly. If you prefer, try it as part of a cocktail, like *margarita* or *tequila sunrise*.

Remember that tequila should be savoured in small quantities and drunk responsibly due to its high alcoholic content.

! *If you are going out to clubs, dress appropriately. Men should wear a long-sleeved shirt and shoes. If you wear sneakers or sandals you will be turned away at the door.*

Tourists find *mezcal* interesting, not only because it is a liquor made from agave plant, like tequila, but also because it is served with a worm in the bottle.

🚩 *The name 'mezcal' comes from 'mexcalmetl,' a word from the indigenous language of the Nahuatl people of Central Mexico, which means 'agave plant'. The worm is actually a larvae that lives on the agave plant.*

BARS & CLUBS

If you fancy going out for a drink or to a club, there are many choices to suit all tastes in music and atmosphere.



Ask the locals for a good bar or cantina where you can find deals like "happy hour". Many of them also serve you *botaneros* (tapas) for free with every round of drinks!

In Mexican bars you always get nibbles with your drink, either peanuts, popcorn or tortilla chips served with a variety of freshly made salsas.

Areas of Mexican cities with



Tequila Factory

many bars and restaurants are usually lively and swarming with people on weekends. The majority of the bars play live music and many charge a cover fee.

When going to a club, you usually need to reserve a table and order bottles of drink to share, rather than individual glasses.

🚩 *Mexicans often like to have parties, so if you make a lot of Mexican friends you will probably find yourself being invited to many of them!*

🚩 SOME TYPICAL DRINKS

- *Agua frescas*: refreshing beverages made from a combination of fruits, cereals or seeds blended together with sugar and water.
- *Agua de horchata*: made with cinnamon and rice water.
- *Agua de jamaica*: made with dried hibiscus flowers.
- *Tamarindo*: made with tamarind and sugar.
- *Aguamiel*: sap from the agave plant.
- *Agave juice*: juice from the agave plant.

🚩 TYPICAL ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

- *Tequila*: a spirit made from the juice of the blue agave plant.
- *Tequila sunrise*: a cocktail traditionally made with tequila, crème de cassis, lime juice and soda water.
- *Margarita*: a cocktail made with tequila mixed with triple sec and lime or lemon juice, often served with salt on the glass rim.
- *Mezcal*: a distilled alcoholic beverage made from the agave plant. It has a smoky flavour.



! *It is a custom to haggle in Mexico, so be prepared to do so (knock off up to 20-30% off).*

Shopping in Mexico is a fantastic experience. From designer shops, big shopping malls and many American franchises to crafts stalls and open markets, the big cities have it all.

Tianguis (open markets) and street vendors are a big part of Mexican shopping. You can find almost anything, from imported goods, clothes, shoes, music (many are pirate copies), jewellery, cosmetics and books.

As a student you might like to buy *bueno, bonito y barato* (good, pretty and cheap). Here are some suggestions for places to shop in Mexico:

GROCERIES

Supermarkets are great for doing your grocery shopping. Some of them are *Comercial Mexicana*, *Soriana*, *Aurrera*, *Gigante*, *HEB* and *Hipermart*.

! *If you are shopping for fresh food at your local market, it's best to get there early for the best selection.*

APPLIANCES

For electrical appliances at good prices try *Radio Shack* or *Wal-Mart*, where you can find anything from stationery, food and clothes to appliances and linen.

SOUVENIRS

If you are looking for a gift to bring back home, Mexico has beautiful and excellent quality pottery, leather, silver, wood and textiles. Tequila bottles are always a good present and there is an immense variety of arts and crafts.

For souvenirs, arts and crafts markets are the cheapest and you may find more unique things. Established shops like *¡Ups!* also offer appealing gifts.

STATIONERY

Stationery stores around the universities are the best bet for your study needs, but *Office Depot*, *Office Max* and even supermarkets also have a variety of goods at warehouse prices.

HOSIERY

For bed linen, towels and similar items, *Sam's Club*, *Home Depot* or *Wal-Mart* are good choices.

CLOTHING

If you are looking to buy clothing, shops like *Bershka*, and *C&A* and department stores like *El Palacio de Hierro*, *Sears*, *Suburbia* and *Liverpool* are student favourites. There are also many boutiques and quality stores in shopping malls.

BOOKS & MEDIA

Great places to buy books, CDs and DVDs are *Librería Gandhi*, *La Casa del Libro* and *Fondo de Cultura Económica*.



OPENING HOURS

Generally speaking, Mexican stores offer shoppers extended opening hours and many stores are also open on Sundays.

- *Banks*: normally 9am to 4pm during the week, but some also open on Saturday morning.
- *Supermarkets*: open extended hours seven days a week. Some are open 24/7.
- Shopping malls: open from 10am or 11am and stay open until 8pm or 9pm.
- *Pharmacies*: open from early morning to around 10pm at night. You will always be able to find a pharmacy open 24/7 somewhere in your locality.
- *Convenience Stores*: franchised convenience stores like *Seven-Eleven*, *Circle K*, and *OXXO*, are open extended hours. A few are open 24/7.
- *Markets*: usually start trading at 10am and will start to pack their stalls away from about 4pm.
- *Fast Food Outlets*: open early in the morning for breakfast and stay open late into the night. Most of them close at around 10pm on weeknights and around midnight on weekends.

LANGUAGE

SPANISH

Spanish is the main language spoken in Mexico, but there are many words derived from English, indigenous languages and abbreviations. There are also many slang expressions and colloquialisms. It would be impossible to mention all of them here, but we have prepared a list of some of the most commonly used words and expressions on the following page.

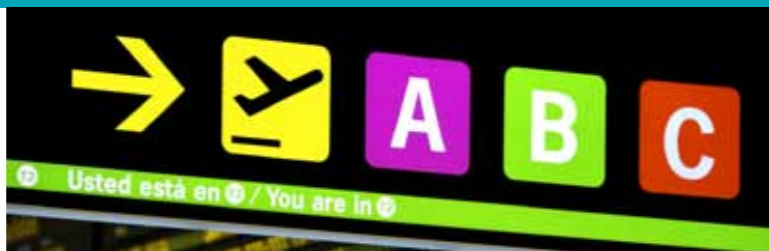
You are also likely to hear many inappropriate *groserías* (rude words) or *malas palabras* (bad words).

! *As a general rule, don't use slang expressions unless the person you are speaking to uses them first.*

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

There are over 100 indigenous languages in Mexico, many of which are considered national languages by the government. The indigenous language currently spoken by the largest number of people is *Nahuatl*.

📍 *13% of the population is of indigenous origin, but only 6% speak an indigenous language. However, this is still equivalent to over 6 million people!*



MEXICAN SLANG & COLLOQUIALISMS

¡Aguas! - Careful!

A toda - Great!

Bolas / Lana - Bucks / pesos

Borrachera - Party with alcoholic drinks

Bronca - Fight / problem

Buena onda - Good vibe / good news / great

Chafa - Low quality / cheap

Chela / cheve - Beer

Chido - Great / cool

Chisme - Gossip

Chocante - Arrogant

Chulo - Attractive person

Con madre - Amazing / too good / that's cool

Crudo - To have a hangover

Cuate - Friend / brother

Cuerda - Intelligent / clever / smart

Cuero - Good looking

Fresa - Yuppie / snob / show-off

Gringo - An American person

Güero - Someone blond and/or fair skinned

Híjole - Oh my gosh!

Lana - Money

La neta - The truth

La raza / La banda - The gang / the friends

Mala onda - Bad vibe / bad news / that's bad

¿Me entiendes? / ¿Me explico? - Do you understand me? / Do I make myself clear?

Mordida - A bribe (with money)

Naco - Someone without class

Nave - Car

No manches - No way / don't mess around

Órale - OK / alright

O sea - In other words

Pisto - Alcoholic drinks

Precopa - Pre-drinks (drinks before going out)

¿Qué onda? - What's up?

¡Qué padre! - Cool!

¿Qué rollo? - What's up?

Supéralo - Get over it

¡Te la bañaste! - Over the top!

Tipo - Like...

Tirar carrilla - To tease lightly

Tranza - To cheat

Vato / chavo - Guy / dude

Vieja / chava - Girl / babe

Vamos a ligar - Let's flirt

Wey - Mate

USEFUL LINKS

If you would like to learn more about travelling in Mexico and Mexican culture & traditions, here are some useful websites:

www.allaboutmexico.com

www.mexconnect.com

www.mexperience.com

www.inside-mexico.com

www.mexicoguru.com

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This booklet has been designed to assist students of The University of Queensland that are planning to complete the study abroad program in Mexico. It contains practical, cultural and language-related information that is relevant to students.