



EXCHANGE REPORT

Name

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Year and semester for
exchange
2022, Fall semester

Exchange university
Instituto Politecnico Nacional

Degree programme

Master Program in Engineering Physics

Spicy food, waterfalls, jungles and volcanoes. An exchange semester in a metropolis.

Before departure

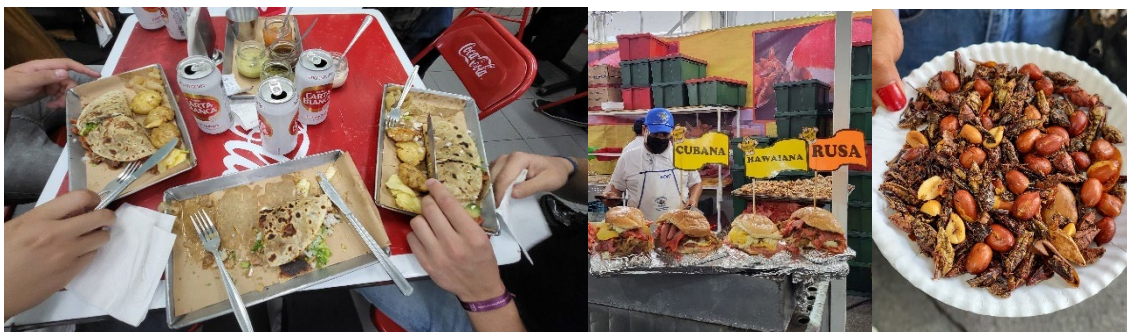
I knew I wanted to do an exchange experience, and Latin America had always fascinated me, as it is a place where you arrive as a foreigner, but people are so open and welcoming that you end up feeling at home, as I didn't think could happen in the more "popular" exchange places such as the US, East Asia or most of Europe.

I was undecided between various choices, namely Mexico, Argentina and Chile. In the end, I decided to opt for Mexico because it gave me the feeling of being a country where you can find anything you want, may that be incredible history and culture with its ancient Mayan and Aztec ruins, virgin and warm ocean beaches, mountains to climb and incredible food. I was not disappointed about any of it!

Upon arrival

I arrived some days before the beginning of the program, so I had the time to get to know my new flatmate, another Italian exchange student, and explore the city together and eat lots of tasty, spicy tacos and quesadillas.

On the first day we were directly invited by some locals to join them at the "Feria de la torta", a food fair where you could find so many delicious tortas, a typical Mexican sandwich. There I also tried Mezcal, a liquor very similar to Tequila, and the *chapulines*, dried crunchy crickets.



At the beginning of the program we were welcomed by "buddies" and had a welcoming week where we had activities, tours and games at the campus.

Financials

From KTH I only received a one-time scholarship of 8000kr, which I mainly used to cover the flight.

For the rest, Mexico is most definitely cheaper than Sweden. However, Mexico City can be expensive as Europe at times.

In order to save money, I would recommend to not go to supermarkets, as they are not so cheap, but rather to go to street markets to buy fruits, vegetables and meat (you'll have the best mangoes of your life there).

Accommodation

Unfortunately, the university did not provide accommodation. I was lucky enough to get in contact with some other exchange students at IPN and we managed to get a place together.

I would recommend moving either near the university area, for example Colonia Lindavista, as it is incredibly cheap (between 1000 to 3000kr for a room), or if you want to be near the nightlife and "nice parts" of town, I would recommend colonia Roma or Condesa, even though they tend to have European prices (easily >4000kr for a room).

Also, I would recommend not renting a place before arriving, as it might be a scam. I would recommend arriving and getting a hotel/hostel/Airbnb for some days, maybe a week, and start with the searching process.

University and studies

The university is one of the biggest in Latin America. It has many campuses all over Mexico, a dozen in Mexico City. The main campus, Zacatenco, where I was studying, is in the north of the city, in the Colonia Lindavista. It is not very close to the center, however it's a lovely and safe residential area, where you can even find the famous Basilica de Guadalupe.

The campus is huge, it has hundreds of buildings, American football fields, swimming pools, cycling tracks, even a planetarium! A funny note: the mascot of the university is the Burro Blanco (the white donkey), and for that reason we had a farm of white donkeys inside of the campus.



Courses

I fortunately was at a point of my master where I was already done with all the mandatory courses, so I only went for courses of subjects I was interested in.

It was a bit complicated to start with my courses as most courses I had chosen were either outdated, or had the same schedule, or just in uncomfortable times (one of my preliminarily chosen courses was even at 9pm!).

By the way, this is a thing you have to consider about university in Mexico, your courses could literally go from 7am to 10pm, so choose carefully.

In the end I managed to create a schedule with 4 courses:

- Relatividad Especial
- Laboratorio de instrumentación y mediciones nucleares
- Deep Learning
- Protección Radiológica

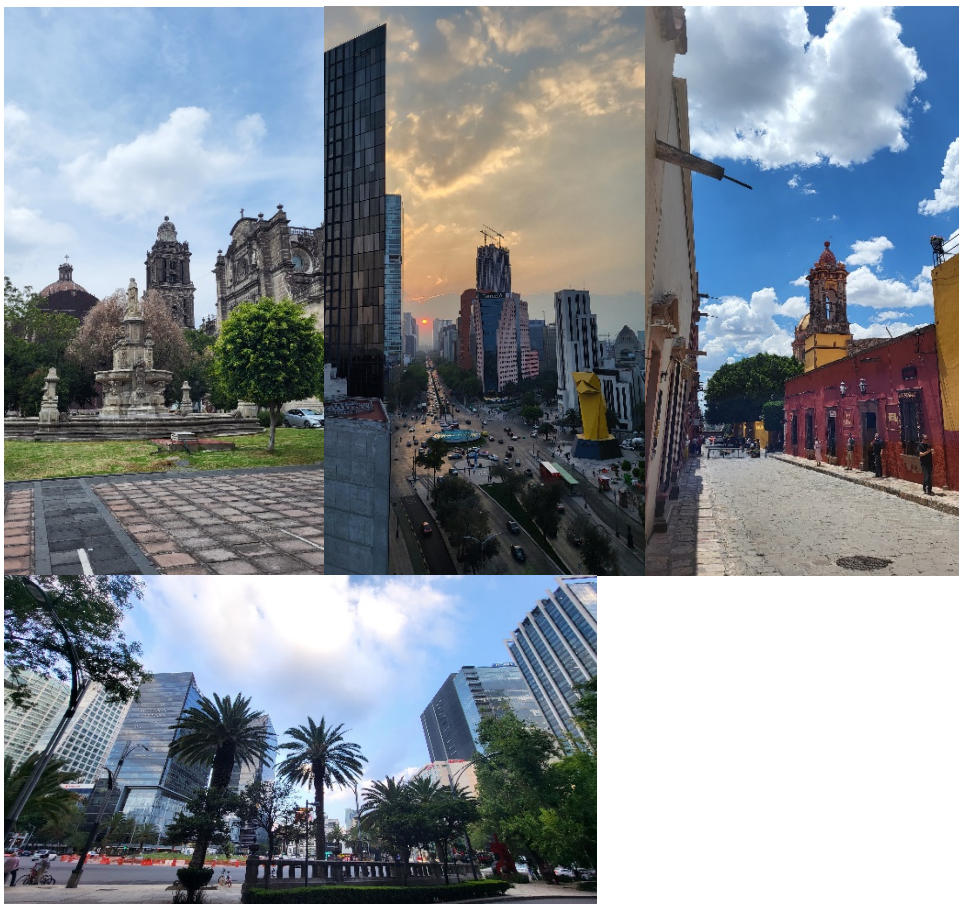
I would say that the intensity and difficulty of the courses are very similar to the ones at KTH, at least in my department (Physics and Mathematics), but some courses were more chill. Though, I have heard from exchange students in other departments that their courses were much easier than the ones from their home university, so it really depends from your department or professor.

A couple of differences from KTH are that there's mandatory attendance to classes (though most of my professors were not strict at all with attendance), and that there are mandatory homework to send in every week.

City and country

Wow, where can I even begin ... Mexico City is the most incredible city ever. It is a huge city with history, art, skyscrapers, nightlife, food, anything you want!

Differently from what you may have heard, it is not an unsafe city. You can wander around *most* of the city by walk with no issue at all. There are of course dangerous areas, but as long as you avoid them you are completely safe.



There are many neighbourhoods where you can even walk around in the night with no problem (the neighbourhoods where the restaurants and clubs are). I would say those neighbourhoods have the same safety standards as Europe.

The country is amazing. I managed to visit most of the country during my time there (though I stayed one month longer after the end of classes). I visited the beautiful beaches of Oaxaca, climbed over the vulcano of the Nevado de Toluca, visited the beautiful towns of Pátzcuaro during Día de los muertos, hijes through jungles and waterfalls and saw Mayan ruins in Chiapas, tasted purest tequila from agave fields in Jalisco and so much more. I loved every moment of it!





Leisure and social activities

The university offered so many activities for their students: most sports could be practiced, as well as dance, music, photography and more!

I personally enrolled in the basketball team of the university, and we competed in some tournaments around Mexico City, and even managed to win a small city tournament!

One thing that I also enjoyed a lot was the contact with local students. I hear from many exchange students in other countries that they mostly hang out with other exchange students. For me it was quite the opposite: most of my friends were actually Mexican! This was incredible for me because I was effectively part of the Mexican culture and also had friends from different "social classes" (unfortunately still a thing in Mexico as inequality is big), so I could get real insights into the Mexican society.

If you are interested in doing an exchange in IPN, Mexico City or Mexico in general, feel free to text or contact me at rubenpozzi97@gmail.com, I would be more than happy to help you and to give you advice :-)