The Mexico Student Teaching program is offered by The School of Education (SoE) and International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with Costa Verde International School (CVIS) in Sayulita, Mexico. This IAP Program Handbook supplements handbooks or materials you receive from the UW-Madison School of Education as well as the IAP Study Abroad Handbook and provides you with the most up-to-date information and advice available at the time of printing. Changes may occur before your departure or while you are abroad.

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Contact Information

ON-SITE PROGRAM INFORMATION

Your primary contacts will be:
Kathy Nicoletti
Supervisor
School Phone: 329-291-3355
Cell Phone: 322-140-4051
Email: kathy@colegiocostaverde.com

Other Contact
Tamra Koch, President, Board of Directors, CVIS
Cell Phone: 322 120 6846

School Address*
Av. Revolucion #3
Sayulita Nayarit
Mexico

*There is no surface mail in Sayulita.

All phone numbers are shown as you would dial them locally. To call from the US, dial 011-52- before any of the numbers.

UW-MADISON INFORMATION

International Academic Programs (IAP)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
106 Red Gym, 716 Langdon St.
Madison, WI 53706
Tel: 608-265-6329, Fax: 608-262-6998
Web: www.studyabroad.wisc.edu

Program Liaison:
Kate Hamoonga
IAP Study Abroad Advisor
Phone: 608-265-6296
hamoonga@studyabroad.wisc.edu

Student Teaching Advisor:
Margaret Hawkins
Professor, Dept of Curriculum & Instruction
Home: (608) 233-7742
Cell: (608) 333-4173
mhawkins@education.wisc.edu
EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION
In case of an emergency, call the main IAP number (608) 265 6329 between 7:45 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday; after-hours or on weekends call the IAP staff on call at (608) 516 9440. Student calling the US from Mexico must first dial 001, then the number (do not put ‘1’ in front of the area code).

Mexico Emergency Number: If there is an emergency while students are in Mexico, call Kathy Nicoletti. Should you not be able to reach her, call Tamra Koch (numbers provided above).

EMBASSY REGISTRATION
All program participants who are U.S. citizens must register at the U.S. Embassy before departure as this will help in case of a lost passport or other mishap. You can register on-line at https://travelregistration.state.gov. If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country’s embassy or consulate.
American Embassy
Paseo de la Reforma 305
Col. Cuauhtemoc
Mexico City 06500
Mexico

Phone: 011-52-55-5080-2000
Email: acsmexicocity@state.gov
Website: http://mexico.usembassy.gov/

US STATE DEPARTMENT – MEXICO TRAVEL WARNING
Please review this document at the end of the handbook or at the following web link. More tips on safety and security can be found in the safety section of this handbook as well.
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_5815.html

Stay up to date:
• U.S. State Department website which contains the current travel warnings and travel alerts, as well as the worldwide caution. http://travel.state.gov/
• Follow the U.S. State Department on Twitter and Facebook:
  https://twitter.com/travelgov
  https://www.facebook.com/travelgov
• Download the free Smart Travel iPhone App to have information at your fingertips.
Take time before you travel to improve your personal security. Here are some useful tips for traveling safely abroad provided by the U.S. State Department.
Program Dates

**Fall 2013**
- 8/29: arrive Puerto Vallarta
- 8/30: Orientation
- 9/2 – 11/1: Student teaching placement
- 11/2: leave Puerto Vallarta

Preparation Before Leaving

**IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS**

**Passport:** A passport is needed to travel to Mexico. Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website [http://travel.state.gov/passport/](http://travel.state.gov/passport/). If you already have your passport, make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad. You will not be admitted into the country if you do not have this 6-month requirement met.

**Visa:** US citizens traveling to Mexico must obtain a tourist card, also known as an FMM, available at the airport when you arrive. The fee for the tourist card is generally included in the price of a plane ticket for travelers arriving by air. U.S. citizens fill out the FMM form; Mexican immigration retains the larger portion and the traveler is given the smaller right-hand portion. This FMM is normally white, blue, and green in color. It is extremely important to keep this form in a safe location; if you lose it, you will be charged $150 fine upon departure. Travelers should always carry a photocopy of their passport data page and FMM. Upon exiting the country U.S. citizens are required to turn in this form. Travelers who lose their FMM can be significantly delayed and possibly fined upon departure.

If you are not a US citizen, please speak with your Study Abroad Advisor for advice on entry requirements.

**HANDLING MONEY ABROAD**

In Mexico, the national currency is the Mexican peso (MXN). As of 04/16/2013, the exchange rate was $1 USD to $12 MXN. Most common bills come in denominations of 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500. They come in a range of hues, including purple, blue and yellow. Coins come in values of 1, 2, 5 and 10 pesos. Cents, or “centavos,” are worth very little. The same symbol ($) is used to designated prices, but this will always designate the price in pesos, never dollars, in Mexico.

**ATM/Debit cards:** You can exchange your local currency into pesos at airports or money exchange locations, but you will either be charged a fee or will pay an unfavorable exchange rate. You can also withdraw cash from foreign bank accounts from ATMs in Mexico, but you will likely be charged ATM fees, international withdraw fees and currency exchange fees. You should check with your bank/credit union if your ATM card will function properly in Mexico, identify the maximum amount you can withdraw in a day or one week, and learn about any withdrawal fees you may incur. Also, consider taking an extra ATM card in case your card gets demagnetized, lost, or taken by the bank machine. Vigilance should be exercised when withdrawing money from ATMs due to the risk of ATM fraud, which
has been reported in the last 14 months in Sayulita. Your supervisor in Sayulita, Kathy, can advise you as to which ATMs are safe.

**Credit cards:** Credit cards are widely accepted at hotels and lodges and with tourism companies, but not widely accepted at local stores and restaurants. Credit card fraud is a growing concern in Mexico. You should never allow your credit card out of sight and should carefully watch any transactions made. It is advisable to retain a copy of the transaction slip.

**PACKING**

- Important documents (passport, emergency contact information, insurance card, ATM card, money, etc.) should be in your carry-on luggage. Also, make sure that you make a copy of important documents (including a photo copy of the info page of your passport) and leave them with a friend or family member back home to access in the case of an emergency.
- Take enough prescription medication to last the duration of the program including malaria prophylaxis. Keep prescription medication in their original packaging and carry a letter/prescription from your doctor explaining your condition and use of medication. Prescriptions should be packed in your carry-on luggage. Take other first aid/health supplies such as gauze, band-aids, disinfectant cream, Advil, Pepto, etc. that you will want—there are pharmacies, but they are not likely to have brands you are familiar with.
- Clothes (skirts/dresses below the knee for women, shorts/pants. Girls: wear skirts or dresses while teaching at the school. For teaching dress work casual, but no cut-offs, flip-flops, etc.)
- Light fleece or sweater
- Sandals or comfortable walking shoes
- Flip flops for the house (not at school)
- Hiking shoes or boots and socks if you plan to hike
- Rain jacket- lightweight as the rain comes during the hot season
- Extra umbrellas – more than one—during the rainy season – July-October
- Swimsuit – not a bad idea to bring an extra one and swimsuit cover
- Water drinking bottle
- Small bag for day/weekend trips
- Sunblock, hat and sunglasses for protection from harmful effects of UV sun rays.
- Antibacterial hand wipes or alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol
- Flashlight and batteries
- One towel and one beach towel
- Laptop Computer
- Camera
- Teaching supplies you may want (markers, tape, glue, flash cards, construction paper, red, black and blue pens, etc.)
- Supplies for the school and students, such as: wall pockets, white board markers, stickers, books, classroom games and supplies.
- Gifts for teachers and other hosts

**Electronics**

Mexico’s electricity system is the same as that of the USA: 120 V; 60 Hz. Any electrical equipment you carry with you that operates at the higher (240v) rate will need to be dual-voltage (e.g. hair dryers). A lot of electrical equipment (like video cameras, digital cameras, laptops) that operate on 12 volts via a product-specific adaptor will happily cope with dual voltage—check the adaptor and the device instructions to be sure.
Travel and Arrival

Participants on this program make their own flight arrangements to fly into Mexico, to the Puerto Vallarta Airport. Kathy will come to pick you up, but you will need to travel together as a group. There are no approved alternatives to the Puerto Vallarta airport.

ON SITE ORIENTATION

Upon arrival in Mexico, Kathy will lead an orientation that will include an overview of the education system of Mexico, roles and responsibilities of student participants at CVIS, health and safety issues, and comprehensive information about living in Mexico (public transportation, political and cultural conditions, housing, money matters). Other CVIS faculty or staff may also assist with the orientation.

The Academic Program

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

Sayulita is the crown jewel in the newly designated "Riviera Nayarit", the coastal corridor from Litibu to San Blas, 45 minutes north of Puerto Vallarta. It is a prosperous growing village of approximately 4,000 residents. With a growing ecological awareness and stricter zoning enforcement, development is being regulated to help safeguard the environment and quality of life of the community. The town offers visitors and residents incredible beaches, lush jungles and a taste of rural Mexico. Sayulita has two medical offices, a number of pharmacies, reputable health clinics nearby, several internet cafes, and a wide variety of open-air eateries—some right on the sand beach.

Costa Verde International School (CVIS) is an ecological, community-oriented, multicultural and bilingual private school located in Sayulita, Nayarit, Mexico. Incorporating the natural beauty and dynamic culture of the local area, CVIS provides an intellectually stimulating curriculum for preschool through 8th grade with small class sizes and hands on instruction to inspire healthy, happy and well-adjusted life-long learners. Currently there are 106 students in grades K-8; classrooms are comprised of both native Spanish-speaking and native English-speaking children. There is one classroom per grade level. CVIS anticipates a student population of 140 for the 2013-2014 school year and will add a 9th grade.

THE STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

Students will work at the school full-time (5 days per week) in several classrooms. You will be expected to follow the national curriculum; however, there is significant flexibility in pedagogical approaches. You are expected to engage in teaching and learning in ways that are responsive to the local environment, culture, school, community and students. You will learn from what you observe and experience, and the teachers at the school will learn (about new pedagogical approaches and tools) from you.

As is the case for all student teaching, there will be a local supervisor, Dr. Kathy Nicoletti. Dr. Nicoletti is the Director of the school, and earned her Ph.D. from UW-Madison. Dr. Nicoletti will conduct a minimum of three observations during the student teaching experience, including a pre-observation discussion on the lesson plan and a post-observation discussion for feedback and analysis.
The school day is from 7:30 am – 3:30 pm. You are expected to be present at the school during school hours except in case of illness or emergency. In such a case you should contact Dr. Nicoletti.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE AND EXPECTATIONS

While being in this community, you may stand out as a foreigner or you may be mistaken for a surfer or a tourist, here for a short beach vacation. Your purpose and role within the Sayulita community will not be known upon first glance, but during your stay in the community, you will have the opportunity to build your reputation. Your colleagues, students and community members will likely be aware of what you do both in and out of school. In Mexico, you represent not only yourselves, but UW as well. And in Sayulita you represent both UW and CVIS. Your actions reflect on us all. For these reasons, please adhere to the following program expectations to protect your wellbeing and safety, as well as the UW relationship with CVIS and the community.

1. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
2. Recognize that your successful experience is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
3. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
4. Recognize that you will be perceived, at CVIS and in your host community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of UW-Madison
5. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, and mutual learning and respect
6. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others

(Adapted from the Peace Corps 10 Core Expectations)

JOURNAL/BLOG

In order to pass your student teaching course, you must keep a journal or blog of your teaching and learning during the international experience. You may blog about whatever aspects of your experience you like, but you must include reflections on the educational aspect (your teaching and learning at CVIS). Remember that there may be many people reading your blog (professors, staff and administrators here at the University, as well as parents, friends, and even prospective UW student teachers!).

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

You are expected to become involved in the local communities in which your school is located. Involvement may include participating in local community and social events, but should also include efforts to understand (and perhaps build) linkages between local schools and communities, and to understand and increase linkages between families and schools, in ways that promote partnerships that support children’s educations. At least one experience or effort to be involved in the community should be documented in your journals/blogs each week. The following are some suggestions of ways to be involved, but this is in no way meant to be an exhaustive list. Your own skills and interests will determine the types of activities that you choose to pursue:

1. Visit the home of one of your teachers, meet his/her family and have a discussion about the differences between Mexican and US culture (food, dress, gender roles, family life, work life, etc.)
2. Attend a local church
3. Conduct a home visit to see where and how students live, and to get to know their families.
4. Take advantage of the school staff, parents and other you meet, and ask them to show you local places and sites.
5. Ask Kathy to introduce you to other educators, and to people in the community.
6. Soccer, or football as it is known in Mexico, is something students and parents (both male and female) play in their spare time. There are a number of teams with both Mexican and non-Mexicans. If you’d like to play, the teams would love to have you. Or, if you don’t want to play, you are most welcome to attend games and practices.

ABSENCES
You are expected to be present and fully engaged for each day of the orientation and teaching. In the case of sickness, you must notify Kathy. You should not miss school for any reason other than sickness.

REFLECTIVE PAPER/PROJECT
Upon return, you will be responsible for producing a reflective paper/project on the experience, and your own teaching and learning. The format for this can be creative, but it should include a reflective narrative on, or excerpts from, the journal entries, and artifacts should be woven in (such as samples of student work, photos, lesson plans, etc.). Questions to be considered in preparation: What is culture? How is it related to teaching and learning? How are teaching and learning different in my international site than in U.S. classrooms? What have I learned? What did I contribute? What are implications for my future practice?

REGISTRATION AND CREDIT
For the semester in which you are student teaching, you should web-enroll for 7 credits (the 2 credit student teaching seminar and 5 credits of Elementary Student Teaching) For your study abroad experience, IAP will enroll you for 5 placeholder credits that will be replaced by 5 credits of International Student Teaching (C&I 460) after successful completion of the placement in Mexico.

GRADING
You will be graded Pass/Fail for this program. To pass, you must successfully complete all of the requirements listed above, have consistently good attendance in your placement site, and show evidence of thoughtful engagement in practice and reflection.

Living Abroad

MEXICO
Mexico is a large country and geographically diverse. The majority of the country is mountainous, including the Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range in the east, Sierra Madre Oriental in the west, and the Sierra Volcanica Transversal just south of Mexico City. The eastern coast along the Gulf of Mexico is lowlands. Rainfall is relatively scarce throughout most of the country, with the primary rainy season being May through October and the dry season being the rest of the year.

Sayulita is located on West Coast, on the Pacific Ocean. It is approximately 40 minutes north of Puerto Vallarta. The climate in Sayulita is tropical. There is a rainy season that begins in July and is over in October. During the rainy season, it typically rains a few hours a day, usually at night or in the morning.
Average temperatures range from 80 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit, with the higher temperatures during the rainy season.

Sayulita has a population of about 4,000 people, a mixture of American, Canadian and Mexican people. Many in the expat community live in Sayulita November through April. This time is considered the high season with many tourists arriving for shorter stays during these months.

While you can find an assortment of different food, (e.g. Italian, American, Thai) Mexican food dominates. Traditional Mexican food is not quite the same as what you find in Mexican restaurants in the United States. Maize or flour tortillas are the staple food for the majority of Mexicans and can be purchased on almost any street corner.

Mexico is predominantly Christian: 89% of the population is Roman Catholic and 6% are Protestant. The remaining 5% practice other religions or are not affiliated with a religion. The Spanish introduced Catholicism during the colonial period. Although most indigenous Mexicans are Catholic, many combine Catholic practices with their native beliefs. Mexico has the second largest Catholic population in the world, behind Brazil.

HOUSING IN SAYULITA

Students will stay in an apartment or small house within walking distance of the school. They will have facilities for cooking, shared bedrooms (with another program participant), and a bathroom. It is walking distance to the center of town and to CVIS and you will be able to attend to your daily needs easily. Students are able to prepare their own food in the house, or eat out in a local restaurant if/when they desire. Note that it is not safe to drink tap water. Houses will have bottled water in large containers known as garafons. This is the only water you should drink. When out, always ask for bottled water.

In Mexico, water is heated by small gas-burning water heaters. The water heaters are turned on just before showering, so there is not a constant supply of hot water like there is in the United States. If you want a warm shower, a “calentador” (heater) usually needs to be turned on. It usually takes 5-10 minutes to heat enough water for a warm shower. Water is in short supply and very expensive in Mexico. Keep this in mind, and keep your showers short!

Used toilet paper and Kleenex are to be disposed of in wastebaskets, not in toilets. Pipes are very narrow and cannot handle paper products.

Wifi is available where you are staying and at school.

HEALTH

All students should visit a travel health clinic to obtain all necessary immunizations and prophylactic medication at least one month prior to travel. Students should consult the Center for Disease Control and their physician to determine other vaccinations and/ or other health precautions they need to take after acceptance to the program.

Health Tips
- Do not drink or brush your teeth with water that is not purified. Ask if you are not sure where the water came from. Keep your mouth closed in the shower. Do not be misled by well-meaning reassurances to the contrary.
• Do not eat food or drink beverages sold on the streets or use ice in drinks (unless made from purified water). In good restaurants it is usually okay. Be careful of raw fruits or vegetables that are not peeled (tomatoes, lettuce, pears, etc). A product known as Microdyn is used to clean all fruit and vegetables. If there is no Microdyn in the house, it can be purchased very cheaply at the local grocery store. If you do not wash your fruit and vegetables with Microdyn, be sure to peel it.

There are two doctors in Sayulita. If you have a problem, the school will assist you in getting an appointment with one of these doctors. There is a small hospital close by. Larger private hospitals catering to non-Mexicans can be found in Puerto Vallarta. There are also a number of homeopathic clinics in town.

SAFETY

Overall, Mexico is rated as a high-risk destination due to a number of security concerns. Although some of these threats extend to Sayulita, the town does not exhibit the same risk profile as other areas of the country. Please read this information carefully and let your Study Abroad Advisor know if you have questions.

Sayulita, which is located in Bahia de Banderas municipality, has not been directly affected by drug cartel conflict and there have been no recent significant incidents of drug cartel-related violence in the municipality since 2010. However, the lack of any recent incidents is not an indication of the absence of drug cartels; in fact, it is assumed that there is a drug cartel presence in Bahia de Banderas. It is more likely a factor of the presence of one dominant group, as opposed to several competing organizations.

Terrorism in Sayulita and surrounding areas is limited to the small-scale threat posed by drug cartel-related terrorism (known as narco-terrorism). Protests tend to be limited to Nayarit’s capital, Tepic, and rarely take place in Sayulita.

Crime

The main risk facing travelers to Sayulita is that of crime. The moderate threat has been made evident by a recent increase in the number of incidents of both petty and violent crime in the town. These have mainly included house breakings and muggings, but armed robberies have also been reported.

You should always leave valuables and irreplaceable items in a safe place, or avoid bringing them at all. Avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing, and carry only the cash or credit cards that will be needed on each outing. Public transportation is a particularly popular place for pickpockets.

Demonstrations

You should avoid political demonstrations and other activities that might be deemed political by the Mexican authorities. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence. Demonstrators in Mexico may block traffic on roads, including major arteries, or take control of toll booths on highways. You are urged to avoid areas of demonstrations, and to exercise caution if in the vicinity of any protests.

Personal Safety

You should be aware of your surroundings at all times, even when in areas generally considered safe. Women traveling alone are especially vulnerable and should exercise caution, particularly at night. Be very cautious in general when using ATMs in Mexico. If you must use an ATM, it should be accessed only
during the business day at large protected facilities (preferably inside commercial establishments, rather than at glass-enclosed, highly visible ATMs on streets).

**Transportation**
You can get anywhere in Sayulita on foot. If you do wish to take a taxi, you can find taxis right near CVIS and around the plaza in town. Buses leave Sayulita every 20 minutes for Puerto Vallarta and other destinations. Buses are relatively inexpensive.

**Natural Hazards**
Mexico experiences a hurricane season between June to November. Local authorities, which are generally well prepared for approaching storms, issue warnings and implement emergency procedures ahead of time. However, should a tropical storm affect or make landfall in the region during your stay, flooding in low-lying areas, landslides in mountainous regions and coastal storm surges are possible. Disruptions to air, maritime, road and rail transport, as well as to utilities (water and electricity), should be expected.

**Travelers tips**
- Be cautious of the belongings that you carry, especially in crowded areas such as buses and in marketplaces where you may be vulnerable to pickpockets.
- When walking on sidewalks carry your belongings (purses, shopping bags, etc.) on the side of your body furthest from the street; this prevents your belongings from being snatched while someone drives by.
- Look both ways before crossing any street; pedestrians do not have the right of way and cars do not slow down in crosswalks.
- In the evenings, stay on well-lit streets and walk in pairs whenever possible.
- Avoid walking alone at night or with unknown people.
- Only carry the amount of money you need with you; leave credit cards, debit cards, additional cash, traveler’s checks, etc. in your apartment.
- Photocopy your passport and tourist card and carry these copies with you at all times for identification. Keep originals at your apartment.
- If you are mugged give the mugger your possessions; do not resist.

**TRAVEL**
You are strongly discouraged to travel to areas both in the country and in the surrounding areas that the U.S. State Department has designated as hazardous or has advised against travel. This includes travel to Jalisco, Durango and Sinaloa (which all border Nayarit). This advisory extends to the states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, Michoacan, Guerrero and Veracruz.

Generally, cross-country travel in Mexico poses an elevated risk to foreign nationals as rural areas often contain organised crime elements and members of drug trafficking organisations. The presence of military checkpoints, as well as roadblocks established by criminal groups and cartels, cannot be ruled out; assaults against these types of checkpoints are regularly reported and often result in casualties. It should be noted though that there have been no recent incidents of violence recorded in the Bahia de Banderas municipality and the area is less susceptible to violent disruptions than other parts of the country.
Travel to other areas during the program should be limited to holidays and weekends. You must inform Kathy of your travel plans before traveling. Whenever possible, you should travel by bus only during daylight hours and only in first-class.

COMMUNICATION

Telephone: While the region in general is not on central time, Sayulita is. Therefore, there is no time difference between Sayulita and Madison. To make an international call to the United States, dial 00 plus the United States country code (always “1”) followed by the appropriate U.S. area code and local number.

*For example, to call IAP, you would dial: 00 1 608 265 6329

To call Mexico from the United States, dial 011, 52 (the country code for Mexico), and the phone number, minus the initial zero. Some of steps can vary if you are using a calling card.

*For example, to call CVIS from the U.S., you would dial: 011 52-329-291355

If you are calling a cell phone within Mexico, you must use the cell phone’s prefix, which is often 044: 044 + city code (329 for Sayulita) + cell phone number. Also, if you are calling long distance within Mexico, you must dial 01 first: 01 + city code + telephone number. When calling local numbers, you can omit the city code and just dial the 7-digit number.

Telcel is the largest cell phone provider in Mexico and dominates the cell phone market. Since there is still not much competition, prices for cell phone service are fairly high. Most people in Mexico have pre-paid or pay-as-you-go cell phone plans. With pay-as-you-go, you can add money/minutes to your phone as you use them. In Mexico, sending text messages, or SMS messages, is more common than making phone calls with your cell phone since it is cheaper. Telcel users can send text messages from a computer for free. If you choose to get a cell phone and use Telcel as a provider, your friends and family in the U.S. can go to Telcel’s homepage and send you messages from there for free.

Internet: There is an internet café in Sayulita and in most towns in Mexico. The house where you are staying has Wifi as does the school.

Mail: There is no surface mail in Sayulita.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

International Academic Programs (IAP) at UW-Madison:
www.studyabroad.wisc.edu

General Orientation Information:
http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/index.html
(includes topics such as culture shock, international travel, etc.)

U.S. State Department:
http://travel.state.gov/

U.S. State Department Students Abroad site:
http://studentsabroad.state.gov/

Center for Disease Control:
www.cdc.gov/travel/

Current Exchange Rates:
www.x-rates.com
US DEPARTMENT OF STATE TRAVEL WARNING - MEXICO

NOVEMBER 20, 2012

The Department of State has issued this Travel Warning to inform U.S. citizens about the security situation in Mexico. General information on the overall security situation is provided immediately below. For information on security conditions in specific regions of Mexico, which can vary, travelers should reference the state-by-state assessments further below.

This Travel Warning supersedes the Travel Warning for Mexico dated February 8, 2012 to consolidate and update information about the security situation and to advise the public of additional restrictions on the travel of U.S. government (USG) personnel.

GENERAL CONDITIONS:

Millions of U.S. citizens safely visit Mexico each year for study, tourism, and business, including more than 150,000 who cross the border every day. The Mexican government makes a considerable effort to protect U.S. citizens and other visitors to major tourist destinations, and there is no evidence that Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) have targeted U.S. visitors and residents based on their nationality. Resort areas and tourist destinations in Mexico generally do not see the levels of drug-related violence and crime reported in the border region and in areas along major trafficking routes.

Nevertheless, U.S. travelers should be aware that the Mexican government has been engaged in an extensive effort to counter TCOs which engage in narcotics trafficking and other unlawful activities throughout Mexico. The TCOs themselves are engaged in a violent struggle to control drug trafficking routes and other criminal activity. As a result, crime and violence are serious problems throughout the country and can occur anywhere. U.S. citizens have fallen victim to TCO activity, including homicide, gun battles, kidnapping, carjacking and highway robbery.

According to the statistics last published by the Mexican government in late 2011, 47,515 people were killed in narcotics-related violence in Mexico between December 1, 2006 and September 30, 2011, with 12,903 narcotics-related homicides in the first nine months of 2011 alone. While most of those killed in narcotics-related violence have been members of TCOs, innocent persons have also been killed.

The number of U.S. citizens reported to the Department of State as murdered under all circumstances in Mexico was 113 in 2011 and 32 in the first six months of 2012.

Gun battles between rival TCOs or with Mexican authorities have taken place in towns and cities in many parts of Mexico, especially in the border region. Gun battles have occurred in broad daylight on streets and in other public venues, such as restaurants and clubs. During some of these incidents, U.S. citizens have been trapped and temporarily prevented from leaving the area. TCOs use stolen cars and trucks to create roadblocks on major thoroughfares, preventing the military and police from responding to criminal activity. The location and timing of future armed engagements is unpredictable. We recommend that you defer travel to the areas indicated in this Travel Warning and to exercise extreme caution when traveling throughout the northern border region.

The number of kidnappings and disappearances throughout Mexico is of particular concern. Both local and expatriate communities have been victimized. In addition, local police have been implicated in some of these incidents. We strongly advise you to lower your profile and avoid displaying any evidence of wealth that might draw attention.
Carjacking and highway robbery are serious problems in many parts of the border region and U.S. citizens have been murdered in such incidents. Most victims who complied with carjackers at these checkpoints have reported that they were not physically harmed. Carjackers have shot at vehicles that fail to stop at checkpoints. Incidents have occurred during the day and at night, and carjackers have used a variety of techniques, including bumping/moving vehicles to force them to stop and running vehicles off the road at high speeds. There are some indications that criminals have particularly targeted newer and larger vehicles, especially dark-colored SUVs. However, victims driving a variety of vehicles, from late model SUVs to old sedans have also been targeted. While violent incidents have occurred at all hours of the day and night on both modern toll ("cuotas") highways and on secondary roads, they have occurred most frequently at night and on isolated roads. To reduce risk, if absolutely necessary to travel by road, we strongly urge you to travel between cities throughout Mexico only during daylight hours, to avoid isolated roads, and to use toll roads whenever possible. The Mexican government has deployed federal police and military personnel throughout the country as part of its efforts to combat the TCOs. U.S. citizens traveling on Mexican roads and highways may encounter government checkpoints, which are often staffed by military personnel or law enforcement personnel. TCOs have erected their own unauthorized checkpoints, and killed or abducted motorists who have failed to stop at them. You should cooperate at all checkpoints.

Effective July 15, 2010, the U.S. Mission in Mexico imposed restrictions on U.S. government employees' travel. U.S. government employees and their families are not permitted to drive for personal reasons from the U.S.-Mexico border to or from the interior of Mexico or Central America. Personal travel by vehicle is permitted between Hermosillo and Nogales but is restricted to daylight hours and the Highway 15 toll road (cuota).

U.S. government (USG) personnel (U.S. citizens working at the Embassy and nine consulates) and their families are prohibited from personal travel to all areas described as “defer non-essential travel” and when travel for official purposes is essential it is conducted with extensive security precautions. USG personnel and their families are allowed to travel for personal reasons to the areas where no advisory is in effect or where the advisory is to exercise caution. While the general public is not forbidden from visiting places described as “defer non-essential travel,” USG personnel will not be able to respond quickly to an emergency situation in those areas due to security precautions that must be taken to travel to those areas.

For more information on road safety and crime along Mexico's roadways, see the Department of State's Country Specific Information.

STATE-BY-STATE ASSESSMENT:

Below is a state-by-state assessment of security conditions throughout Mexico divided into northern and southern regions. The accompanying map will help in identifying individual locations. Travelers should be mindful that even if no advisories are in effect for a given state, crime and violence can occur anywhere. For general information about travel conditions in Mexico, see our Country Specific Information.

Northern Mexico

Baja California (north): Tijuana and Mexicali are major cities/travel destinations in the state of Baja California - You should exercise caution in the northern state of Baja California, particularly at night. For the one-year period ending July 2012, the number of murders in Mexicali increased by 43%, from 127 to 181, over the preceding year. The number of murders in the city of Tijuana was 351 for the same period. In the majority of these cases, the killings appeared to be related to narcotics trafficking.
Targeted TCO assassinations continue to take place in Baja California. Turf battles between criminal groups resulted in assassinations in areas of Tijuana frequented by U.S. citizens. Shooting incidents, in which innocent bystanders have been injured, have occurred during daylight hours. Twenty-five U.S. citizens were the victims of homicide in the state in the 12-month period ending July 2012.

**Baja California (South): Cabo San Lucas and La Paz are major cities/travel destinations in the state of Southern Baja California** - No advisory is in effect.

**Chihuahua: Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua City are major cities/travel destinations in Chihuahua** - You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Chihuahua. The situation in the state of Chihuahua, specifically Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua City, is of special concern. The Mexican government reports that 1,933 people were killed in Ciudad Juarez in 2011, down from 3,100 in 2010. Although there has been a further decline in homicides in 2012, Ciudad Juarez still has one of the highest homicide rates in Mexico. Chihuahua City has seen an increase in violent crime in previous years. From the United States, other areas in the state of Chihuahua are often reached through the Columbus, NM, and the Fabens and Fort Hancock, TX, ports-of-entry which also experience high levels of violence. In these areas, U.S. citizens have been victims of narcotics-related violence. There have been incidents of narcotics-related violence in the vicinity of the Copper Canyon in Chihuahua.

**Coahuila: You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Coahuila.** The State of Coahuila continues to experience high rates of violent crimes and narcotics-related murders. TCOs continue to compete for territory and coveted border crossings to the United States. In September 2012, more than 100 prisoners escaped from a prison in Piedras Negras. The majority of these prisoners are known or suspected to be connected with TCO activity and believed involved in a series of violent incidents since the escape. The cities of Torreón and Saltillo have seen an increase of violent crimes, including murder, kidnapping, and armed carjacking. USG personnel may not frequent casinos, sportsbooks, or other gambling establishments and adult entertainment establishments.

**Durango: You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Durango.** Between 2010 and 2011, the number of homicides in the State of Durango increased by 122%. Several areas in the state continue to experience high rates of violence and remained volatile and unpredictable. USG personnel may not frequent casinos, sportsbooks, or other gambling establishments and adult entertainment establishments.

**Nuevo Leon: Monterrey is a major city/travel destination in Nuevo Leon** - You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Nuevo Leon, except the metropolitan area of Monterrey where you should exercise caution. The level of violence and insecurity in Monterrey remained high. Sporadic gun battles and attacks on casinos and adult entertainment establishments continue, as do placements of “narco banners” on bridges. TCOs have kidnapped and in some cases murdered American citizens, even when ransom demands are met. TCOs continue to attack local government facilities, prisons and police stations, and engaged in public shootouts with the military and between themselves. TCOs have used vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices against military and law enforcement units as well as incendiary devices against several types of businesses. Pedestrians and innocent bystanders have been killed in these incidents. Local police and private patrols have limited capacity to deter criminal elements or respond effectively to security incidents. As a result of a Department of State assessment of the overall security situation, the Consulate General in Monterrey is a partially unaccompanied post with no minor dependents of USG personnel permitted. USG personnel serving at the U.S. Consulate General in Monterrey may not frequent casinos, sportsbooks, or other gambling establishments and may not travel outside the San Pedro Garza Garcia municipal boundaries between midnight and 6 a.m.
San Luis Potosi: You should defer non-essential travel to the state of San Luis Potosi, except the city of San Luis Potosi where you should exercise caution. The entire stretch of highway 57D in San Luis Potosi and portions of the state east of highway 57D towards Tamaulipas are particularly dangerous. A U.S. government employee was killed and another wounded when they were attacked in their U.S. government vehicle on Highway 57 near Santa Maria del Rio in 2011. Cartel violence and highway lawlessness are a continuing security concern. USG personnel may not frequent casinos, sportsbooks, or other gambling establishments and adult entertainment establishments. USG personnel may not travel outside the City of San Luis Potosi after dark and must abide by a curfew of midnight to 6 a.m.

Sinaloa: Mazatlan is a major city/travel destination in Sinaloa - You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Sinaloa except the city of Mazatlan where you should exercise caution particularly late at night and in the early morning. One of Mexico's most powerful TCOs is based in the state of Sinaloa. With the exception of Ciudad Juarez, since 2006 more homicides have occurred in the state's capital city of Culiacan than in any other city in Mexico. Travel off the toll roads in remote areas of Sinaloa is especially dangerous and should be avoided. We recommend that any other travel in Mazatlan be limited to Zona Dorada and the historic town center, as well as direct routes to/from these locations and the airport.

Sonora: Nogales, Puerto Peñasco, Hermosillo, and San Carlos are major cities/travel destinations in Sonora -see attached map to identify their exact locations: You should defer non-essential travel between the city of Nogales and the cities of Sonoyta and Caborca (which area also includes the smaller cities of Saric, Tubutama, and Altar), defer non-essential travel to the eastern edge of the State of Sonora which borders the State of Chihuahua (all points along that border east of the northern city of Agua Prieta and the southern town of Alamos), defer non-essential travel within the state south of the city of Ciudad Obregon with the exception of travel to Alamos (traveling only during daylight hours and using only the Highway 15 toll road, aka cuota, and Sonora State Road 162). You should exercise caution when visiting the coastal town of Puerto Peñasco. There is no recommendation against travel to San Carlos. Sonora is a key region in the international drug and human trafficking trades, and can be extremely dangerous for travelers. The region west of Nogales, east of Sonoyta, and from Caborca north, including the towns of Saric, Tubutama and Altar, and the eastern edge of Sonora bordering Chihuahua, are known centers of illegal activity. U.S. citizens in Puerto Peñasco are encouraged to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to bolster their personal security following a July 2012 mid-day gun battle between TCO members and increases in reported robberies and assaults against U.S. citizens. Additionally U.S. citizens visiting Puerto Peñasco are urged to use the Lukeville, Arizona/Sonoyta, Sonora border crossing, in order to limit driving through Mexico. Travelers throughout Sonora are encouraged to limit travel to main roads during daylight hours.

Tamaulipas: Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Tampico are major cities/travel destinations in Tamaulipas - You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Tamaulipas. All USG employees are prohibited from personal travel on Tamaulipas highways outside of Matamoros, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo due to the risks posed by armed robbery and carjacking. USG employees may not frequent casinos and adult entertainment establishments within these cities; and in Matamoros are subject to a midnight to 6 a.m. curfew. Nuevo Laredo has seen an increase in the number of grenade attacks within the past year, particularly against night clubs within city limits. In June 2012, a small car bomb exploded in front of the Nuevo Laredo city hall. Both Matamoros and Ciudad Victoria have experienced grenade attacks in the past year. All travelers should be aware of the risks posed by armed robbery and carjacking on state highways throughout Tamaulipas, particularly on highways and roads outside of urban areas along the northern border. Traveling outside of cities after dark is particularly dangerous. In August 2012 an American family was forced off the road, resulting in one death and several injuries, in an apparent robbery attempt soon after crossing the bridge from Texas into Nuevo Laredo. While no
highway routes through Tamaulipas are considered safe, many of the crimes reported to the U.S. Consulate General in Matamoros have taken place along the Matamoros-Tampico highway, particularly around San Fernando and the area north of Tampico.

**Zacatecas:** You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Zacatecas except the city of Zacatecas where you should exercise caution. The regions of the state bordering Durango and Coahuila as well as the cities of Fresnillo and Fresnillo-Sombrete and surrounding area are particularly dangerous. The northwestern portion of the state of Zacatecas has become notably dangerous and insecure. Robberies and carjackings are occurring with increased frequency and both local authorities and residents have reported a surge in observed TCO activity. This area is remote, and local authorities are unable to regularly patrol it or quickly respond to incidents that occur there. Gun battles between criminal groups and authorities occur in the area of the state bordering the state of Jalisco. There have also been reports of roadblocks and false checkpoints on highways between the states of Zacatecas and Jalisco. The city of Fresnillo, the area extending northwest from Fresnillo along Highway 45 (Fresnillo-Sombrete) between Highways 44 and 49, and highway 49 northwards from Fresnillo through Durango and in to Chihuahua are considered dangerous. Extreme caution should be taken when traveling in the remainder of the state. USG personnel may not frequent casinos, sportsbooks, or other gambling establishments and adult entertainment establishments. USG personnel may not travel outside the City of Zacatecas after dark and must abide by a curfew of midnight to 6 a.m. within a secured venue.

**Southern Mexico**

**Aguascalientes:** You should defer non-essential travel to the areas of the state that border the state of Zacatecas. The security situation along the Zacatecas border continues to be unstable and gun battles between criminal groups and authorities occur. Concerns include roadblocks placed by individuals posing as police or military personnel and recent gun battles between rival TCOs involving automatic weapons.

**Campeche:** No advisory is in effect.

**Chiapas:** San Cristobal de las Casas is a major city/travel destination in Chiapas - No advisory is in effect.

**Colima:** Manzanillo is a major city/travel destination in Colima - You should defer non-essential travel to the areas of the state of Colima that border the state of Michoacán. There is no recommendation against travel to Manzanillo. You should also exercise caution when traveling at night outside of cities in the remaining portions of the state. The security situation along the Michoacán border continues to be unstable and gun battles between criminal groups and authorities occur. Concerns include roadblocks placed by individuals posing as police or military personnel and recent gun battles between rival TCOs involving automatic weapons.

**Estado de Mexico:** Toluca is a major city/travel destination in Estado de Mexico - You should exercise caution in the municipalities of Coacalco, Ecatepec, Nezahualcoyotl, La Paz, Valle del Chalco Solidaridad, Chalco, and Ixtapaluca, which are eastern portions of the greater Mexico City metropolitan area, located just to the east of the Federal District of Mexico and Benito Juarez airport. These areas have seen high rates of crime and insecurity. In September 2012, the Government of Mexico sent military and federal police forces into the Municipality of Nezahualcoyotl in an effort to combat organized crime.

**Guanajuato:** San Miguel de Allende and Leon are major cities/travel destinations in Guanajuato - No advisory is in effect.
**Guerrero:** Acapulco, Ixtapa, Zihuatanejo and Taxco are major cities/travel destinations in Guerrero - You should defer non-essential travel to the northwestern and southern portions of the state (the area west and south of the town of Arcelia on the border with Estado de Mexico in the north and the town of Tlapa near the border with Oaxaca), except for the cities of Acapulco, Zihuatanejo, and Ixtapa. In those cities, you should exercise caution and stay within tourist areas. You should also exercise caution and travel only during daylight hours on highway 95D (cuota/toll road) between Mexico City and Acapulco and highway 200 between Acapulco and Zihuatanejo/Ixtapa. In Acapulco, defer non-essential travel to areas further than 2 blocks inland of the Costera Miguel Aleman Boulevard, which parallels the popular beach areas. In general, the popular tourist area of Diamante, just south of the city, has been less affected by violence. Flying into the coastal cities in southern Guerrero remains the preferred method of travel. You should also exercise caution in the northern region of Guerrero (the area north of the town of Arcelia on the border with Estado de Mexico in the north and the town of Tlapa near the border with Oaxaca). The state of Guerrero has seen an increase in violence among rival criminal organizations. Acapulco's murder rates increased dramatically since 2009; in response, in 2011 the Government of Mexico sent additional military and federal police to the state to assist State security forces in implementing ongoing operation “Guerrero Seguro” (Secure Guerrero) that focuses on combating organized crime and returning security to the environs of popular tourist areas.

**Hidalgo:** No advisory is in effect.

**Jalisco:** Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta are major cities/travel destinations in Jalisco - You should defer non-essential travel to areas of the state that border the states of Michoacán and Zacatecas. You should also exercise caution when traveling at night outside of cities in the remaining portions of this state. There is no recommendation against travel to Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta. There is also no recommendation against travel on principal highways in Jalisco between Guadalajara including the portions that cross in to the southern portions of the state of Nayarit. The security situation along the Michoacán and Zacatecas borders continues to be unstable and gun battles between criminal groups and authorities occur. Concerns include roadblocks placed by individuals posing as police or military personnel and recent gun battles between rival TCOs involving automatic weapons.

**Mexico City (also known as the Federal District):** No advisory is in effect. See also discussion in the section on Estado de Mexico for areas within the greater Mexico City metropolitan area.

**Michoacán:** Morelia is a major city/travel destination in Michoacán -see attached map to identify its exact location: You should defer non-essential travel to the state of Michoacán except the cities of Morelia and Lázaro Cardenas where you should exercise caution. Flying into Morelia and Lázaro Cardenas, or driving to Lázaro Cardenas via highway 200 from Zihuatanejo/Ixtapa, are the recommended methods of travel. Attacks on Mexican government officials, law enforcement and military personnel, and other incidents of TCO-related violence, have occurred throughout Michoacán.

**Morelos:** Cuernavaca is a major city/travel destination in Morelos -see attached map to identify its exact location: You should exercise caution in the state of Morelos due to the unpredictable nature of TCO violence. On August 24, two USG employees were injured after being fired upon by Federal Police officers on an isolated road north of Tres Marias, Morelos. Numerous incidents of narcotics-related violence have also occurred in the city of Cuernavaca, a popular destination for U.S. students.

**Nayarit:** You should defer non-essential travel to all areas of the state of Nayarit north of the city of Tepic as well as to the cities of Tepic and Xalisco. The security situation north of Tepic and in these cities is unstable and travelers could encounter roadblocks or shootouts between rival criminals. There is no recommendation against travel either to Riviera Nayarit in the southern portion of the state or to
principal highways in the southern portion of the state used to travel from Guadalajara to Puerto Vallarta.

**Oaxaca:** Oaxaca, Huatulco and Puerto Escondido are major cities/travel destinations in Oaxaca. No warning is in effect.

**Puebla:** No advisory is in effect.

**Queretaro:** No advisory is in effect.

**Quintana Roo:** Cancun, Cozumel, Playa del Carmen, Riviera Maya and Tulum are major cities/travel destinations in Quintana Roo - see attached map to identify their exact locations. No advisory is in effect.

**Tabasco:** Villahermosa is a major city/travel destination in Tabasco - see attached map to identify its exact location. No advisory is in effect.

**Tlaxcala:** No advisory is in effect.

**Veracruz:** You should exercise caution when traveling in the state of Veracruz. Over the last year, the state of Veracruz has seen an increase in violence among rival criminal organizations. In response, in 2011 the Government of Mexico sent additional military and federal police to the state to assist State security forces in implementing ongoing operation “Veracruz Seguro” (Secure Veracruz) that focuses on combating organized crime.

**Yucatan:** Merida and Chichen Itza are major cities/travel destinations in Yucatan - No advisory is in effect.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

We encourage you to review the U.S. Embassy's Mexico Security Update. The update contains information about recent security incidents in Mexico that could affect the safety of the traveling public. For more detailed information on staying safe in Mexico, please see the State Department's Country Specific Information for Mexico.

For the latest security information, U.S. citizens traveling abroad should regularly monitor the State Department's internet web site, where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Warnings, and Travel Alerts can be found. Follow us on Twitter and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on Facebook as well. Up-to-date information on security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States and Canada or, for callers outside the United States and Canada, a regular toll line at 001-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). U.S. citizens traveling or residing overseas are encouraged to enroll with the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program. For any emergencies involving U.S. citizens in Mexico, please contact the U.S. Embassy or the closest U.S. Consulate (see list below). The numbers provided below for the Embassy and Consulates are available around the clock. The U.S. Embassy is located in Mexico City at Paseo de la Reforma 305, Colonia Cuauhtemoc, telephone from the United States: 011-52-55-5080-2000; telephone within Mexico City: 5080-2000; telephone long distance within Mexico 01-55-5080-2000. U.S. citizens may also contact the Embassy by e-mail.

**CONSULATES (WITH CONSULAR DISTRICTS):**

• Guadalajara (Nayarit, Jalisco, Aguas Calientes, and Colima): Progreso 175, telephone (011)(52)(333) 268-2100.

• Hermosillo (Sinaloa and the southern part of the state of Sonora): Avenida Monterrey 141, telephone (011)(52)(662) 289-3500.

• Matamoros (the southern part of Tamaulipas with the exception of the city of Tampico): Avenida Primera 2002, telephone (011)(52)(868) 812-4402.

• Merida (Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo): Calle 60 no. 338-K x 29 y 31, Col. Alcala Martin, Merida, Yucatan, Mexico 97050, telephone (011)(52)(999) 942-5700 or 202-250-3711 (U.S. number).


• Nogales (the northern part of Sonora): Calle San Jose, Nogales, Sonora, telephone (011)(52)(631) 311-8150.


• Tijuana (Baja California Norte and Baja California Sur): Paseo de Las Culturas s/n Mesa de Otay, telephone (011) (52) (664) 977-2000.

All other Mexican states, the Federal District of Mexico City, and the city of Tampico, Tamaulipas, are part of the Embassy's consular district.

CONSULAR AGENCIES:


• Cancún: Blvd. Kukulcan Km 13 ZH Torre La Europea, Despacho 301 Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico C.P. 77500; telephone (011)(52)(987) 883-0272.

• Cozumel: Plaza Villa Mar en el Centro, Plaza Principal, (Parque Juárez between Melgar and 5th Ave.) 2nd floor, locales #8 and 9, telephone (011)(52)(987) 872-4574 or, 202-459-4661 (a U.S. number).


• Los Cabos: Las Tiendas de Palmilla Local B221, Carretera Transpeninsular Km. 27.5, San José del Cabo, BCS, Mexico 23406 Telephone: (624) 143-3566 Fax: (624) 143-6750.

• Mazatlán: Playa Gaviotas #202, Zona Dorada, telephone (011)(52)(669) 916-5889.


• Piedras Negras: Abasolo #211, Zona Centro, Piedras Negras, Coah., Tel. (011)(52)(878) 782-5586.

• Puerto Vallarta: Paradise Plaza, Paseo de los Cocoteros #1, Local #4, Interior #17, Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit, telephone (011)(52)(322) 222-0069.


• San Miguel de Allende: Centro Comercial La Luciernaga, Libramiento Manuel Zavala (Pepe KBZON), telephone (011)(52)(415) 152-2357.