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## Latin America: General advice

Latin America is a fascinating, diverse part of the world. It has some of the richest and most vibrant cultures of anywhere in the world, and offers a constant space for discovery and self-discovery. However, there are some important factors to take into account to have a safe and enjoyable stay:

### *Some general points:*

: - Do not try to do anything in a hurry – traffic is often gridlock in most Latin American cities and offices and bureaucracies can seem painfully slow. Trying to do anything quickly will mark you out as a foreigner and make you more likely to become a target of unwelcome attention.

: - There are of course many social problems. These are usually confined to specific areas, and so long as you follow the advice below you will be fine – however you need to be prepared for the unexpected, and also be aware that “safe” areas can often be within 20 minutes’ walk of areas where no local would walk around.

: - Remember that attitudes towards race and gender have been shaped by very differing histories to those which have shaped attitudes in your own country. You need to be aware of these differences and be prepared to respond to them accordingly. Some female students do find the levels of attention stressful, so take steps not to travel about on your own if you are worried about this.

: - The recent radicalism of many countries in Latin America and some universities can affect the ways in which students are received. Students should be mindful of issues of class and historical inequalities and how these may affect the way in which they are perceived.

## Brazil:

Brazil is a wonderful destination and there are really very few students who regret having gone there (in my 5 years as study abroad tutor I have not met one). However, be aware that things are very different there; provided that you are prepared to make some adaptations to your way of life and to how you see priorities, you will have a wonderful and thoroughly educational experience. But be aware that you will suffer from culture shock and that things do not work in the same way as in London.

## Rio de Janeiro:

- Recommended areas to live: Zona Sul, eg. Botafogo, Ipanema (Copacabana is a bit more ... ‘daggy’ for want of a better word)
- Avoid taking public transport after dark – use the easytaxi app (all Brazilians do this).
- Don’t stay around the beaches after sunset and avoid the underpasses after dark
- Always try to walk with at least one other person after dark
- Avoid the centre at the weekends – it is completely deserted!
- Livraria de Travessa – a lovely bookshop chain which usually has a café inside; a good place to escape to.
- Shopping centres are usually the safest place at night as they have more security – they usually have cinemas in e.g. Botafogo Praia Shopping, Rio Sul, and Leblon Shopping.
- Often people sitting down in buses will offer to hold your bag on their lap if you are standing; do the same if you are lucky enough to get a seat!
- Most buses have a buzzer which you press in order to make the driver stop, but sometimes they may have a rope which goes along the ceiling that you have to pull on.
- Most buses cost around 3.40 reais – except from the blue premium buses which go to and from the airport and cost around 9 reais no matter where you get on (these are airconditioned)
- Always leave plenty of time to get anywhere as buses and traffic can be unpredictable (it once took us three hours to get to Galeao airport from downtown Rio due to traffic!).
- Often CPF (a Brazilian identity code) is required to purchase items, especially if you want to get a phone contract. Foreigners can get hold of one of these although it is a bit of a hassle: <http://www.liveinbrazil.org/getting-cpf/>
- When registering at the Federal Police Office expect a lengthy wait – it’s better to be surprised by how quick it goes, than be left demoralised (I arrived at 9am for a 10am appointment and wasn’t seen until 5pm, by which time I was one of the last in the room). The process itself only takes 5 minutes – they take you into a room with a group of other VISA applicants and you have your photo and fingerprints taken. Make sure you have ALL of your documents – some people didn’t have all of them, were turned away, and made to come back the next day.
- When paying your taxes for your registration the queues are often much quicker in a post office than in the banks.
- When you have to get your documents notarised you can go to this public notary in Botafogo to do so: <https://pt.foursquare.com/v/cart%C3%B3rio-5%C2%BA-of%C3%ADcio-de-notas/4d52c8039b27721e3fb4c546>
- BRADESCO – this will be your best friend. It is one of the only banks that always seems to work with foreign cards. Always take out money by going inside the bank, never take out money from hole-in-the-walls (although you will rarely see these in Brasil).
- Try not to take out your phone in public and never carry more than 200 reais on you at a time. Also always try to have small coins as shops do not always have change.
- In Brazil when paying for items, you are usually offered the opportunity to pay ‘em parcelas’ (instalments) or ‘a vista’ (all at once) so respond accordingly.

- Often in supermarkets and other shops they will have a 'caixa preferencial' for pregnant women, elderly or disabled so make sure you're not standing in the wrong queue.
- Get involved with the REI events (for international exchange students) – they organise lots of trips and it's a good way to make friends.

### Rio: the Student View

*Olivia Maisel (4<sup>th</sup> year, Hispanic Studies and Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, 2015-6):* Firstly, I would just like to say that I loved my time in Brazil, and would recommend it to everyone, provided they are prepared to make some lifestyle changes in order to integrate into Brazilian society, but also for safety reasons. I didn't experience any trouble during my time in Rio as I tried my best to blend in and appear Brazilian. So just the obvious points such as no expensive jewellery/watches, don't wear branded clothing, no flashy cameras etc.

Also, don't take any new iPhones out - ideally, don't take any, but old iPhones were relatively common. Nothing newer than a 4s. Motorola smart phones are common there, and I would recommend taking a smart phone as access to internet is important. Several of us started contacts with VIVO, which I would definitely recommend. It's very easy to set up and you pay monthly in cash at a lottery station. The only tricky part is you need the Brazilian equivalent of a social security number to get a contract - I did this, and then others used my number for their contracts, which worked well. Even with a cheaper phone do not flash it around - especially on buses and in downtown Rio. Backpacks are common in Rio, so I would recommend getting one, but don't put anything valuable in the front pocket!

Have patience - if you're walking quickly or rushing to uni you stand out as a foreigner. Things generally move slower in Brazil, and you can't expect things to be as quick as they are in London. We spent 8 hours with the federal police in Galeão Airport to get our documents signed, so prepare to do that before you start university.

I spent my 6 months living with a Brazilian family, which I highly recommend. I actually found them on Airbnb, and there were several families which were prepared to take students for extended periods of time. Living with a family you really get a sense of the Brazilian way of life and they look out for you, which I know my family appreciated. I am still in contact with them and plan to return in June for the Olympics!

The only issues I had was getting my credit card cloned. This happened twice but thankfully not much money was stolen as I used a Caxton Card - this is a travel card that you top up online from your UK bank account. I never had more than 200 pounds worth of money on it at any one time, that way not much could be stolen. However, the downside to this card is that their security systems are not as efficient as banks such as HSBC, Santander etc. In terms of security, be particularly careful at night. Avoid the beaches and the Lagoon, but again, none of us had any trouble, even on nights out in the centre of the city. Brazilians are extremely friendly and are always happy to help if you need advice.

The Rio metro only covers half of the city, so I mainly took the bus, but traffic in Rio is a nightmare so you need to allow several hours to get into uni! Also, I wouldn't advice taking the metro at night, as there are no security cameras and there were a few incidents during our time there.

I would definitely recommend travelling around Brazil, which you can do cheaply by bus or plane. Places to visit which are relatively close to Rio are; Sao Paulo, Ilha Grande, Salvador, Brasilia and Chapada Diamantina, which has some of the most beautiful waterfalls and landscapes I've ever seen!

### Sao Paulo

With a population of 20 million São Paulo is one of the largest cities in the world and the largest in South America and (depending on what area is measured) the largest in Latin America. Because of this it can often be chaotic and is not the most aesthetic city in the world. However, as almost half of all the money that goes through Brasil is generated or passes through the city, it is one of the safest large cities and has the best food scene and some of the best nightlife in the country. From my experience of Brasil I found that São Paulo is the most liveable city in the country, especially for a westerner due to the large history of immigration (Italian, Japanese, Arab) in the city. It is not a cheap city (the prices you should expect to pay for most items are not much lower than those in London) but you do generally get a lot for your money in terms of food and nights out. If you like living in a city then São Paulo will be a really enjoyable place for you, there is always something to do; some show to see, some exhibition to visit, some huge party somewhere, some sport to watch or play and always somebody to hang out with.

**University:** The university sits on a large campus in the west of the city and the classes provided are to a good standard and are interesting, although you shouldn't feel intimidated to try out subjects as most of the teachers are forgiving and if you're struggling they will be willing to help you (possibly even in English if absolutely necessary, although I didn't know anyone that needed to do that when I was in Brasil (July-December 2017)). I wouldn't fret about what subjects you choose on the original approval forms as you have two weeks at the start of term to try out classes. Another thing that is important to note is that the term will run from the start of August (for me I had induction on 31<sup>st</sup> July) and officially runs until the end of the second week of December (for me that was 15<sup>th</sup> December) although your classes will almost all end by the end of the first week of December. I think that the perfect time to arrive would be about one week before the start of your term and book a hostel (a lot of exchanges in my year stayed in *Ô da Casa* hostel) or hotel and book this for two weeks as most of the advertisements for accommodations appear on Facebook (a really good place to find accommodation, there's lots of groups for finding places for USP students) or Easyquarto during the first week of term. The university has a very large sports complex and you can sign up for free for many teams, tournaments or lessons in practically any sport, and is a really good way to meet people and make friends as Brazilians are always particularly friendly and willing to let you join in when it comes to sport. In terms of USP classes here is a link to the classes I could take during my semester: <http://ccint.fflch.usp.br/node/1700>. I would try and take a mixture of classes with and without other exchange students and also if

you want to take the Portuguese language class then you will have to move fast as it gets filled very quickly after matriculation opens. In my year there were a lot of English exchange students from loads of different unis such as Cambridge, Leeds and Manchester which is good for socialising, although be careful not to fall into a trap of never speaking to anyone Brazilian!

**Accommodation:** Living in São Paulo you are most likely going to have to try and find a compromise between distance from uni, cost of accommodation, quality of accommodation and general trendiness/ safety of the area.

The first area you may look to live in is Butantã. This is next to the university campus, has a metro line, is the cheapest of the areas you would be looking at houses in and you will easily find lots of student shares. However, this area has become particularly unsafe at night over the past few years and you'll hear many students warning you about not going out after dark around here except by uber, as the nearby favela *Nova Jaguaré* means that the area is popular for prostitution and drug trade. I didn't know any exchanges that stayed in this area during my time in São Paulo.

The next areas you'll probably look in are the adjacent neighbourhoods of Pinheiros and Vila Madalena which lie across the river from the university. These are two of the prettiest and most interesting areas of São Paulo, with lots of barzinhos and restaurants serving all different types of food from high-end Japanese to Kebab shops. Transport to uni is similar from both areas as they both have metro stations and direct buses and you would expect about a 30-minute travel time to USP. They are also much closer to the centre and the main areas for going out in the city; in Vila Madalena they have one of the main streets if you're looking for a samba/ pagoda bar and good caipirinhas (Rua Aspicuelta) and there is also the Beco do Batman which often hosts cultural events and music, whilst in Pinheiros there are several larger clubs that play Brazilian funk music and pop music. The main difference between Pinheiros and Vila Madalena is the price: in Pinheiros you would look to pay around 1000-1300 reais per month whereas in Vila Madalena you would be generally looking at between 1500-2000 reais per month. Both areas are extremely safe both day and night.

Your third option is to find somewhere further afield, for example in Moema near to Parque Ibirapuera. The benefits of doing this would be; you will likely get more value for money, it will be easier to find somewhere sharing with non-students or not sharing, you will probably have a few more public transport options to take you to the centre or the local airport Congonhas (if you plan to travel a lot), safety is often even higher in these areas as each condominium has a team of 24-hour security guards. The price in Moema is going to be around 2000 reais and upwards, but in some of the neighbouring suburbs it will be less. My advice for travel to uni would be be prepared to travel an hour to get to uni (regardless of where you live as traffic can be awful).

The two options for living are generally repúblicas (student residences) and living as a lodger in someone's house. A few of us had problem living as lodgers in houses with Brazilians who weren't students, as they could be quite strict and paternalistic. For instance, I wasn't allowed to have anyone else round to the house under any circumstances. So I'd probably recommend living in a república or in a house with people who don't own it.

The best places to look for accommodation are here: <http://www.easyquarto.com.br/> (like Gumtree) or at USP, there are flyers in every bus stop and faculty offering to rent rooms out.

The study abroad office also puts out an 'approved' list of homestays, but they tend to be quite expensive!

This is the hostel that I stayed in when I arrived in Sao Paulo which was good, cheap and well-placed for going to house viewings in the above-mentioned areas:

<http://www.cafehostel.com.br/>. There are lockers, though you need your own lock! The biggest dorm is the nicest and cheapest.

**Visas:** To get a student visa the first thing you need to do is complete an application form and book an appointment at the Brazilian consulate near Oxford Circus. This link contains all the relevant information and further links to the forms needed and appointment booking page (see Vitem IV student visa): [http://cglondres.itamaraty.gov.br/en-us/visas\\_to\\_brazil.xml#Tourist\\_visa](http://cglondres.itamaraty.gov.br/en-us/visas_to_brazil.xml#Tourist_visa).

When in São Paulo you will need to go to the Federal Police in Lapa (North North-West of the city) to register your Visa. This link tells you what you need for that appointment <http://www.pf.gov.br/servicos-pf/imigracao/cedula-de-identidade-de-estrangeiro/registro-de-visto-consular-1>.

Take note that you will need to get these passport-style photos in Brazil as they do not accept the ones we use in Europe (wrong size), you will need to go to a *Cartorio* where you will have to take a *senha* (there will be a machine giving out pieces of paper with numbers, take one and wait for your number on the screen) to get signed, authorised copies of **all used** pages in your passport and finally you will need to go to a bank and pay two *taxas*. Be aware that Brazilian banks have a high level of security and you will have to put your things in a locker or pass them through the Perspex, then take a *senha* probably again from a machine and go through a scanner (that may just look like a revolving door), I didn't realise this and the security guard started to freak out and pull her gun out until I realised! At your appointment in Lapa be prepared to wait and them to find some problem with your application that means you need to return with some other document another day. After you have registered you can now get a CPF which can be useful for buying tickets and in shops. To do this you need to go to the post office (*correios*), take another *senha* and wait, then tell the person at the counter that you need to get a CPF and pay the *taxas*. After you've paid you need to a *receita federal* with whatever paper the post office gave you and again take a *senha* and wait then you should be seen and have your CPF printed out (it's literally a number on a piece of paper).

Go to register your student visa asap, as it's quite hard to get an appointment. However, cancellations are put through in real time, so if you can't get one first time you try, check the website as regularly as possible (even in the middle of the night) and you'll probably manage to get one. If you can't get an appointment and your month to register your visa is running out, just go to the office really early one morning when it opens (be there for about 8?) and try to fill a missed appointment. You can still do this in the afternoon, but it turns into a bit of a scrum. Also, check the visa you are issues in the Brazilian embassy in London. One of my friends had a visa issued with his Dad's name written down incorrectly, and it got rejected. It caused quite a lot of hassle, however, it did get sorted in the end and he managed to dodge the fine!!

**Travel:** Getting a *Bilhete Único* will save you a lot of money as it is 3,80 per journey and after you get on one bus you can get on any bus for free for 3 hours. You can get a normal one of

these from big metro stations and to get a student one you need to go to an office at USP which is near to the main *bandejão* towards the direction of the clock tower until you meet the road in front of the park/square in which it sits and then you turn right and walk about 50 metres and you should find it. Ask about getting your student travel card and they should print of a sheet with your RG on it and give you the link to the website you need to register at to apply for it (if not it should be this <https://scapub.sbe.sptrans.com.br/sa/acessoPublico/index.action>). Fill out the forms and then take the *boleto* and pay the *taxa* at a bank then wait to receive an email telling you your card is ready to collect and where from.

Finally, I think that anyone can enjoy living in Brazil and you shouldn't be put off by what you hear on TV or on the media about safety as it is completely blown out of proportion. In São Paulo you need to take practically the same safety considerations as in London i.e. be a little bit conscious about walking about not knowing where you're going with your phone out. Brazilians are in general great people and are very friendly and welcoming and you can easily meet a lot of fun people here. I personally had a great time in Brazil and the other King's student in Brazil who lived in Rio felt the same, so whatever city you choose to live in you should definitely take the opportunity to live in Brazil as you won't regret it.

## Salvador

Salvador is a city at the heart of Brazil's African past. The population is much more heavily Afro-Brazilian than in other parts of the country, and this is something that students should consider when making their choice as right for them. This heritage will open up a whole new perspective on Brazil with options to study more African and Afro-Brazilian history and many opportunities to participate in Candomblé.

Salvador is largely a safe city, though do bear in mind that the *baixa* near the port and some areas near the central bus terminal are not so safe. As in many Brazilian cities, safe areas can be very close to dangerous ones, so you should always seek local advice. The city has one of the most lively and famous carnivals in the whole country, and has wonderful beaches. Most students tend to live in areas such as Barra, Rio Vermelho, or Ondina (which is near the university).

One important tip is to really examine closely the details of your health insurance. Even with health insurance, it is complicated to see a doctor in Salvador. Basically, you can only be admitted to hospital or seen by an emergency doctor if the hospital has an agreement with that insurance provider. Most insurance policies will not have an agreement with most Brazilian hospitals and so they will refuse you at the entry of the hospital even if you are very unwell and that obviously can create a dangerous situation. You should find out which hospitals your insurance scheme has an agreement with (on the phone they may tell you to go to any hospital, but that doesn't work), because it can be very time-consuming to find out and sometimes it's a hospital that's far away or inaccessible (as was the case in Salvador).

Secondly, here are some useful links for accommodation in Salvador:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/moradiaemsalvador/?fref=ts>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/454502401291367/?fref=ts>

## Belo Horizonte (UFMG)

Belo Horizonte is a large city in the middle of one of the most historic parts of Brazil, Minas Gerais. Nearby are many beautiful old colonial towns like Ouro Preto. There is quite a relaxed feel to the city in many ways, though bear in mind that some students find life here a little quiet. But it is a very good option, and the university is one of the best in Brazil.

### Accommodation and Getting Around

The Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais is just outside the centre of Belo Horizonte. Although the university has its own campus accommodation, and there is one international hall which you may find will accept you. It may be better however to rent a room or an apartment in the city for your stay, as this way you will not be with foreign students speaking English. As Belo Horizonte is very much a student city, there will be many options with short lets, shared rooms, and great services from landlords; however, renting directly from a landlord is next to impossible, even for Brazilians, so don't be put off by student houses, or *republicas* being run by other students, with cash-in-hand payments and no individual contracts.

### Arriving:

As it can be a little difficult and stressful to set up accommodation before arriving, the best thing to do is to check into a hostel or hotel for your first week or so, while you get a feel for the city, explore the transport system, and start searching for accommodation from within. As Belo Horizonte is quite small and not very touristy, the only places you will find to stay will be in the centre.

And once you're there, the best place to start looking for accommodation would be either at the university campus itself, where there are many posters and adverts up all over the place, at local estate agents, or online at [Easyquarto](#). Easyquarto is a great website which allows you to look up spare rooms, and for a little extra cost you can maintain more secure contact between you and the people letting the accommodation. However, as explained before, many *republicas* are organized by students themselves, so the best thing to do is to get talking your new classmates! For Easyquarto you should register for a premium account shortly before you arrive, which lets you contact landlords directly.

### Areas:

**Pampulha:** Pampulha is the area nearest the university, and covers a range of smaller zones (such as Santa Teresinha or Rua Boaventura) which many students choose to live in. Renting in this area is of an average price (around R\$400-600 a month), however you should take into consideration that it is a good half an hour from the centre, so if what you're after is more nightlife, this might not be the place for you!

**Santa Tereza, Floresta, Sagrada Familia:** These areas, especially Santa Tereza, are in the more bohemian part of town. Santa Tereza regularly hosts free concerts or other arts events, and the houses in this area are much older and European-looking, with large green areas and blossoming trees at every corner. Transport is good, and prices are average, so if you want something a bit closer to the alternative student scene, but don't mind a bit more of a trek to university, this is the place for you.

Praça Sete: Praça Sete is in the main centre of the city, and some great places can be found if you look hard enough, however the area isn't the safest, especially at night. However, if you can brave this, the area will be great for going out and getting around.

Savassi: Savassi, just south of the main centre, is the more exclusive side of town. Accommodation here will be more expensive but the advantage is the safety and modernity, as well as more classy restaurants, bars, and shopping centres.

Carlos Prates: Carlos Prates is also a popular area for students, for the prices and transport connections. However, be aware that not much really goes on in this area, and apart from mechanics and bicycle shops, there are not many places to hang out.

## Studying

### **Modules**

During your application to UFMG, you should have already chosen between four and eight 'cursos' from one particular department, for example 'Belas Artes' or 'Ciencias Sociais'. However, the great thing with UFMG is that upon arrival you can not only change these modules, but mix them up, choosing up to five different classes from five different departments. The vast majority of modules are for one semester only, so if you are staying the whole year you will get the chance to choose again later on.

In UFMG there will be both 'optativos' and 'obligatorios'. As an exchange student, you should choose the optativos, as they are far more interesting and are specific to Brazil. At UFMG you usually have to take 5x4 credit modules, making a total of 20 credits, however, some classes will be worth more or less, usually depending on the number of contact hours and workload, so make sure! Modules can be checked on the website.

### **Assessment**

Assessment, like in King's, is usually a combination of coursework, end of term written exams, and a presentation. As there are so many course options, many classes are a very practical size of about 5-10 students and, similar to seminars, work by reading a text every week, and discussing it openly in class with your fellow students and tutor. An assessed presentation will usually be allocated and will consist of you presenting a topic to your classmates before the teacher expands on it.

The set-up of exams in UFMG is much less formal than what you will be used to, so if, for example, you are feeling a lack of confidence about a timed exam to be written in Portuguese, you can always speak to the teacher and see if they can offer you a less pressurized form of assessment. Attendance and participation is also important, so make sure to show up and give your opinion in class, even if you are feeling shy.

Exams usually happen at the in the middle and at the end of the semester, and again this can be flexible, so be sure to let your individual teachers know if you need to head home or to get to your next semester in another country.

### **Academic Help**

After your initial 'exchange student' briefing at UFMG, you will quickly become familiar with the friendly Study Abroad team, who are always on hand to help with any general problems

and initial admin. Their office is called the 'DR' and they are located in the middle of the campus. However, for any more specific problems, such as obtaining proof of study or changing modules etc, you will have to go to the individual department administration offices, which have much more Brazilian opening and closing times.

### ***A weekend in BH***

Saturday morning is an especially good opportunity to attempt a day trip. One option is Inhotim, an outdoor contemporary art museum that stretches across 3,000 acres and offers the most bizarre modern artwork, interactive experiences, and impressive natural landscape. The bus leaves from the Rodoviaria on platform F2 at 09.15 and will bring you back at 17.00. A further option is Ouro Preto, one of the country's most impressive colonial mining towns where you can learn all about the most important period of Brazil's history in the countless museums, visit one of the hundreds of churches, or venture into one of the old mines.

Another great morning or afternoon activity is to visit the Lagoa de Pampulha in the North West of the city, right next to UFMG. The lake is outlined by 18km of pathways for visitors to either walk or cycle along which are dotted with amazing views, weird wildlife (including a harmless old alligator and families of capybaras) and lots of architectural treats – the lake is home to five works of the famous Oscar Niemeyer, including an old boat house and one of Brazil's first casinos.

For a great night out, Savassi and Praça Sete are the places to stay. Either stay out in the bars or hit some of the area's clubs such as Velvet or Na Sala. On a Friday night it is worth checking out UFMG's own local bar – Bar do Cabral – where students stay until the early hours dancing to the jukebox.

## **Chile**

**General:** During the remaining minutes of your long flight, you'll find yourself on the edge of your seat gazing at the beautiful Andes mountain range and then through the smog the Chilean capital will suddenly appear. Santiago is an interesting city; it has a heavily local feel with strong overtones of the quintessential cosmopolitanism that characterises global capital cities. That is to say, although the colonial architecture or indigenous presence may not be obvious at first, you won't forget that you are in a Latin American capital. Once you begin to explore Santiago you'll find the city easily navigable thanks to its efficient metro system and grid system, with the main *Alameda* conveniently intersecting and connecting the opposite ends of the city. It is home to cool and quirky neighbourhoods like Bellavista and Barrio Lastarria, but it also has its more "sketchy" areas such as Estación Central and Barrio Brasil. Petty crime is quite prominent, but like any city you just have to have your wits about you - on the whole, it is a comfortable and fun place to live, but be sensible.

On another note, it's a brilliant base to travel around the rest of Chile and parts of the continent. Bus travel is cheap and frequent; however, journeys can be extremely long and sometimes possessions can get stolen if passengers are not vigilant. It's worth paying a little extra to fly; the airport is located less than an hour's drive from the city and has cheap daily flights to (almost) everywhere. Also, if you fancy escaping the city for a day, it is surrounded by great places to explore - hiking routes such as Manquehue and the Cajón del Maipo reservoir are particularly nice - and Valparaíso is only a couple of hours away. With regards

to language and culture, girls may find the culture quite machistic at times, but it has not prevented them from enjoying their time there. Lastly, don't let the accent daunt you: you will get used to it and pick up their (great) expressions quickly - provided you also put the effort in. It's one of the challenges that makes it an attractive place for students.

**PUC:** PUC accommodates for a huge number of exchange students from all over the world. You'll be invited to a welcome meeting where they explain everything you need to know; from course selection to safety and international student events to obtaining a student travel card. They also invite student representatives from each department to help you start thinking about what kind of classes you want to take. There are a few campuses; don't be fooled (like me) into thinking most of your classes will be based at the Casa Central campus in the city centre. Most arts & humanities classes will be based at the San Joaquín campus, which is about a 30-45min scenic metro ride from the city centre (depending on where you live).

After the meeting, you'll be given a course-pack with further course details online, and you'll have a week to attend some sample classes. Students find these really helpful, as you'll not only get an insight into course but it also gives you a feel for how the teacher speaks. However, it's worth noting that PUC is fairly bureaucratic; there is no online system for exchange students to sign up to classes. I'd recommend you get to class registrations a couple of hours early - if you don't, be prepared to queue for a while and risk not getting a place in popular classes. It's worth noting down some back-up classes in the event of you not getting into your first choices, and the deadlines for changing and dropping classes are strict. Having said that, despite the bureaucracy, most of the staff are very friendly and helpful to exchange students.

The workload varies for each class; some can be quite demanding while others expect little to nothing during the semester. This is where the taster classes particularly come in handy, and don't be afraid to try out classes you wouldn't have the chance to at home. Teaching standards are high, and the grading system is numerical (1-7). To pass a class you must achieve a minimum of 4, but most lecturers do take it into account if you are an exchange student and offer help if you are struggling. Don't get discouraged if you get lower than a 4 in the first couple of tests, you'll find yourself improving quickly.

#### Accommodation

There are plenty of options when it comes to accommodation in the city. Despite not providing university accommodation, PUC do offer recommendations ( <http://relacionesinternacionales.uc.cl/alumnos-internacionales/preparate-para-llegar-a-la-uc/alojamiento> ). A few popular options students go for are:

Homestay: <http://www.homestay.com>

Staying with a family is a popular option amongst exchange students. If you really get on with your family, it can become a very special part of your stay, and is a great way to advance your Spanish. However, students are advised against booking a stay for more than 1 month through the website, as you'll have to pay very high fees to the Homestay agency. Instead, to save money, once you have arrived and settled in let your host know directly that you would like to stay longer (should you wish to). In this sense, you'll have a verbal agreement with your host and monthly rent should be lower from not having to pay agency fees. Some students may find the family environment a little constrictive, while others much prefer it to halls or personal accommodation.

Residencia Fantastic (link on the PUC accommodation website):

Located in Providencia, a large and popular area with good transport links to the city centre and the university campuses (and near the lovely Barrio Italia!). The accommodation itself hosts around 40 students. It's great for meeting other students (Chilean and non-Chilean) studying at all universities based in Santiago, and is an interesting option from a social point of view, as you'll be exposed to a variety of worldwide cultures and languages. You may end up with a group you really get on with, but if you don't, it's not the be-all-and-end-all. Very much like halls, students have their own bedrooms with shared bathrooms, kitchen and living space. However, there are quite strict rules regarding alcohol consumption and guests, and a 'guardian' is always present for security reasons (which is not necessarily a bad thing, especially in the case of emergencies).

Flatsharing: [www.compartodepto.cl](http://www.compartodepto.cl)

The most independent form of accommodation; the Chilean version of EasyRoommate and exactly the same concept as Spareroom. If you live with locals, you'll have the benefit of enhancing your Spanish while still being as independent as you were if you lived away from home while you were at King's. But you may find you wouldn't have the same security as you would with the other options, and I'd recommend you have a good look at the areas the flats are located in.

## Ecuador

I will start by saying that my time in Ecuador was undoubtedly the best 5 months of my life! I loved the country and amazing locals that I made friends with, which has given me so much more passion for my subject and ideas of what I want to do with my life (a very pertinent topic right now as we are less than a year from graduating)! There can definitely be drawbacks, depending on whether you want to be closer to home or are afraid of living where the culture does not resemble a European one; I personally found that despite the differences, I enjoyed Ecuadorian culture more than I do European culture. The city itself is long and narrow, squeezed between the Pichincha volcanoes to the west and the Parque Metropolitano and other steep hills to the east. There are a number of shopping centres and other parks in the centre of the city, lots of restaurants, bars and clubs (music ranging from reggaeton to salsa to electronic), the best of which you will probably hear about if you get involved with the Ecuabuddies and other students at USFQ. Lots of people go out in the Mariscal district, which can be fun and there are nights out every night of the week, but it's gringo-central, which for me was a bit of a put-off. Imported goods (clothes, food etc.) are highly taxed in Ecuador, so stick to local produce and everything will be cheap. You can get a 2-3 course meal in many Ecuadorian restaurants for about \$3 in the city, haircuts and other beauty treatments are very cheap at a few dollars, second-hand bookshops are cheap, etc.

People:

The people are generally kind-hearted, happy, friendly, more approachable than Europeans and always intrigued when they see foreigners; they especially liked that I was able to speak Spanish to them. A lot of Ecuadorians are Catholic, though their devotion varies. At the university San Francisco itself I did not come across many religious students. Since I am very tall, very pale and blue-eyed, I stood out a lot from basically all Ecuadorian people, as they are the polar opposite of this description. For this reason I wouldn't be surprised if people start talking to you randomly, in the

street, in clubs or at the university itself. If you are a girl, there will definitely be men that speak to you with an ulterior motive in mind, if you catch my drift! But the few times this happened to me it was just funny, I never felt in any danger or uncomfortable. These sorts of men in South America are different to their European equivalent in that they compliment you endlessly and try to make you feel special; but when you assert that you're not interested they accept it and move on to someone else without batting an eyelid. I find this to be the opposite of my experiences in England and France, where they won't take no for an answer or get offended. So for that reason, I found them far more bearable in Ecuador! Taxi drivers are often very chatty, so practise speaking with them! And if you are lost/need help with something, I wouldn't doubt that most people in the street would be happy to help you if you ask.

#### Accommodation:

I spent my semester living with an Ecuadorian family, which was all set up through the university – I cannot recommend this highly enough, as they spoke almost no English and so of course I was forced to speak solely in Spanish every day with them; I really think this is one of the factors as to how my Spanish improved so quickly. The families provide you with breakfast and dinner every day as part of the cost, and my host mom also did all the cleaning and washing and would give me extra food if I was at home during the day. I know a couple of people who moved out of their host family homes and into apartments with other students, though one did so in her second semester and the other moved into her Ecuabuddy's (I will explain this term later) apartment because she didn't like living with a host family and there was a spare room. If you don't want to make the effort of finding someone to live with and organising everything by yourself when you arrive, a host family is the best option. If I remember correctly it worked out at about \$2800 over the whole semester, so that would be about \$550-600 per month. This seems like a lot by some Latin American standards but includes bills, most of your food and drink and most likely the cleaning and washing done for you. The families seemed to receive mixed reviews in terms of enthusiasm, facilities, distance from the university etc., but my host mom is honestly wonderful; I had a broken foot when I arrived and she drove me around loads and helped me at home, and was generally very motherly. We still chat occasionally; she likes to see photos of London and she loved hearing about my semester in France! I will definitely visit her when I go back to Quito.

#### Safety:

I had no problems while I was there, though I heard a couple of horror stories from fellow exchange students that semester. This would include a mugging at knifepoint; the boy in question was having a picnic in the biggest park in Quito, Parque Carolina, with a girl and they stayed until it went dark (something we were all advised against doing since we arrived). A man approached them and held a knife up to the boy and forced him to hand over his laptop and mobile phone. Very scary stuff but nothing like this had happened before, apparently; and I do believe that it would have been avoided if he had heeded the advice. A couple of people also had their mobile phones pickpocketed, from bag pockets or even jacket pockets, while on the bus or even walking across a busy footpath over a main road. So it's worth being conscious of what you're flashing/what you have on your person at all times. I understand this information will put some people off, but remember that obviously most of the people in the country are totally normal and not criminals; obviously if they weren't, I wouldn't have enjoyed myself so much!

#### Visa:

If you are staying longer than three months in Ecuador, you need to get a visa; the one that all the exchange students got is the 'cultural exchange' 12-VIII visa. Most of the necessary paperwork is kindly organised for you by the study abroad officer at USFQ, and you will have a host family and address organised for you well before your appointment at the consulate (NOT the embassy!! The CONSULATE near King's Cross!! Yes, I went to the embassy only to find I was in the wrong place). So other than providing your own documents like passport, photos etc. (online as well as in person) and paying £300, there's very little for you to do apart than turn up to the appointment! You need to declare your arrival within one month of your arrival in Ecuador by going to register your visa at the Dirección General de Extranjería in the city centre. You will need to take a couple of documents along with you to do this as well, but the study abroad team at USFQ will explain this all to you.

#### Flights:

Direct flights to Ecuador from the UK don't exist, so you will have a journey of at least 14 hours with one or two connections to get to Quito. The flights are also quite expensive, so I would book as far in advance as possible if I were you. I would also recommend a flexible return journey if you are able to find one; or if not think very hard about when you want to come home. I went to Quito in my autumn term, and booked to come home a couple of days before Christmas. However I regret doing that now as I made a lot of friends, exchange and local, who were travelling more during the winter holidays, and I didn't get the opportunity to go to the Galapagos before that; you get a discount on entry fees to the islands as a student there! I thought I would be missing home but I really wasn't haha!

#### Transport:

The bus system in Quito seems a bit of a shambles from a British perspective – there are no numbers, the lines either have names or the buses will just have the names of their destinations on a sign in the window. There is someone taking money sitting on the bus as well as the driver; they will often jump off the bus as it stops to shout the destination. You will also find that some buses will stop in a random place for you if you ask to get off; they don't always pay attention to the bus stops! Most of them run very frequently, but for those that don't you have to set out a bit earlier as they have no specific timetable. Like in some other South American cities, there is a bus that traverses the length of the city between the north and south, called the Ecovía – this is usually quite fast as has its own lane. It costs 25 cents for a single ticket. When I was there, a Quito underground metro was in the process of being built; I am not sure if it will be completed by the time you go.

The cross-country travel is bookable in advance online, or you can just turn up at one of the two bus stations (Quitumbe in the south of the city; Terminal Ofelia and Carcelén in the north), and the price doesn't change the later you buy the ticket, so you can turn up basically whenever you want to catch one, like in other South American countries. For this reason, and the fact that the long-distances buses are so comfy and spacious, I really prefer this system to what we have in the UK. Although they tend to arrive late to their destinations no matter where you are going; you can never predict traffic and the winding mountain roads make journeys last a lot longer than you would expect, so it's worth keeping that in mind when planning a trip.

Taxis in Quito are yellow sedans with taxi signs on them; we were advised not to catch taxis from the street but I did this most of the times I caught taxis and had no problems, though you will be given phone numbers to use and there is an app called EasyTaxi which works like Uber but you can pay in cash. They have a meter inside that records how much you should pay for your journey, so make sure the driver has one and ask him to turn it on if it isn't already on in case he tries to fleece you. Depending on how far you want to go/traffic conditions, taxi prices are very low compared to what we are used to here, a 15-minute journey can cost about \$3.

#### University:

Located on a gorgeous campus a little outside Quito in a small, rich neighbourhood called Cumbayá, this is one of the most expensive universities in the country. Some Ecuadorians judge the students of this university as totally out of touch with the real world, which may or may not be the case; but I think it is a good transition for what we are used to in the UK when you are getting to know the place. The support available for international students is overwhelming; they sort out so much in terms of your accommodation, visa, organising trips (I would recommend going to Tiputini, it's amazing!) and advice for home sickness/illness. There are a lot of classes just for international students and you can take more or less whatever you want from the arts and humanities modules (I took a class in Brazilian Portuguese). There is an 'Ecuabuddies' system in place, consisting of volunteer USFQ students who make sure you integrate with the other exchange students and get to know some of the Ecuadorians as well; they host big parties (this is definitely a reason why some of them sign up), organise trips around the country and other activities to help you experience Ecuadorian customs.

#### Phone:

The university provides you with a phone SIM card which gives you . I bought a cheap 'brick' phone to use the SIM with as my phone was locked to my English network and it worked out cheaper to just buy the phone, but I would recommend using it in your smartphone if you can. Among the middle-class quiteños smartphones are very common, though I wouldn't recommend bringing your new iPhone with you. I took my 5S and as I said, had no problems, but the newer models only really exist among the rich students at the university (who either live in Cumbayá or have cars to drive to university so generally don't need to get public transport), so they make you an obvious target.

#### Packing:

Quito is at an altitude of about 2800m, so despite being on the equator and the sun being very strong during the day, it can get pretty cold at night time. It is sunny during the day most of the time but every now and then there will be ridiculous thunderstorms, so you need clothes for any weather possibility really. In Quito I would say that skirts on the shorter side and shorts (even men's long shorts) are extremely uncommon; you are likely to draw more attention to yourself and look like a tourist if you wear these, although Ecuadorian girls at the university were more likely to wear short skirts than normal women in the city. So still bring your favourite clothes if you don't mind a few more people looking at you on the bus or in the street; I wish I had brought more of my normal clothes as I was expecting to have to conceal my personality to fit in, but realised I would have been fine in my usual outfits. Just don't wear extremely revealing tops!

Also think about what travelling you want to do; if you want to hike in the mountains you need fleeces, woolly hats, gloves, good walking shoes, waterproofs etc., and on the coast and in the rainforest it is boiling hot and it is more normal to wear very little clothing. I would also recommend insect spray!

## Mexico

Mexico is an amazing country with some of the world's best food and friendliest people. It has a wonderfully rich mixture of urban highs and cultural mixtures. However students should also be aware that issues of class, race and gender need to be treated carefully; and that the impact of the ongoing drugs trade to the US has been an increase in violence, especially in Mexico City and the north of the country. That said, the area around which UNAM is based in Mexico City is generally safe and student-focussed.

## UNAM

### Applying

When Study Abroad told us that the online application process was open for UNAM, we were only given a week to complete our applications. Bearing in mind the tight deadline, you could start getting together the documents you'll need before you have to apply.

You will need:

- "Carta compromiso de estudios"
- A personal statement of about a page detailing your motives for studying at UNAM
- References in support of your application from two academic members of staff in Spanish and English
- A transcript of your results from King's and this information translated into Spanish.

### General information

Terms at UNAM are a bit longer than they are in the UK, the summer term begins at the start of August. It finishes in December and then the second term runs from January until June.

UNAM is very involved in Mexico's current affairs and politics, and it can be exciting to be at the centre of the action. The Faculties of Filosofia y Letras and Estudios Latinoamericanos where you'll probably study are proactive, and radical at times. Classes might be interrupted, for example, since October 2014 a lot of faculties have closed to protest the mass kidnapping in Iguala. Some big protests can be dangerous and as a foreign student, you are not legally allowed to participate in protests and you could risk deportation. **Whatever you do, steer clear of all these demonstrations.** If you do this, it is safe to be there.

The years are split into semesters and third year classes correspond to the sixth and seventh semesters. You'll need to pass 3 classes a term, and assessment varies. You might have to do presentations, essays, a project or an exam. The marking system is out of 10, a mark of 6 is a pass. It was hard to adapt to timings at UNAM, if you arrive on the dot you might find yourself waiting around for fifteen minutes until the other students turn up, or even the lecturer.

## Picking classes

There are so many classes to choose from at UNAM and King's will want you to study something associated with your degree. We took a range of literature, language, history, art-based, and cultural modules.

The great thing is that you will be thrown into classes with normal students, there aren't any special classes for foreigners unless you go to CEPE, which you won't have any need to do unless you'd like to study another language to complement your studies (rates are discounted or fees don't apply for UNAM students). It can be daunting at first, and teachers and modules are hit and miss. You will be able to sign up for numerous modules, or just go along and try them in the first weeks, then drop them according to which ones you liked or disliked. You are only able to do this in a set window of time, though, so make sure you go and see the **Secretaría Adjunta de Servicios Escolares before the deadline.**

**It's hard to recommend classes as everyone's tastes vary, but I found 'Literatura Iberoamericana' with Prof. Ignacio Díaz Ruiz really enjoyable, and it attracted quite a few foreign students which made for a great atmosphere. México y América Latina with Prof. Javier Gámez Chávez was also interesting; the reading was heavy but worth it. Dr Camacho's classes carry a warning for prejudice against foreign students.**

## Visas

Everyone who enters Mexico will have to fill in an FMM migration form on the plane to declare the purpose of their visit. The immigration officer will stamp the FMM card when you get there and those who are studying for under six months need to hold on to this card which is valid for 180 days.

If you are planning to study in Mexico for more than six months you will have to get your temporary student visa printed in your passport at the Mexican Consulate in London at least a month before you arrive in Mexico – the earlier the better though, more than one student experienced difficulties at the embassy which held up the process.

For this you will need to make an appointment at the Mexican consulate, at the Embassy on St George Street in London. A lot of the relevant information is listed on their website:

<http://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/reinounido/>

You will need to apply in person at the Consular Section during their opening hours (Monday-Friday, 9am-1pm).

The requirements for a Temporary Resident Student Visa (Residente Temporal Estudiante) are as follows:

- A valid passport (It will need to have enough time left to last up to 3 months after you intend to leave Mexico) and photocopy of the pages where the personal details and holder's photograph are found.
- A Visa application form which you will find on their website.
- One UK size passport photograph (in colour, with the face clearly visible without glasses, white background and be taken within the last month).
- Payment of consular fees in cash (they will ask you for this when you get there – my fee was £23.57 and they asked for exact change!)
- Your original confirmation letter from UNAM (make a copy for yourself)
- You will need to prove you can fund your studies, housing and needs during your stay. You can find exact details this on the website, but it involves either your student

finance documents or a letter from your parents indicating their sponsorship along with proof of their financial solvency.

This is a single entry Visa and will allow you to enter the country to exchange it for a Temporary Resident Student Card at the immigration office within 30 days of your arrival. The temporary resident student card will be valid for one year and multiple entries and exits. Unfortunately, the process of exchanging our FMMs and single-entry Visas for the Temporary Resident Student Card proved to be a thankless task. Be prepared to have to stand in a lot of long queues and arrive early (before 9am to start queueing if your Visa is being handled at the main office). You can always explore Polanco once you're finished! You might be able to spend less time and get less stressed out by this process if you bring all the things you will need for the first couple of stages when you make your first trip. These are:

- Your passport and a photocopy, and another form of identification (driving licence for example)
- Your FMM and a photocopy of it (make numerous copies as you'll need one for UNAM too)
- Three photographs "tamaño infantil" which is 2.5x3cm (you might need to get these taken in Mexico)
- Your student finance documents or other proof of financial solvency

Additionally, we can get hold of the 'basic form' for you to look at, which is the first thing you will have to fill in, though you may be required to fill this in at the office in Mexico City.

Before you go

### **Flights**

UNAM tends to tell students whether they have been accepted pretty late. This can cause a few worries with regards to booking your flights. I chose to bite the bullet and booked my flight in April, before I'd heard that I'd been accepted. In hindsight, I don't think there's any sort of holdup which would stop you being able to study at UNAM that couldn't be sorted out before the start of term.

When I booked I decided just to get a one-way ticket, not knowing whether I'd make it back for Christmas. Some friends booked returns or flexible return tickets where you adjust your flight back. A return flight can set you back around £800, and on my way there I had a transfer in Atlanta (if this happens you'll need to get an ESTA form from the US government). However, in December 2013 Aeroméxico opened a new direct route between Mexico City and Heathrow, which was much better.

### **Luggage**

When I left for Mexico I imagined I'd be boiling hot all the time, and packed a lot of summer clothes. This isn't a problem and they will come in handy if you get the chance to travel, but Mexico City itself is very changeable. As it's in a basin and at a high altitude, it maintains a cool climate. When I arrived in July, it was warm but very rainy (it rained even heavier than in London) and in winter it gets cool at night-time and in the mornings.

Female students may be made uncomfortable by unwanted attention on the streets. I found this difficult at first, as it was warm I tended to wear what I'd wear in summer in the UK, but

you'll quickly realise that people (men and women) wear jeans and t-shirts all year round. You'll attract attention by being foreign, but what you wear can contribute. Mexicans tend only to wear shorts at the beach and most women dress comparatively conservatively. Of course, it's not nice to have to change how you like to dress and over time you get used to people looking at you anyway!

In general, when you're packing it's good to consider how much you'll have to carry around, and you will be able to buy clothes when you've arrived if you need to. It's a good idea to take some home comforts too – it's hard to get a decent cup of tea!

## **Insurance and health**

Before your year abroad you'll need to buy travel health insurance, as you will have to confirm with UNAM that you have coverage.

I bought my insurance at <https://www.yearabroadinsurance.com/> though I can't comment on their service as I was lucky enough not to fall ill while I was away (aside from illnesses incurred from dodgy tacos).

Year abroad policies often cover your possessions, legal fees and emergency repatriation. It can seem like a lot of money to pay but medical costs can be expensive if something happens. You may want to check policy documents to see if they will still cover you if you leave the country to travel or go home during your year abroad.

When you arrive in Mexico City it may take you a while to adjust to the climate and food. Altitude sickness was a problem for some of us (the capital sits at an altitude of 7,350 ft) so don't plan anything too strenuous for your first weeks. It might also be best to avoid street food that may not be subject to the same hygiene standards as the food back home.

You won't be able to drink the tap water in Mexico, so you will need to buy bottled water and avoid drinks and ice that may have been made with tap water. Most apartments have large water-coolers which are delivered to the building.

If you fall ill it's worth noting that many pharmacies, such as Farmacia Benavides, have doctors who you can see without an appointment for the equivalent to £2 or so.

## Arriving in Mexico

### **Taxis at the airport**

Once you have touched down at the airport and found the exit, it's advisable to find authorised transport to your next destination. There are lots of red and gold taxis which pull up outside arrivals, but for a first taxi journey in the city it's worth paying extra for the authorised airport transport. You'll be able to find a variety of stalls inside the terminal at which you pay, and are given a receipt to take to the relevant taxi bay.

### **Money**

Some of us tried to forward plan and open Mexican bank accounts with HSBC before we arrived, but in the end this didn't prove to be worthwhile. You will probably end up spending hours filling in forms at home, to get to Mexico and learn your account hasn't been opened!

So, your other option is to open one when you get there, which isn't actually difficult. The only problem is that you will need your Student Resident Card and documents which have arrived at the place you are living (strangely it doesn't matter whether these are addressed to you or not). You probably won't have your Student Resident Card within a month of getting to Mexico, it could drag on as long as two.

Make sure you have a bank card which you can use abroad. Naturally, you will run up pretty hefty charges (an ATM withdrawal fee and 10% charge on cash for my HSBC account) but you may be able to minimise the number of times you take out cash in the time running up to having an account. It's probably best if you take some pesos too (enough for a few weeks or a month if you're worried about your bank card working).

### **Mobile Phones**

If you have a smart phone with a removable SIM card you might be able to use it by putting in a Mexican one, alternatively you could just use it in areas where there's WiFi. Other than that, you can get cheap phones from Telcel shops, or stalls at the market. Setting them up is easy.

### Finding somewhere to live

#### **The first weeks**

Finding somewhere to live was quite stressful, but exciting too. You might want to book an airport hotel for your first night in Mexico, especially if you arrive in the evening. That way you won't have to worry about negotiating the city when you're tired after getting off your long flight.

Most of us chose to stay in a hostel while we found our feet and looked for places to live. *Hostal Cuija Coyoacan, for example, is a friendly, relaxed hostel in Coyoacán – a pretty, and safe, colonial part of the city, also near to UNAM. I chose to stay here as it was an area I wanted to explore for permanent living, so if you have a different place in mind you might like to choose a hostel in another area. Saying that, it's a lovely place to stay for sightseeing and it's well connected by metro.*

### **Apartments**

Places to live can vary in price greatly, but it is unlikely you'll pay more than £300 monthly for a room in a shared house, and most rooms will be much cheaper. Lots of UNAM students tend to live in Copilco, which is right next to the university. Coyoacán is close and a bit more expensive but it is a well-heeled and leafy area with lots of bars, coffee shops and restaurants. Some friends lived a bit further out, in Roma, Condesa (or nearby Escandón) which are nice. Your choice will probably depend on how much commuting you want to do to get to class. Santo Domingo and Tepito are areas we were warned to avoid.

### Tec de Monterrey in Querétaro

#### **Querétaro, México – A student experience**

- A great place to experience Mexico from within a protected environment as the university is so attentive to the needs of foreign students. Everyone knew my name. There are always trips planned albeit these are sometimes not worth it in my

experience so choose wisely. A good environment to make local friends and an excellent location to explore the rest of Mexico from. Amazing facilities with so many extra-curricular activities that we would have to pay for here. The town is quaint and small with a few museums, one theatre and not many clubs / bars but lots of places to have a relaxed drink. The university is a private one and has many wealthy students. Things can quickly add up when you need to take taxis nearly everywhere, and eating on campus is expensive and most people live in large houses.

- The need for taxis and relative lack of freedom frustrates some students. The taxis that run from Tec (the nickname for the university) are safe and can be called. Do not trust other students at night to be safe, as they often drink-drive and the boys have been brought up in a different culture. In general, a woman will have to get accustomed to constant attention whilst walking which can be uncomfortable. As long as you are careful and don't seem lost / vulnerable you will be fine. Do not get into any skirmishes with the police. The machista culture is apparent everywhere you go: but at Tec they are doing their best to educate people and counter it.
- The university offers all these trips and activities but there is a distinct focus on students only there for a semester. If you plan on spending the whole year in Mexico, make sure you are aware of the repetition and maybe do an internship for the second semester as there are not many classes within the Humanities that are appropriate for us. There are so many rules and regulations that appear completely unnecessary but it is because they are trying to foster an earnest learning environment. Try not to let it bother you too much but be aware of the extremely strict attendance rules that will limit your exploration / leisurely time to practise Spanish.
- The work level is different to King's. The work seems far more prescriptive which can be frustrating. There is a focus on group work and PowerPoint presentations and often facile assignments. Bear in mind that you are there to practise your Spanish and that your focus is different to other students whose aim is not to be fluent so do not get the balance right and do not spend your entire time in the library, not interacting with anyone.
- The option to live with a family was about 50% successful in my opinion. Many people ended up unhappy with excessively miserly 'parents.' Do not feel scared to speak out – I changed within a few days and ended up with a wonderful family who included me in their family gatherings and who I spoke to all the time and now consider my second family. You are paying quite a lot in relative terms so you should not feel uncomfortable or as if you are paying for things that are in the contract. You can always go and talk to the accommodation staff who are always there to help albeit you may have to emphasise your point so they realise that action is necessary. Private renting options seem good and cheaper but I would make sure you will still be speaking Spanish so arrive early to mingle. Public transport is pretty much non-existent so if you live in the centre of town you probably will be taking taxis at about £2 - £3 per trip.
- Make sure you try everything! You will get used to the food and it is delicious; the rest of Latin America raves about it. Looking back I had a wonderful experience and made friends for life but it was not always easy by any means.

## Peru:

### General:

Peru is an incredible country to visit but even better when you have the opportunity to live there and I could not recommend it enough. As a whole, the country has so much to offer from Machu Picchu (which is so much more incredible than any Instagram picture will portray), there is the Amazon Jungle; you can visit either Iquitos (there are cheap jungle tours in this area and are great fun!) or Puerto Maldonado, as well as the amazing ocean and the desert too! Naturally, there are some important things to be aware of, most of which have already been mentioned in the other city guides, but as a general rule, be aware of your surroundings and have your wits about you.

Another thing that has previously been mentioned is that you need to understand that you are no longer in London, things do not work in the same way and although this may be frustrating at the start, it's easier to just relax and try to work around it instead of getting frustrated about it. If you can, I would suggest going to Lima for the second semester as the term starts in March and you can extend your trip by a few months after the semester is over to travel more and explore other countries in South America! I was there for 6 months in total and it really was the best time of my life. Also, it's a good idea to start saving money so that you can take every opportunity that comes your way and really enjoy your time. Also, just a note- it may seem that there a lot of negative notes in this city guide, but these are just things that I would have found very helpful to know before I moved to Lima, but which I found out as I went along.

### Lima:

- **Recommended areas to live:** Jesus María- this is the neighbourhood where the university is located (if you can find accommodation near to the university-which is very likely- it will make your life a lot easier for when your lessons start), Miraflores (most people initially choose to live in this area because you're right by the ocean and this is where most of the nightlife is, but here the property is more expensive, and because of the crazy traffic in Lima it could take you more than an hour to get to university sometimes)
- **Public transport:** there is not metro unfortunately so getting around Lima is a bit more difficult, however there are buses and micro-buses too. You do need to be very careful when you're on them (I had friends who had their watches/phones etc stolen when they were on the buses and they had no idea until they were off the bus). Luckily there is Uber in Lima and it is much cheaper than other cities such as in Europe, as well as other apps such as Taxi Beat and Easy Taxi. There are also street taxis but be very careful, these really aren't that safe and a lot of the times the drivers can be drunk/not in a fit state to drive the car which can be very dangerous so the taxi apps are more recommend- lots of Peruvians use the taxi apps as well! (Also if you lose something in the taxi- Uber is a lot more reliable). One annoying thing however, is that a lot of drivers might start a journey without picking you up so as to get the money without doing the work, or they might just cancel on you (just make sure to get your money refunded on the app)
- **General safety:** unfortunately, like many places, it's not really safe to be out by yourself at night (especially if you're a girl), but if you have other students going to Pacífico in your accommodation, you will probably find that you will be going out to bars/clubs with them and even shopping too. One tip is that if you want to go to the supermarket to do some shopping in the evening, ask your housemates if anyone else needs to go; that way, you can bond but also

feel a bit safer. In terms of theft, just don't flash your valuables around and when you are in a taxi, try to cover your phone with your bag and don't have the window open- it's easy for someone passing by/driving by on a motorbike to just reach in and grab it.

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- **Shopping:** when going food shopping you will probably be asked 'boleta o factura' - referring to how you want to pay for your shopping- just say 'boleta' which means that you are paying for your items instead of on behalf of a company. Another thing is that the cashier will normally ask you for your ID number which every Peruvian gives when they do their shopping- whenever I went I would just say that I was foreign and that I didn't have one which always seemed to work, however if for some reason they are persistent you can just give them your ID number. Peru seems to not really care about how much plastic they use (it can be quite shocking) so if you do want to use your own bag to pack your shopping, be aware that you may get some strange looks as people rarely do that! Make sure you keep your receipt as well, as the security guards will usually check it on your way out.
- **Visa:** you will have been in contact with the office at Pacífico to organise your visa but you also have to go to the Peruvian Embassy in London to sort it out- make sure you give yourself enough time to do this, as it can be a long wait (it's a little taster of what it will be like in Peru!) Also, double check all of the information on your visa once you receive it (my date of birth was put as 1966 by mistake, so it's always a good idea to check in advance so they can fix it before you leave). When you get to the university for your welcome/introduction meeting, you will be asked how long your visa is for and from there you can arrange to extend it (for some reason some countries gave people visas for only a few months whereas other countries gave people visas for the whole time they were going to be abroad)
- **Money:** naturally when it comes to money you don't want to be getting fees all of the time from your bank at home. I would recommend a card like Revolut, it's free to sign up and basically works like a debit card- you link it with your bank, top up however much you want and you don't have to pay exchange fees. It's also great because if you lose your card or if it gets stolen you can easily cancel it and order another one. (If you're going to use this method, organise your card before you go to Peru as they don't have it set up there yet- you need a UK address for them to send you your first card, but they can send you replacements to Peru). I would recommend having a backup option just in case, the Revolut card works with an app and you can't always count on technology 100% of the time. Another thing to mention is that some of the ATM's will charge you to take money out, ScotiaBank doesn't and there are a few others as well. It will tell you before you choose to take any money out, so unless you really have to, just choose another ATM. There is a mini ScotiaBank inside the university and also a few different bank ATM's as well to choose from. Don't try to carry too much money with you, but always have something on you (as a general piece of advice, not specific to Peru, but if someone wants to rob you and you have nothing to give them, then you are more likely to get injured as a result- so basically have some 'mugging money' on you just in case).
- **Health:** Obviously your EHIC card won't work in Peru, so make sure that you use the King's Insurance and have the details somewhere easily accessible in your room in case something happens or you get ill. You can't drink the tap water, but you're not exactly going to wash all of your fruits and vegetables with bottled water, so you might have a bit of a dodgy stomach for a week or so as your body gets used to it, but after that you should be fine (just still only drink bottled water). Hospital stays and even simple check-ups are expensive in Peru and you will have to pay these fees upfront before your insurance can sort it out. If you do go in your second semester, be aware that March is the end of summer in Peru and it can be super hot, so you know the drill. (Don't make the mistake I did when I tried to go to supermarket and got lost for 4 hours with no sun cream on in 35° weather- it didn't end well)
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- **Technology:** it's worth bringing a back-up phone or two with you, and if you have one of the latest smart phones, really consider whether it's worth bringing, especially if you're going to be constantly worrying about it (thus bringing more attention to yourself). Also, there are no official Apple stores in Peru, but there are recommended resellers, so if you have any problem go there; it may be more expensive but if there is an issue with your Apple device and you take it somewhere else and something happens to it, Apple can't do anything about it. Make sure you have good travel insurance as well as for your devices. Another thing is that a lot of the times the voltage messed up a few tech items for my housemates and I, so just be aware.
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- **Phone/Sim Card:** there are a few on the market- Claro and Movistar are among the most popular- you have to go to the specific Claro or Movistar shop to set it up but you can always get someone to help you- either your buddy at Pacífico or your landlord. Claro seemed more value for money in terms of internet data. You can top up your credit it at any supermarket and most petrol stations.
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- **Flights:** luckily there is now a direct flight from London to Lima which is about 12h40m, but obviously this can be an expensive option- there are also connecting flights via Amsterdam/Paris/Madrid which will reduce the costs so there is an option for everyone. I would suggest booking the flights as early as possible to get the cheapest deals you can. Also, if you're not sure what you want to do after the university finishes and you don't want to come home straight away, you can always book your return flight for a few months afterwards and see what you decide to do. I ended up going to Bolivia for two weeks and travelling around Peru some more! As for flights during your time in South America- they are cheap if you book them in advance but don't get caught out by the fact that there are two prices sometimes- a cheaper price for the Peruvians and more expensive for tourists. But there are also coaches that you can get to different near-ish places outside of Lima (but if your bus is leaving from La Victoria coach station- stay inside the station- it's a very rough neighbourhood)
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- **Upon arrival:** make sure you organise a transfer from the airport to your accommodation and talk to whoever will be collecting you. Most will send you a picture of what they look like and where they will wait for you as well as having a sign of your name. You may have to queue for a while after collecting your luggage as they often have to scan the suitcases, but some of the time they just let you through so just pay attention to what is happening. When you come out after the scanning part, there will be a huge crowd of people and a million and one taxi drivers shouting out 'Taxi!!!' 'Taxi!!' and it can be very overwhelming. Just try to find your transfer and they will help with the rest. Depending on where you are staying, transfers can sometimes be quite expensive, but if you are going to Jesus Maria you really shouldn't pay more than 50 soles.

#### Universidad del Pacífico:

- **Accommodation:** The university is super helpful with suggesting accommodation and the options they provide usually mean that you will end up living with other students that are also going to the same university. I would say this is quite important, especially because you will be living with these people and spending a lot of time with them, so it's nice to have a good base of people who you can go to the events with and who can provide some emotional support if/when you need it (we all have bad days). There aren't really halls type accommodations, they are more like student houses, where occasionally there will be a live-in housekeeper or at least one that comes to the house most days. There were a few houses that sort of had host families but the people I spoke to that lived in this type of accommodation still felt that they had a lot of

freedom. Don't panic if you don't like the place where you are living, you can always move- you can either contact the university and in particular the office that you've been in contact with for organising everything so far, or your buddy as well (I'll come to this in a bit). Make sure before you find a place that it's within your budget as you don't want the majority of your money to be going on your rent and then as a result not be able to go out at all. As mentioned above, if you live in Jesus Maria it will be cheaper, it'll be quicker to get to the university and means you won't spend money on getting an Uber to class (because let's be real, you're not going to be bothered to get up early to get the bus only to be squashed and uncomfortable for like an hour, especially during summer).

- **Buddy system:** Having a buddy is so helpful and even you don't really get on with the buddy you have been assigned, the actual system itself is so useful. I definitely didn't want a buddy because I thought it would be unnecessary and awkward, but the university had loads of icebreaker activities and a huge welcome party so that all the buddies and foreign students could get together and make friends. This is also really helpful because although for some classes you might have a few other international students, as you'll have to take all of your classes in Spanish, there probably won't be that many (there were only really a handful of students that could speak Spanish well, most others studied Business or Finance at their home universities). This means that if you interact with the other buddies, you will feel more confident in lessons if they have the same ones as you, especially as they will give you some advice about the teachers/grading etc. Your buddy will also help you when you have to choose your courses- there will be a day when you will do it at the university and they will be there to help. Honestly, the buddies were ridiculously helpful and especially when you felt like you had a silly question to ask or weren't sure of something, they were never judgmental and always there for you. The parties that hosted were also amazing, in great locations and super organised!
- **Facebook group:** as mentioned above, the Buddy system is super helpful in meeting new people, Peruvian students as well as students from all over the world that will be in the same boat as you. There will be a Facebook group created for all international students that will be doing the same semester as you. This is a great tool to meet and chat to other people, maybe try and find someone to live with and get to know the organisers of the buddy system. Another great thing is that they can give you advice on what courses to take- which ones are the easiest/have the nicest teachers- and they can answer any other questions you might have.
- **Lessons/teachers:** personally, I hardly had any homework to do during my semester, which was great but at the same time I felt quite bad for some of my housemates who were working every night. Obviously, the workload will differ per person and what their university requires that they study, so luckily for Spanish you can choose any course that is similar to what you study- the literature classes are interesting and the teachers are very understanding that you are an international student- sometimes they even use this to their advantage to try and get your opinion on things. The way the credits convert really works in our favour as well, I only had to take three courses which also meant that I had more time to travel around Peru. Even in the introduction meeting, the welcome 'committee' encourage you to plan your timetable in such a way as to give yourself as much free time as possible.

Overall, Peru is the most amazing and beautiful place in the world and I really hope you go and study there. It honestly felt like a 6-month holiday because it was so relaxing, I saw so many incredible things and made long-lasting friendships. If you are nervous or anxious about travelling so far away from home, just know that there are so many people in exactly the same position as you, but try not to let it affect your choice. South America is a completely different world and even though I was tempted to take the easy option and just go to Spain, I really challenged myself and decided to go to Peru. I learned so much about myself and other people and I really think it's a country that not enough people visit. There is so much more to it than Machu Picchu and llamas (although they are

amazing too!). The food, the people, the culture and the landscapes are just incredible. I miss it so much and it really is the experience of a lifetime. When else are you going to have the opportunity to say that you lived in South America?