

UNIVERSIDAD DE LAS AMÉRICAS PUEBLA

In the following I will lay out why I think the UDLAP is the best choice to make when it comes to studying one semester in Latin America. First off: My study field at the Viadrina (Frankfurt Oder) is International Business Administration.



PREPARATION

What do you need to get started? Have a decent knowledge of Spanish, B1 would be recommendable and is also required from Viadrina at least at date of departure. Write a little motivation letter for the International Office in Frankfurt. Don't worry, it can be in English or German. Mention why you are passionate about going there and give context why this university is optimal for you. Once you are accepted by our university, some bureaucracy begins.

Get a Travel Insurance: if you happen to be member of Techniker KK make a deal with Envivas, which is the cheapest one because they have a contract. UDLAP wants to know your blood group, I just donated blood in the Oderturm, which also gives you a 20€ voucher.

Choose your courses: this will be approx. one month before the semester starts (either mid-august or start of January) and you will get an email on your Viadrina account as well as on the UDLAP email. I had the fortunate starting position of only having to pass one class in one specification. If you haven't had started with your specifications, you could easily take classes in Management Process and Finance but not so much in Taxation and European Economics. If you are like me, you can also go to another faculty, namely Engineering and take classes of the specification "Information & Operation Management". To be honest, this course (web applications in distributed environments) was hard and not only because it was entirely held in Spanish. But I passed and learned heaps. If you have the freedom of choosing whatever courses you like, go ahead and DO THAT. It was the best decision to go for something really outside the box because I got to know so many interesting people and was forced to step out of my comfort zone (I took improvising theatre in Spanish).

There are all different kinds of cool courses e.g. photography, music, dancing and if you are a nerd also chemical biology and computer science. Consider that students there pay over 1000€ for a course! Take advantage of this. If you decide to go for 0815 marketing courses, that's fine too, easy grades.

Take at least one Spanish language course. And if you don't want to write the Unicert II Exam (like me), take three courses held in Spanish.

You don't need a visa, a little form will be handed to you in the airplane. Make sure to have your letter of acceptance (from UDLAP) ready when you land.

Bafög: apply as soon as possible for Auslandsbafög. The respective office is in Bremen. You will receive more money than usual because of included flight cost compensation. Also, already apply for the Bafög for the following semester.

Beforehand I asked if somebody from the buddy program (Amigos Internacionales) could pick me up at the Airport in Mexico, but they rejected my request and told me which bus line to take. Which was fine, you can totally do that without any stress (luxury shuttle bus from the airport with WIFI and AC). What I generally suggest for commuting between Puebla and Mexico City is using BlaBlaCar. It is half the price and takes half the time. Safe, too.

GETTING STARTED

I came in the middle of the introduction week, but I would rather come a little earlier (If you can, I had an important festival the weekend before). The introduction week is good to get to know some people and having your first fiestas.

There are an abundance of flats and houses and everybody is looking for roomies. Everything is at max a 15-minute walk from the campus. Look in the facebook groups "Amigos Internacionales" and "UDLAP Internationals". Don't take the accommodations on the campus. They are good for one thing: being surrounded by people all day. Other than that, you have absurd rules and just fun brakes on every aspect. For your apartment you shouldn't pay more than 4500\$ which is around 220€.



Now it comes to the crispy part: "studying". I had the best time "studying" at UDLAP. Not only do you have the most beautiful campus ever with a nice library, good food, eight pianos, five football fields, three tennis courts, two gyms and one swimming pool, you also enjoy the access to the newest technology and software for free, have supreme security and overall the most pleasant "studying" environment ever.

You must attend the classes, it feels more like in a school also due to only 25-30 students per class. There is homework, which is not hard but sometimes volume-wise overwhelming. During the semester, you usually write four partial exams. The level is, subjectively speaking lower than in Germany. You have knowledgeable and experienced teachers. I got the feeling that everything was more practice-oriented, there were multiple group works among the classes, case studies and real projects. I liked that a lot because it gave more meaning to the subject. For example: in one class I took, event management, simultaneously with the theory, we worked on a real event which we held at the end of the semester. For this event we had to raise money, organize food and beverage and plan the whole event by ourselves. This was challenging but worth it and fun, because it turned out to be a huge success. We planned one afternoon for the students of a high school which is supported by UDLAP.



ONE DAY AT UDLAP

After you made the five-minute walk to the campus, you go to your class which usually lasts one hour. Then you have a coffee with some friends at Punta Cielo, which is a neat little café from which you enjoy the view of the fountain on the main square. Maybe you go work a little bit in the library, do some homework or revise your Spanish vocabulary. Now it's time for lunch. Either you get the meal of the day (vegan modifiable) or you go for a big salad and spend the next 1.5 hours talking outside at a table with other students and internationals. After you finished your next class it is time for some physical exercise, be it tennis, gym or football.

Wow, you spent another whole day at your uni. Time goes by quickly and on your way home, you pick up some food at the tienda. You pay about five euros and you have more fruit and veggies than you can possibly eat in four days. My top three: mango, avocado and lime.

CHOLULA

Puebla is the safest state in Mexico. Cholula lies 15km west of the city Puebla and has about 90.000 inhabitants. The impressive archeological area is crowned by a beautiful church which is the city's most prominent piece of architecture. Surrounded by four big volcanos, Cholula strikes with outstanding living quality and is one of the most advanced cities in Mexico. Its calm and pleasant atmosphere is owed to a high level of safety. You can go home alone without any worries even as a woman.



Other than that, you are surrounded by all different kinds of clubs, bars and restaurants, giving you the opportunity to spend your leisure time exactly how you want. One of my favorite restaurants is La Colmena, a vegan place which is cheap and plays chill techno music. Another great feature of Cholula is that most UDLAP students live there. You meet people left and right and feel very integrated.

HIGHLIGHTS



In the four months of “studying” I went on four big trips. Although I loved the day-to-day life in Chollywood, it is safe to say that travelling is the most exciting part of studying in Latin America. We went a lot to the Pacific side, with Puerto Escondido being my favorite place (Surfing, Nature and Camping). For the time left I will still go to the Caribbean Sea.

Besides seeing amazing places and experiencing adventures with new people, with each trip your horizon expands. Looking back at writing in my motivation letter that I don't know anything about Latin America and that I want to change this, gives me a feeling of accomplishment. Like a checkmark "new part of the world discovered". And even "setting things in perspective". It is not easy to put in words, but people there have another attitude about life. It is all much lighter and friendlier. Despite more difficult life circumstances, people tend to smile more and speak to you with more excitement. This light-heartedness manifests in the traditions e.g. celebrating Día de los Muertos as well as in behavioral patterns like being more physical and even using less cynicism. I really enjoyed the Mexican nature of going about life and hope to carry some of its features back home.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To get the full experience, you must overcome the language barrier. Arriving with basic knowledge but virtually zero practical experience, I struggled a lot with stumbling non-sense to natives, mixing up words and not being able to follow conversations. Frustrating. Assuming everything would fall into place by just being in a Spanish speaking country turned out to be false. I didn't take a single Spanish course at UDLAP although they are free. Don't make the same mistake! I made up with taking a private teacher at Zalao Language School two months later. This helped a lot and finally took my Spanish to the next level. Some more tips:

- Refuse speaking English to natives, just answer in Spanish all the time. Make people know that you prefer speaking Spanish and that they shouldn't hesitate to correct you. Ask what words and phrases mean. But also use your intuition.
- If you have the opportunity, come in the winter term. There are more internationals and more parties and life in Cholula. When you book your flight, already book the returning flight, but maybe consider staying a bit longer. My flight was three months after the semester had ended.
- Make trips with Travel's Life if you want a healthy mix of party, culture and nature while not neglecting the social aspect.
- Go to Costco once a month. It is a wholesaler with an amazing product range (vegan protein, hummus, wine) and low prices. You don't need a member card, just ask other customers to use their cards. They will be happy because they get more bonus points.
- If you happen to have a social occasion with a special person, go up to the pyramid (church) by night and enjoy an incredible sea of lights.
- Ah, one last thing. Be careful with your valuables in Mexico City. Especially in the metro.



CONCLUSION

I regret nothing. Going for the more challenging exchange year turned out to be the most fulfilling experience. Don't shy away if family and friends express concerns about Latin America. It is nothing like the media describes it like. Studying at UDLAP was the best decision because this university really suited my preferences and the life around it even more. I got to know the craziest people, saw stunning nature and had unforgettable adventures.

Overall, this 7 months broadened my horizon and stood for growth, experientially, intellectually and personally. Don't miss out on what the world has to offer you. Go for it!