

Mexico Travel Guide

2017 Edition - Emily Firehammer

2018 Edition - JC McCaw

(mccaw@purdue.edu), Luke Smith,

Luke Scheer

Preparation

- Applying for Tec de Monterrey
- After Acceptance
- Living Options
- Banking and ATMs
- VISA Information
- Packing: what to bring & leave behind

On Arrival

- Flying In
- Transportation
- Phone Plan

Daily Life

- Transportation (campus)
- Grocery shopping
- Appropriate attire
- Notes on culture

University Life

- School supplies
- Classes
- Study Spots

Food and Drink

- Meal times
- Mexican Cuisine
- Restaurants/Cafe
- Bars

Spanish Language

- Mexican Accent
- Helpful Phrases

Travel

- Useful tools
- Personal Recommendations
- Beaches
- Festivals

Interning in Mexico

Miscellaneous

Preparation

Applying for Tec de Monterrey

Applications for Tec de Monterrey programs with Purdue can be found on the studyabroad page: https://www.studyabroad.purdue.edu/programs/search_results.cfm.

There are actually three different locations that Purdue students can attend; Monterrey (Main campus), Mexico City, or Querétaro, during the summer, either, or both semesters. These programs are approved by the colleges of agriculture, engineering, health and human sciences, liberal art, science, interdisciplinary, management, and polytechnical. All of these programs are exchange programs, meaning that only the regular tuition to Purdue will need to be paid. Further

information can be found on the Purdue Study abroad page here

<https://www.studyabroad.purdue.edu/programs/programs.cfm>.

Most fall applications are due March 1st and spring applications are due September 15th. After applying to the Purdue study abroad program the study abroad office will contact the applicant with the Tec de Monterrey application. The application is online and the student will receive an acceptance or rejection email.

After Acceptance

After being accepted to Tec de Monterrey, they will send an email with instructions on how to set up an account. This account will give access to the potential classes given for the semester. Tec requires a list to be sent in by every exchange student of their top six picks for classes. Tec will review the classes chosen and set as many as they can given there are no conflicts, and, in the case that they are, place the student in the class they ranked higher on their list. WHEN ARRIVING TO TEC THEY WILL GIVE YOU A COMPLETED SCHEDULE THAT CANNOT BE MODIFIED. For this reason, take the list and its ranking seriously.

Living Options

There are essentially three options for living: apartments, student housing on campus, or living with a host family. The student needs to search for apartments on their own, though Tec may provide some insight after acceptance. In addition, the Tec de Monterrey Facebook page can be helpful in asking other students where to live or if anyone has a sublease open. Tec offers student housing on campus, with 80 single or double room, separating males and females by floors. The application to live in one of these dorms is due very early after acceptance. Finally, there is a host family program set up by the university*. If the student decides to opt into this program Tec will send a

questionnaire to match them with the best family possible. Rent is about \$240 every month and is paid directly to Tec. Tec will put the student in contact with their host family before the student leaves for Mexico. Families are put through training before hosting the laundry, food, internet, and a private room. Housing should be arranged before leaving the United States.

*Personal Note: Having stayed with a host family I had a great experience and would recommend this option. Prices are comparable for all three options (\$4,500-\$4,700 or ~\$236-\$246 USD per month) but there is a better opportunity to live in the Mexican culture and speak Spanish.

Banking and ATMs

As with any trip the student traveling should inform their bank that they will be abroad. Most ATMs accept usual American credit or debit cards from VISA, MasterCard, etc. The recommended option for getting cash is to use your American debit card at an ATM. There will be a small fee for each ATM transaction, but it will be cheaper than exchanging or transferring money by other options.

Only students with a VISA can open a banking account in Mexico. They will need the following documents to do so: valid passport or ID, residential proof, and the FM2, FM3, or FMM VISA. Some popular banks include CitiBanamex, Banco Santander, BBVA Bancomer, and more. Ask Tec about their student credit card. The official currency of Mexico is the peso. Currently the conversion rate is 19 pesos to \$1 USD. You should check this every once in a while as it has been fluctuating between 18-20 pesos per dollar. The symbol for the peso is \$, the same as the USD, so don't be alarmed if you are charged \$25 for a coffee or \$600 for a long distance bus trip.

VISA Information

For just one semester in Mexico a VISA is not necessary. If the student plans to stay more than 6 months they will need to apply for a VISA. More information on this can be found at the following website:

<https://www.mexperience.com/lifestyle/mexico-essentials/mexico-entry-requirements/>

Packing: What to Take or Leave Behind

Basics: The following are a list of general items that are a good idea to take, regardless of which city the student is traveling to:

Clothing

Underwear (1-2 weeks worth)

Socks (1-2 weeks worth)

Jeans

Shirts (explained further in climate portion)

2 work-out outfits

Swimsuit

2 pairs of tennis shoes, 1 pair of nice shoes

2 formal outfits

Pajamas

2 sweatshirts

Flip Flops/Water-shoes (preferable for wet hiking situations)

Toiletries

Shampoo/conditioner

Toothbrush/toothpaste

Soap

Deodorant (note: most Mexican deodorants are liquid or spray, not stick)

Feminine Products (note: tampons are not as widely used in Mexico, so packs are smaller and more expensive)

Brush/Comb

Razors/Shaving materials

Nail clippers

Contact lenses and solutions

Some over the counter medicines (ie. Ibuprofen, allergy medicine, TUMS, Pepto-Bismol)

Tissues/Toilet Paper

Miscellaneous

Important documents (Passport, VISA [if applicable], itinerary, Purdue travel insurance, ID)

Wallet/Purse

Sunglasses/extra glasses/contacts

Camera w/ charger or extra batteries

Laptop and charger

Outlet adaptor (most outlets are compatible with US electronics but an incompatible one may be encountered)

Cellphone (unlocked if possible)

MP3 player/iPod

Backpack

Water bottle

Spare towel (or more depending on living situation)

Sunscreen (High SPFs are not available or more expensive so be aware of how quickly you burn. Sun is strong there)

Hats

Travel journal (great for keeping memories, addresses, or unfamiliar Spanish words)

Climates:

Querétaro:

Rainy season is from June to Mid September. During the rest of the year it is fairly dry and unlikely to rain. From November to February nights drop to temperatures of ~40 F but will heat up during the day. For this time layers are necessary. Shorts are not popularly worn until the summer months, but temperatures from March to August can reach well into the 80 F. Expect lots of Sun.

Mexico DF:

Referred to just as "Mexico" by locals the climate here is usually cloudy and cold. Throughout the year highs usually go to the 70 F or 80 F and lows to the 40 F to 50 F. June to September are the rainy seasons while May and October are moderately rainy.

Monterrey:

From May to early September temperatures go well into the 90 F. November to February are the colder months but only drop into the mid 40 F. Monterrey is the sunniest of all of these cities, so sunscreen and hats are highly suggested.

On Arrival

Flying In

There is a large airport in Mexico City, MEX, a smaller airport in Querétaro, and an airport in Monterrey, MTY. Keep in mind pricing and the fact that there is a wide bus system that travels between these cities that may make the visit cheaper or faster.

Flying during the trip from Mexican city to city is less common and often buses are the cheaper, easier route.

Transportation

Buses are the most popular form of transportation, whether within the city or traveling from city to city. Buses or camiónes within the city cost only \$6.5 pesos, or ~ 35¢ USD. There is a discount card for students that you can apply for here: <http://redq.gob.mx/>. On the outskirts of town there is a central bus station which travels to many different cities. There are three different bus (autobus) companies that leave Querétaro: Primera Plus (<https://www.primeraplus.com.mx/>), Turistar/ETN (<https://etn.com.mx/>), and Autobuses Futura (<https://futura.com.mx/>). Tickets can be bought online on the websites or at the terminal center. Taxis are a safe travel option too. Some safe taxi phone numbers, also posted around Tec, are 2432611 2611450. The applications Uber and Cabify are cheap, popular options in Mexico as well. Although cheaply available, bikes are not commonly used in the city as there are no bike lanes and cars tend to be fast and a bit reckless. There are a number of walking bridges across the city and it may be possible to walk to Campus.

Phone Plans

Phones or phone chips can be bought in phone stores or OXXOs, a CVS equivalent located everywhere in Mexico. SIM cards can be purchased and reloaded with data/minutes at any OXXO. Most SIM cards come preloaded with some data, and you can reload them by giving your Mexican phone number and how much money you want loaded to the clerk at OXXO. There is wifi located on campus and in most cafés. Whatsapp is the most used mode of communication so it is highly recommended that you download the application and create a free account. Whatsapp sends off the internet so when connected to wifi messages are free. Many phone plans include a specific WhatsApp data block (many include unlimited WhatsApp and Facebook use). The US zip code is (+001) – your number, and the Mexican zip code is (+52) - their number. The two biggest providers

NOTE: JC McCaw (mccaw@purdue.edu) by way of a long story has an unused mexican smartphone and 5 Telcel sim cards. If you're interested, send him an email.

Orientation

There are generally two days of orientation: one solely for international students and Hi-Tec. The first day is about settling in, learning the rules of the university, and some fun cultural learning. You will meet the administrators in study abroad and the lawyer available to students, should they need him. You can sign up for programs that match you with a Mexican student as your brother/sister. The second day is Hi-Tec a day of fun competition. Incoming Mexican students are invited to join Hi-Tec and this give you the opportunity to get to know some. In general, Hi-Tec is very much like BGR, but only two days long.

Daily Life

Transportation (Querétaro campus)

The entirety of campus is fenced off and a student ID is necessary to swipe in and enter in one of the three entrances. Select buildings also require students to swipe in or show their ID card to a security guard on duty. For this reason it is suggested that you do not lose your ID. In the case that you do you can receive a new one in building 7, the building for student help. On campus there exists a trolley that stops at a couple of places on campus and can help travel fast to further away buildings. In addition, there are unlocked Tec bicycles that can be used and placed at any bike rack on campus. A map of the Querétaro branch of Tec de Monterrey has been attached for convenience.

Getting To and From Campus

Queretaro recently launched a city-wide bicycle service that is fairly easy to sign up for and runs for about \$18/year, as of Summer 2018. The bikes are good quality, and the stations are absolutely everywhere. It's called QROBici (<https://qrobici.com.mx/>) and this is cheaper and faster than the bus if school is too far to walk every day.

The city buses are a good method of transportation, but vary widely depending on the route. They range from nicer than the buses in the US to the stereotypical, chicken-in-a-crate buses in rural areas around Queretaro. However, they are very affordable, and generally fast and reliable especially near the city center and around Tec's campus. You'll need to get a bus card to use them, however -- these cards can be purchased at some corner stores, and all can be refilled at Oxxo.

Grocery shopping

Similar to the US, Mexico has many large supermarkets where one can grocery shop. Large bags cannot be brought into these facilities and must either be stored in a locker (available at some locations) or left at home. In addition, drinks and other personal items may receive a sticker at the door to indicate this was a good brought in and one that is not being stolen. In centro there are many different small shops which sell candies and other goods. Often there are street vendors that one can buy prepared food from, candies, or fruits. Medicine can be purchased at pharmacies and will require the help of the pharmacist. In addition, small, high priced items are often locked up and help is needed to check out these items.

Appropriate attire

Fashion in Mexico is fairly similar to the States. It is important to dress up formally for presentations in class or other important meetings. The only big difference in Mexican

fashion and American fashion is in shorts. Shorts are not common, until the summer months, and very short “booty” shorts are frowned upon. It will not be abnormal if during your stay you only ever see your friends in jeans and pants.

Notes on culture

If there is one word to describe a key ideal of Mexican culture it is kindness. You will quickly find that nearly everyone you meet is very kind and very glad to meet you. However, you must return this kindness. Females greet with a kiss on the cheek to other females or to males. Males will greet each other with handshakes or hugs. Friends will always take time to give a full greeting, even if they're busily headed somewhere. When arriving to a party individual greet everyone, and introduce yourself if you need to. Similarly, when leaving be sure to say goodbye to everyone.

University Life

School supplies

Tec de Monterrey recommends that you supply your own computer, though there are desktop computers available in the library. Laptops can also be checked out at the library. Some classes will require that you bring your computer to class, while others will not permit it. Most classes do not require you to buy any books and will instead give you all materials necessary to understand the course. Books are usually still available in the library.

Classes

As mentioned in the application portion, you will choose your classes before going to Tec. Be sure to work closely with the study abroad office and councilors to get credit for your classes. Classes are given in both Spanish and English*, although a lot of classes are only available in ONE of the two languages. Classes are much smaller than Purdue classes and generally have a maximum of about thirty students. This means the professors get to know you on a much closer level. You will be expected to go to the board to solve problems and actively participate in most classes. Attendance and timeliness are important. Depending on how many credits a class is you may have a certain number of absences before you automatically fail the class (usually three weeks' worth of class), and a certain number of tardies add up to count as an absence. Classes tend to focus strongly on teamwork and hands on projects. Many engineering classes will have you do group homeworks, projects, or even quizzes. There are a number of labs and work spaces available for Tec related projects that you are likely to make use of. In addition to academic classes Tec provides clubs and sports as classes. For example, they provide classes like boxing, Krav Maga, Mexican Folk Dancing,

Photography, Salsa Dancing, and many, many more. These classes you sign up for during orientation and there is no limit to how many you may take.

*Note from personal experience: Don't feel bad taking courses given in English. My engineering classes were entirely other Mexican students and so the teachers would often flip between Spanish and English, provided that I was comfortable with it. This means you can still learn the material while getting Spanish exposure.

Study Spots

The library is a good study spot and open to students with their ID cards. In addition, tables are set up around campus outside and can be lovely to study at on a sunny day. There are cafés and restaurants near campus, and most provide wifi service, provided that you purchase something.

Food and Drink

Meal times

Unlike in the States the most important meal of the day in Mexico is lunch, or “comida”. It is eaten around 2-3pm, usually with the family, and is the largest meal of the day. During this time of day it is the hardest to get a hold of people as they may be commuting home for lunch, eating, or even taking a siesta. Lunch is not the only meal of the day though. It is still important in Mexican culture to eat all three meals of the day, with dinner being the least important, sometimes as small as just a quesadilla.

Mexican Cuisine

If there is one word to describe Mexican food it is spicy (picante). Mexicans love their spice and you will either agree or learn to agree. Popular foods are tacos (though NEVER hard shell), quesadillas, mole (a spicy chocolate based sauce that is matched with meat), elotes (corn coated in mayonnaise with lime, cheese, and chile), enchiladas, nopales (cactus), among other delicious treats. In addition to their spice, Mexicans love limes and salsa, commonly added to all foods ranging from meats, to soups, or even to fruits. You will likely be offered agua frescas at some point. This is more of a juice than water. They can be any combination of fruit, though the most common types are lime, tamarind (a brown fruit), jamaica (a sort of hibiscus tea considered good for digestion), and horchata (a white cinnamon flavored drink). If you want plain water you will have to ask for ‘agua sola’ and ‘agua mineral’ gives you carbonated water.

Restaurants/Cafés

As in the States you are expected to pay a tip of 10-15% when at a restaurant or café. It is common to spend hours at restaurants or cafés talking before and after eating. This practice is called “sobre mesa”, and it is almost considered rude to quickly leave after eating without making small talk. When you are ready for the check you can ask the waiter if they make eye contact with you, or make a scribbling motion in the air.

If you are a coffee drinker, expect not to find any coffee shops open before around 9:30AM. At home, most mexican families have a jar of instant coffee, and this is the most commonly drunk coffee.

Bars

There are a number of bars and dancing clubs in Querétaro. One of the most popular is called Pepe el Toro. One dance club I can personally recommend is Barrabana, which has live bands come in to play. Bar hopping is common in Querétaro but most local students will agree that party life is in a nearby city, San Miguel.

Drinks to try:

-Tequila (made from the blue agave plant. cheap and much better quality than those in the states. drunk with grapefruit juice, carbonated water, or as a shot with salt and lime)

- Michelada (very popular drink. beer mixed with lime, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, Tabasco, and optional Clamato [clam + tomato] juice)
- Pulque (fermented sap of the agave plant. Low in alcohol content.)
- Mezcal (made from any agave plant. sort of an artisanal and stronger version of tequila. Drunk straight accompanied with orange slices and chile powder.)

Spanish Language

Mexican accent

The Mexican accent is one of the easiest to understand. Mexicans announce more than most other latino cultures. They have very hard, rolling R's and tend to have a rhythm to the way they speak. That being said, you will likely encounter students from other Spanish speaking countries during your time at Tec. I encourage you to listen to the way they speak and see if you can tell their nationality.

Helpful Phrases or Slang

"Discúlpame"	Excuse me.
"Puede ayudarme?"	Can you help me?
"Entre"	Come in
"La cuenta por favor"	The check please
"Cuanto cuesta..."	How much does ____ cost?
"Has probado...?"	Have you tried...?
"Perdón. Donde esta el edificio numero..."	Sorry. Where is building number...?
"Estar pedo"	To be drunk
"Estar crudo"	To be hungover
"Mande"	Tell me/Repeat that (for if you didn't hear something that was said)
"No hay pedo"	No problem (Literally: there isn't a fart)
"Topes"	Speed bumps
"Guey"	Dude
"Putra madre"	(Either) Super cool, (or) vulgar exclamation
"órale"	Come on
"Qué onda?"	What's up? (Literally: what wave)
"Qué padre!"	Cool!
"Aguas!"	Watch out! (Literally: Waters)
"No mames!"	No way (very vulgar)
"No manches"	A slightly cleaner version of "no mames"

Travel

Useful tools

As mentioned before the applications Uber and Cabify can be used to help travel from place to place. Tec plans, usually, 2-3 trips for international students, and you can choose to buy a ticket for one, all, or none of these trips. In addition, there are a number of travel agencies that will encourage you to join their planned trips. Usually they promote one or two free trips to encourage you to return.

NOTE: the travel agencies (Integraté, etc) will often offer 'history' themed tours -- generally, all of their trips are more party themed. Still fun, but the Tec trips will generally be more like a tour.

Personal Recommended Must See Places

Day trips (Can easily be traveled to and back in a day, more days may be encouraged)

San Miguel de Allende

Bernal (10/10 recommend going with a climbing guide and summiting. Also, in the square there are two places to get a pan dulce that I've only found there - they call it pan de queso, but it's fairly specific and not what we would call cheesy bread. There's two places near the main square, both are good. Try to go when it's fresh out of the oven.)

Guanajuato

Tequisquiapan (wineries, puebleando)

Weekend or longer trips (Longer travel time)

Mexico DF (you could spend a few weekends here, there's a lot to see. If you only have one weekend, focus on Coyoacan and the city center.)

Puebla

Leon

Huasteca Potosina

Valladolid (best access to cheap cenotes that isn't Cancun, a lot more cool local stuff than Cancun)

Guadalajara (great music scene, especially in the summer)

Oaxaca (far, but worth it)

Merida (far, but worth it)

Beaches

There's many beaches in Mexico. Depending on the place you decide to go you'll be closer to other beaches, but these are the popular ones:

Acapulco

Puerto Escondido

Huatulco

Cancún

Puerto Vallarta

Sayulita

Tulum

Isla Mujeres

Myto (off the beaten path, very rural, but mostly untouched beach.)

Festivals

- There's around 3 days off per semester. They become an extended weekend that will allow traveling to places that are further away
- "Semana Santa" is the week of Easter and school will be off during this time.
- Independence Day (16 sep) – Is celebrated both the 15th and 16th of September. Usually a big party on the 15th to rest on the 16th, the national holiday and day off.
- Día de Muertos (Nov 2) – Usually just a festive day off. Celebrated with 'altares', 'pan de muerto' and hot chocolate.
- La Feria de San Marcos is one of the largest festivals on earth, and is held in Aguascalientes in Spring. This is a combination bull fighting/cock fighting/music/dance/tequila/banda festival, and is really hard to describe. This is something that you would only want to go to if you are extremely confident in your spanish or have someone local to go with, if not both. In terms of the nightly parties in the squares during the festival, it's like Mardi Gras in New Orleans but attended by 8x as many people, none of them foreigners.

Interning in Mexico

-Finding an internship independently is difficult. Online applications are usually filtered out quickly because you are an international student.

-Thus far, the most success has been found with the GEARE staff and online job placements, such as IAESTE. However, there is a hefty cost with these programs.

-Try and network with professors, connections in the US, and individuals in Mexico. This is your best option at finding a decent internship.

-There is a chance that you may not be paid for your internship, but there are scholarships that Purdue offers for these situations. Also, you can ask your employer, and there is a chance that they may be able to help you.

-The experience of interning in Mexico depends on the job:

-Research:

-Hours are flexible depending on what your supervisor expects

-Students and doctors generally have a good level of English. They will want to practice English with you.

-Most likely, you will be unpaid.

-Scholarship opportunities with CIDESI (research center in Queretaro)

-Unique opportunities available. Ask your professors to find out more.

-Industry:

-Expect to use Spanish. Many of the associates on the floor will have minimal English skills.

-Be social and get to know employees. They are friendly and will ask you to practice English with them.

-Most likely paid but not a lot. Hours depend on the agreement. Overtime is not common.

-The industry life is considered difficult in Mexico. Standards are high for production, and there is not a lot of money involved.

-Good opportunities with big companies. In Queretaro, there is GE, ZF, Eaton, P&G, and more.

General Advice: Be cautious of the location of where the job is. Some locations in Mexico are not recommended. Queretaro is a great location for industry. Chances are that you will remain in Queretaro. Do your research.

Misc.

- Do not drink the tap water. Most houses have large jugs of drinkable water stored in the kitchen, or they have a water filter installed. However, tap is clean enough that you can use it to brush your teeth.

- Listed party start times are not the time you should show up. Wait for an hour or two, as this is usually the time the host is prepping for the party.
- Stores and restaurants shut down very early in comparison to in the States.
- If you are out at night past 11 pm do not be surprised if the roads are empty.
- You can check out materials from the library but check outs only last a week.
- Be very proactive about making Mexican friends. They see you exactly how many Purdue students (and maybe you, and sometimes me) see international students; it's a lot of effort to communicate with you, you seem like you fit a stereotype, and at the end of the day, they don't want to waste time and energy on you. Think about when you've had international students in your classes -- did you approach them? Ask their name, where they're from, if they want to hang out sometime? Probs nah. Be proactive.
- GPS >> Paper Maps, and buy your data to fit this. Routes and time estimates given by GPS are accurate. The streets of Queretaro are mostly labeled, except when you need it most. Maps often don't have insignificant streets on them, and since we aren't familiar with what a significant or insignificant street looks like in Mexico, you'll probably want to use GPS more often than not.
- That being said, wander, a lot -- Queretaro is really a pretty town, with a lot of interesting neighborhoods. If you wander into the right one, you'll find bustling street markets and window-sized pozole shops. Any dangerous part of Queretaro is over an hour and a half walk from the Centro, so you'll probably be fine. If you're worried, take a friend or just go during the day.
- The students at Tec are mainly from well-to-do families. Take this into consideration, and explore the less-privileged parts of Mexico. Great places to start that are very open to tourists are Guanajuato, Puebla, and most of Oaxaca.
- Buy your books BEFORE you leave if you can, and take them with you in your carry-on. This is going to suck so much you'll be wondering why you did it. That is, until you have to order textbooks without Amazon Prime. Most books have a pdf available online, but I had one with a required textbook, that wasn't carried by any bookstore in Queretaro, and had \$80 in non-expedited shipping costs. The book itself cost \$76.99.



- | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Ingeniería Civil | 9 Gimnasio - Auditorio | A Alberca |
| 2 Centro de Ingeniería y Electrónica (CIE) | 10 Centro de Medios | B Ciber Plaza |
| 3 Ingenierías | 11 PrepaTec | C Cafetería Central |
| 4 Negocios y Humanidades | 12 Residencias | D Cafetería Prepa |
| 5 Escuela de Ingeniería en Alimentos, Biotecnología y Agronomía (ESI/ABA) | 13 Centro de Diseño, Innovación y Creación Industrial (DICI) | E Plaza Borregos Tec
* Centro de Atención y Admisiones |
| 6 Biblioteca | 14 Escuela de Diseño y Arquitectura (EDA) | F Instalaciones Deportivas |
| 7 Edificio Administrativo
Becas - Tesorería - Atención a Alumnos | 15 Parque Tecnológico | |
| 8 Salón de Congresos | 16 Centro de Innovación en Manufactura Avanzada (CIMA) | |