

CEPE TAXCO STUDENT HANDBOOK

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Introduction:

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

The first secular and public university in the Americas was founded by Royal Decree issued by Charles V in 1551. Today, UNAM is ranked in the top 100 of universities in the world, and is ranked number one among Spanish speaking universities.

School for Foreign Students – Taxco (CEPE-Taxco)

The School for Foreign Students was established in 1921 in order to give students from foreign countries an opportunity to acquire a deeper knowledge of Latin American Cultures. With the same aim, and to offer students a new option, on June 15th, 1992, CEPE-Taxco was funded at the former Hacienda El Chorrillo, a hacienda built by two sons of the Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortés, built in the late 16th century. To date CEPE-Taxco has received students from 21 different nations from around the world.

I. Personal Expectations

The majority of students who come to Mexico intend on forming friendships with people they encounter during their studies and travels. This is quite possible, but it does require an effort on the part of the foreigner. Most Mexicans are friendly and interact well with foreigners, but this does not mean that they will automatically invite you to their home on first meeting. The same precautions should be made as you would take with a foreigner in your own country.

In order to augment the possibilities of forming meaningful relationships with Mexicans, it's best to be somewhat informed of Mexican and Latin-American culture before coming to Mexico. The more one knows about the politics, the art, the religion, etc. the easier it will be to make those initial contacts to form lasting relationships. It's best if students are able to do some research beforehand, either through meeting Mexican people in their own country, or by reading about the country and culture.

At the same time, students should be well informed of the current events in their own country when they travel to Mexico. Many Mexican's will probably be interested in hearing and will know much about your country. These are all initial contact conversation starters to enrich your experience and establish bonds with Mexicans you meet abroad.

A) Climate and Clothing

The climate in Taxco is moderate, and is considered to be one of the best year round climates where people live in the world. It is a tropical mountain climate, which means that it doesn't get too hot or too cold. Most people are comfortable in pants and a t-shirt year round. For those coming from very cold climate in the winter, Taxco will seem hot and sunny. However, it is recommended to have a sweater or jacket for those studying in the months of November through February. It does get chilly and windy often at night. Students can also expect hotter climate during the months of March, April, and May. The rainy season is from the end of May through October. During the rainy season it rains often, but sporadically. Chances are you will find Taxco's weather to be very pleasing.

B) Housing

Housing can be pre arranged for students when requested. When arranging housing through the CEPE office, students have the option of living in a furnished apartment or living with a host family. A host family is recommended for students to receive a greater degree of exposure to Spanish and Mexican culture. The cost of living with a host family is \$200 USD per person per month. An apartment will cost in a range of \$300 to \$500 USD per month. **Payments for rent or to host families can be made in cash in US dollars or the equivalence in Mexican Pesos directly to the land lord.** This information is also indicated on the student application form. To verify that the process has begun, you can contact Public Relations at comtaxco@servidor.unam.mx if you

have any concerns. Students also have the option of arranging their own housing.

C) Health and Hygiene

It is important that students take care of their health while living abroad. It is highly recommended that you see a doctor in your own country for a routine physical before traveling. Your doctor can give you some tips in basic healthcare while living abroad.

Keep in mind that people do not drink tap water in Mexico, and sometimes food that has been prepared on the street is not safe to eat. It is very important to have a healthy diet and to get exercise.

Of course, students should abstain from heavy drinking, and the use of illegal narcotics is not tolerable. Students also need to be conscious of illnesses such as AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Casual sexual intercourse can potentially lead to a list of undesirable venereal diseases that are most often incurable. Be sure to use a condom and refrain from contact with prostitutes.

It is always recommended to practice simple hygiene. With recent scares of the N1H1 (Swine Flu) pandemic, it is important to take precautions that will protect you from the virus. The most common way a flu virus is spread is through physical contact, therefore it is important to wash ones hands frequently or use an anti-bacterial gel to kill germs that may be harmful. Fortunately, the State of Guerrero has had a limited amount of Swine Flu outbreaks, and no reported deaths.

D) Visas

All students must obtain a visa to enter the country. Many students can obtain a tourist visa upon entering the country either at customs in the Mexican airport, or at the boarder. Persons of the following countries may enter Mexico as tourists without obtaining a student visa before their arrival, and then obtain the legal rights to study for prolonged periods of time through Mexican Migration while in Mexico if necessary: Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Check Republic, Chile, Cyprus, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latonia, Luxemburg, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The United States, Uruguay, Venezuela .

If you are not a citizen of one of the countries here mentioned, you must petition with the nearest Mexican embassy or consulate office in your country to obtain a student visa in order to enter Mexico. This process is as follows:

- 1.) The person interested in studying in Mexico needs to personally inform the Mexican embassy in their country (or nearest Mexican embassy if

their country has none) of their interest in studying in Mexico and obtain the name and contact information of the person at the embassy who will handle their account.

- 2.) Then, the student needs to inform CEPE of their plans to study in Mexico and send us a completed application form, a copy of their passport (photo page only), and the name of the contact at the Mexican embassy with their e-mail address. We also will need to know the exact dates that the student plans to enter and leave the country. Student will also have to make a payment in full for one course to receive a formal letter of acceptance, *too read more about wire transfers, please see section A) Inscriptions under academic expectations*. To receive information to make a wire transfer, please write to public relations at: comtaxco@servidor.unam.mx
- 3.) After all of this has been accomplished, CEPE Taxco will then be able to write a letter of acceptance to study at CEPE and it will be sent to the student and the contact at the Mexican embassy.

This is a process that may take several months to complete, and requirements in obtaining visas vary from country to country. If you have any specific questions regarding visa acquisition procedures, please write to:

comtaxco@servidor.unam.mx

E) Reception in Mexico City

Most students who study at CEPE Taxco will fly into Mexico City. Please keep in mind that all students traveling into the country are subject to have their luggage inspected by customs upon entering the country. Most students will receive a visitors FM visa at this time. See section **C)** for more information about visas.

CEPE Taxco can provide shuttle transportation from the Airport to Taxco if pre arranged. Usually it is not cost effective for just one or two people. In order to arrange transportation for a group, please contact the Public Relations representative with plenty of anticipation in order to arrange for a pick up: comtaxco@servidor.unam.mx

If students travel on their own, it is recommended to take the Pullman de Morelos bus from the airport. This bus service takes passengers to the *Selva* bus station in Cuernavaca, Morelos. From there, one can take a taxi to the *Estrella Blanca Centro* bus station and board a bus that will take them directly to the city of Taxco de Alarcón.

F) Money and Living Expenses

Students will find that they can live well without spending too much money. There are many economic restaurants that serve tasty and nutritious food, as well as a farmers market and a super market. Because Taxco is a tourist city, there are also high class and expensive places as well.

To obtain Mexican pesos, one of the easiest ways is by using a credit or debit card with the various ATM machines that are located through out the city. There are also 'exchange' houses that will change cash (such as US Dollar or Euro) into Mexican Pesos. This can also be done at the banks that are available.

Payments for courses and materials can be made in cash at our CEPE Taxco office. CEPE Taxco's prices are posted in US dollars, but payments must be made in the Mexican Peso equivalence, CEPE-Taxco does not accept foreign currency or traveler's checks. CEPE-Taxco can also receive bank wire transfers for an additional fee of \$30 USD per transfer. Credit card payments are also accepted.

G) Culture Shock

The majority of people who travel to a foreign country are often surprised or "Shocked" by the subtle and grand differences between the two cultures, even when just traveling for a short period of time. Culture Shock can be positive and/or negative, depending on the out look of the individual. Most often students will start out in a euphoric stage of enjoying the differences, but this can wear off, to the point of depression and homesickness. Usually the best way to avoid any negative culture shock is to make those initial friendships with Mexicans and try to understand their culture as much as possible while keeping an open mind. There will of course be other students experiencing the same thing, and they can also aid as a support group if the culture becomes overwhelming. It is highly recommended though that students immerse themselves in the culture and try to abandon the use of their native language in order to fully learn Spanish and partake in Mexican Culture.

II. Academic Expectations

Students who come to Mexico to study at CEPE Taxco should have two objective goals. The first is to learn Spanish as a second language, and the second is to learn the culture of Mexico and Latin America. Many students believe that by living in a Spanish speaking environment, that they will automatically learn the language. Even though this is the ideal way to develop skills using a foreign language, it does impart a great deal of effort by the student. What is learned in the classroom should be reviewed. Students need to force themselves to practice Spanish, and should limit the use of their native language when spending time with friends. For many students, getting to know other Mexicans can be a challenge. Some students will find it difficult to set aside their timid nature in order to use Spanish. The success in improving ones ability in expression depends on the willingness to interact with Mexicans.

The intensive Spanish program taught at CEPE Taxco consists of four basic levels, three intermediate levels, and one superior advanced level. Most students begin with level 1 or higher. It takes one and a half years to complete all levels starting at the basic 1. There are five terms to one year. It is quite possible for students to accelerate their learning while living in a Spanish speaking environment. In these cases, students who start at the first level may be able to pass through the entire course in less time than the full one and a half years.

With the exception of one culture class that is taught in English, all culture classes are taught in Spanish. Of the culture classes that are offered, students may choose to take classes that are suitable for their level of Spanish. Each culture class has a code. The number that the code begins with indicates as to what level of Spanish a student must be in, in order to take the class. When students arrive on campus for the first time, the week before classes start, they are given a placement exam in order to determine the correct level of Spanish that they should be in. *For more information on placement exams, please see the section titled **Placement Exams**.*

A) Incriptions

Students should arrive on campus the week before the first day of classes in order to orientate themselves with the school and with the community. Incriptions for classes always take place the week before the first day of class. In most cases, the first day of class for any term is on a Monday. Students need to register for their classes in the office. Tuition for one term costs \$ 520 USD which consists of one term of intensive Spanish, and two culture classes. Additional culture classes cost \$50 USD. The registration fee includes the registration of the student, a student ID card, and one hour of internet service. Students who request a formal letter of acceptance for any reason must pay for a course in advance. Bank wire transfers require an additional \$30 USD service charge.

The registration and tuition fees must be paid upon arrival, at the time of registration. **Payments can only be made in cash with Mexican Pesos.** *If you are a student who needs to obtain a student visa, please see section D of personal expectation regarding student visas. Payments must be made before arrival in order to receive an acceptance letter directed to the nearest Mexican embassy in your country.* Prices are listed in US dollars, but payments are made in the equivalence with Mexican Pesos. Fees and tuition will not be refunded under any circumstances. The school reserves the right to change tuition and fees when the circumstances so require. Please see the CEPE Taxco web page for up to date postings of tuition fees:

www.cepetaxco.unam.mx

For Spanish courses, the text books that are used were especially made by UNAM's linguistic team and follow the European Frame method for teaching languages. The series "Así Hablamos" is the name of the text book, and is available for purchase in our CEPE office. The price is \$340 pesos.

B) Special Immersion Classes

CEPE-Taxco offers special classes to students who are unable to attend a full intensive course that has been scheduled on the regular course calendar. The special immersion classes can be tailored to fit the needs of the students, such as focusing on Spanish for business, for social workers, teachers, etc.

There is also the possibility of taking tutoring sessions where the instructor focuses on the interest of the student through the use of grammar, conversation, pronunciation, etc. The cost per hour per person is \$15 USD, and there is a minimum of 10 hours, plus a \$40 USD registration fee. Materials are not included.

For more information regarding Special Immersion Classes or to set up classes, please contact Public Relations at: comtaxco@servidor.unam.mx

C) Placement Exams

At the time of registration, students who have had some Spanish training and who wish to enter a level higher than level I, must take a placement exam in order to determine their level of Spanish. Placement exams are usually given on Thursday and Friday in the morning the week before the first day of classes. The exam usually takes about an hour to an hour and a half. It consists of four sections: written expression, oral expression, comprehension and reading, and listening comprehension. The learning center puts an emphasis on the importance of the language as a means of communication, so the exam puts more of an emphasis on auditory comprehension and oral expression than on grammar.

D) Classroom Conduct

Students are expected to have positive behavior in the classroom and community. While attending classes, students should be clean and should be courteous to their fellow classmates and to their teachers. Students are also expected to respect the CEPE Taxco facilities and community of Taxco. Violence is not acceptable, nor is invasion of personal space. Inappropriate language or subject matter is also not acceptable. Students are also expected to be in the classroom on time. Repeated tardiness or absence of class attendance is not acceptable and students will be reprimanded for such behavior.

E) Conduct in the Community.

While students are living in Taxco, Mexico, they need to understand that they are subject to the laws of Mexico and must obey them. It is important to realize that foreign CEPE students represent their university from their native country, their nationality, and CEPE itself. Rude conduct or violence again is not acceptable. It is illegal to use drugs. It is important for the student to consider their conduct in public, and to determine if it is acceptable in the community.

F) EPLE

The Centro de Enseñanza para Extranjeros (CEPE), de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), offers the EPLE Exam of Spanish proficiency (EPL: Examen de Posesión de la Lengua Española), which is accredited with the Cervantes Institute and the University of Salamanca .

The EPLE examination of Spanish proficiency is an instrument that determines the level of domination and proficiency of a student of the Spanish Language, independent of the form in which the student had learned or studied the language.

Based on the results, the Learning Center for Foreigners (CEPE), of UNAM, grants a certification of linguistic competence, which is useful in its distinct rolls, both academically and for the workforce. For academic use, for example, the EPLE contributes to the level of aptitude of the foreign student who may wish to study for a Bachelor's degree or graduate degree. For use in the workforce, it allows public and private companies to verify the linguistic competency level of employees, without having to generate strategies of formulating competency levels, which allows the reduction of cost in hiring, contracting, and rotation of personnel. For the worker, it provides notable documentation that endorses the student's knowledge, abilities, and linguistic skills, and facilitates the incorporation and development in the area of labor desired by the individual.

It is often common for students to study at CEPE Taxco for one year to learn Spanish, and then place into a degree program of their choice in Mexico City in order to receive a bachelor's degree or graduate degree.

Please visit the following web pages for more information about Taxco:

<http://www.taxco-today.com/>

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

<http://www.pueblomagicedemexico.com.mx/sec/taxco/taxco.php?opc=1>

http://www.visitmexico.com/wb/Visitmexico/Visi_Taxco

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