

Alexandra Lauffer

**Spanish 197B Mexico Immersion Experience: May 20, 2007 - June 10, 2007
Travelogue**

Trip Overview

The trip was amazing. We flew out on individually scheduled flights on Sunday, May 20 and arrived in Mexico City either that morning or afternoon depending on our flight. We took a chartered bus through Pullman, a bus company, to Cuernavaca from Mexico City. We were in Cuernavaca the entire first week and started our classes at Cemenahuac Language Institute right away on Monday, May 21.

During the first week, we had the opportunity to attend speakers at the school and tour Cuernavaca. The Secretary of Agriculture for the state of Morelos in Mexico visited and spoke to our group about the main crops produced in Morelos and in Mexico as well as some of the practices and improving technology. On another night, a staff member at the school gave a demonstration involving the cultural significance of corn in Meso America. We had the chance to not only listen and learn but also try some of the techniques and taste various foods that contained corn. The director at the school, Charlie, took us on a tour of downtown Cuernavaca to see the churches, botanical gardens, and other public buildings. Charlie would serve as our tour guide for nearly every tour we took through Cemenahuac.

On the first Saturday, we visited Mexico City to see the ruins of the original temples and view other public buildings such as the National Palace, Fine Arts Building, and a cathedral on the main square. On Sunday we traveled to Teotihuacan, where the Aztec pyramids to the sun and moon are located. All of us had the chance to climb the pyramids/temples. I was able to climb most of them but I did not make it all the way to the top of the Pyramid of the Sun. The steps were very crowded and steep in some places and that just did not mix very well with my fear of heights.

The second full week was also spent in Cuernavaca where we continued our classes and took some agricultural field trips in the afternoons. We visited locations such as: Avigrupo, a poultry operation that includes hatchery and grow out facilities, agricultural university fields, and Floramundo a green house and research center with extensive and beautiful acreage. We left classes early on Wednesday to go on a tour to Xochicalco that was sponsored and led by the school. We saw a man made observatory in a cave as well as ancient temples and ball courts.

We left for Mexico City Saturday morning. We had a tour of the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City and moved our belongings into the Hotel Gillow later in the afternoon/early evening. We stayed overnight as a group and had the morning free in Mexico City. A few of us went to the Folklore Ballet and it was very impressive. The ballet includes a dance derived from each of the states in Mexico and is complete with festive music and costumes. It did not fit the traditional definition of ballet but was very well choreographed and there was not a single boring moment.

We traveled to Buena Vista de Cuellar in the afternoon and met our host families for the following week at the school. We once again attended classes the entire week and continued agricultural visits to various rural locations for cheese making, rabbit breeding, fighting cocks, tomato greenhouses, other greenhouses, mango orchards, sugarcane and corn fields, tannery, and slaughter market as well as having the chance

to participate in the specialty classes offered in Buena Vista. We could go to people's homes or meet at the school for a large variety of activities. I participated in dance classes, leather work (I made a belt), embroidery classes, and a cooking class. Other options included guitar lessons, a singing night, horseback riding, and medicinal plants. Thursday afternoon most of our group went to Taxco, known for beautiful silver, and spent a day for sightseeing and shopping. The school hosted a social Thursday night and we were able to spend a great deal of time with individuals in the community on a social level. It often felt like being part of a town-wide family.

Once again, Saturday morning consisted of a trip to Mexico City and we had the weekend to spend until the time of departure for each of our flights on Sunday. Both of the overnight stays in Mexico City were at Hotel Gillow. On the final night of our trip, we went out to a nice dinner as a group and bid farewell to one another before heading home at various times the following day.

Best Part of the Experience

The best part of the trip was absolutely the people. I got to know classmates from Penn State very well and the families and teachers in Cuernavaca and Buena Vista. I learned so much from them and really got to appreciate the culture they have in Mexico as well as practice my Spanish with the very patient families I lived with. The worst part was very similar to what is usually the least fun here, while I learned a lot in the classes, it wasn't always fun to sit there from 9am-1pm every weekday. Since the "worst" part wasn't all that bad, I'd consider this to be a very successful trip for me.

What I Learned

I don't even know how to put what I learned into words. For one, I learned a lot of Spanish, but I also learned how to understand another group of people in a new way and how to appreciate all of their contributions. The trip part of the class taught me about international travel and how much I can accomplish on my own when I put my mind to it. It was a wonderful growing experience for me and I learned a lot about myself.

In the pictures: Cathedral in Cuernavaca, Me working on a belt, Our group at the poultry growout operation, the cathedral and town in Taxco

