

I spent my exchange semester in the Universidad Autonoma de Estado de Mexico that is situated in Toluca, Mexico. Toluca is the capital of the region that is called Estado de Mexico in the central part of the country. The way from Toluca to the capital of the country - Mexico City - is near 40 minutes by car.

Preparation

My preparation for the exchange semester started in Frankfurt several months before my trip. It was important to choose subjects that I will have and to find the place to live. During the semester I had subjects from the first year of Master and also the third. Besides that, I had to make my own research. To find the place to live was not that easy because of language difficulties and the absence of dormitories. University provided the list of possible places to stay but almost none of them had the email and the only possibility to contact was to call. I had to call by Skype and with the help of my Spanish speaking friends. I would recommend to search for the place near the university because public transport doesn't work good. It is much easier to search for accommodation when you are already in the city because you understand better areas and get to know people who can provide different opportunities.

Exchange semester

1. University

University in Mexico is much bigger than in Frankfurt and not all the faculties situate in the same campus. Depending on the faculty the building can be in the central part of the city or in the main university campus that is a bit further from the centre of Toluca. All the classes in my Master program were in Spanish. I didn't learn much Spanish before going to Mexico and first days were a bit difficult. But I should say that most of the professors are very helpful and let me to do some tasks in English. But unfortunately not all of them speak English. I can say that if you want to learn fast the language it is a great experience to go for exchange semester and have all classes in that language. It is a big challenge but gives a result. At the end of semester, I was able to pass all exams in Spanish. Besides classes in my Master program I was visiting Spanish classes in one of the language centers of the university. University has 2 language schools. At the beginning it was difficult to find the Spanish class because most of exchange students are from Spanish speaking countries and no one needed

classes as me. But at the end language centre CILC opened a class just for two students.

Speaking about the Master program by itself, the educational system is very different from university in Frankfurt. My Master program in Frankfurt focused on the city planning and in Mexico it was more about sustainable development. I think it is an interesting experience to participate in the program with different focus. Also I have to say that the difference of educational system can be also noticed in the number of homework. In Frankfurt we have the final project and working on it during the semester and in Mexico there are different tasks every week (many essays and readings). Moreover, it is very important to present in all classes because attendance is the part of the final mark.

2. City

When you arrive to Latin America in general you notice from the first step that it is absolutely different from Europe world. Toluca is a big city for Mexico and very industrial. There are not so many interesting attractions but has very beautiful typical for Mexico centre and botanical garden Cosmovitral. The main problem of the city is insecurity. For European citizens it can be shocking but you can't walk there in the evening, better not to take out your phone and always be aware of people walking near you. The main rule is to be careful and not to provoke dangerous situations. The main advantage of the city that it is in the central part of the country and very near to many beautiful and historically important Mexican cities. Also near Toluca is situated Nevado de Toluca. It's a former volcano that nowadays is a very fascinating natural park. Life in Toluca is not expensive. You can find cheap food and accommodation. You have to be ready that the food is mostly Mexican and all the cafeterias has just typical food. In my opinion it is very tasty and at the same time very unhealthy.

I think that exchange semester was the most amazing experience in my life. I learnt a lot about Mexican culture, met many friends, had an opportunity to travel. I was lucky and during semester were many typical Mexican holidays such as Day of Dead and the Independence Day, so I had the chance to be a part of the big celebration. I would for sure recommend the Universidad Autonoma de Estado de Mexico and Mexico en general for the exchange semester for other students.