Mexico

Merida

DESIGN STUDIES

IAP PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Let Your Mind Wander
UW Design Studies in Mexico is offered by International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with the Institute for Study Abroad, Butler University (IFSA-Butler). This IAP Program Handbook supplements handbook(s) or materials you receive from IFSA-Butler 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 contact in Merida will be the UW-Madison Program Leader, Design Studies Professor Roberto Rengel.

Professor Roberto Rengel  
Program Leader  
rjrengel@wisc.edu

The program is administered through the IFSA-Butler Merida Center. The Merida Center staff will also be there to assist you and help you with any issues you may encounter.

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**UW-Madison Information**

International Academic Programs (IAP)  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
106 Red Gym, 716 Langdon St.  
Madison, WI 53706
Emergency Contact Information
In case of an emergency, call the main IAP number (608) 265-6329 between 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; after-hours or on weekends call the IAP staff on call at (608) 516-9440.

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 online for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at https://step.state.gov/step/. If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country’s embassy or consulate.

U.S. Consulate General in Merida
Calle 60 No. 338 K x 29 y 31, Col. Alcalá Martin,
Mérida, Yucatan C.P. 97050
Phone: (52)(999)942-5700; (202)250-3711
Website: http://merida.usconsulate.gov/service.html

Cancun Consular Agency
(An extension of the U.S. Consulate General in Merida)
Blvd. Kukulcan Km 13 ZH, Torre La Europea, Despacho 301
Cancun, Quintana Roo C.P.77500
Phone:(52)(998)883-0272
Fax:(52)(998)883-1373
E-Mail: ConAgencyCancun@state.gov

Program Dates
The program begins in late December and ends in mid-January. Beginning and end dates are:

12/26: Arrival at Cancun International Airport
1/16: Departure from Merida by bus for Cancun International Airport

More information on your program dates is available below, in the “Travel and Arrival” section.

Preparation Before Leaving
Refer to the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for essential information, as well to any materials that IFSA-Butler provides. Be certain to read all of these documents carefully, as they answer many common questions about cultural, academic, and health matters abroad. The IAP Study Abroad Handbook also contains a Pre-Departure Checklist in Appendix B which should prove useful.
**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.

**Visa**
A visa is not required for U.S. citizens for this program. U.S. citizens must have a U.S. passport valid for at least six months beyond the end of the program. Students from other countries should check with the Embassy of Mexico in the United States about whether a visa is required. If you will not be traveling on a U.S. passport, please notify your Study Abroad Advisor.

**Handling Money Abroad**
Plan to rely on a combination of cash from ATMs and credit cards. Visa, MasterCard, and American Express (Cirrus and Plus networks) are widely accepted in Mexico. Contact your bank and credit card companies prior to departure to make sure you will be able to use your debit/credit cards there. Some banks block usage in certain countries because of concerns about fraud.

Also ask your bank if you need a special pin number to withdraw money from ATMs. Most debit cards with four-digit pin numbers work fine in Mexico, but it never hurts to double check. Be aware that most banks and credit card companies charge withdrawal and transaction fees. Contact your bank and credit card companies to see if this applies to you.

**Tipping**
There isn't an established percentage, but 10% is generally the norm when you eat out. People tip almost everything here: the person who pumps your gas, the person who bags the groceries at the supermarket, the parking attendant, the person who delivers food at home, the person who allows you to take your picture with them, etc. A few pesos will suffice.

**Packing**
As you are preparing for your time abroad, please keep in mind that Mérida has a tropical climate. In December and January, it is typical for highs to be in the high 80s and lows to be in the 60s. You can find additional information about average monthly temperatures and precipitation [here](http://example.com).

Do not pack your tickets, passports, travel documents, prescriptions or valuables in your checked luggage. Keep them on your person. Do not put valuables in a backpack.

Pack your carry-on so that you can live out of it for a few days if your luggage gets lost.

Don’t pack more than you can carry on your own.

Airlines have stringent baggage and weight requirements. Do not attempt to exceed the baggage limit. If you do, the airline staff may make you purchase additional luggage and repack in the airport. They may also charge you an extra weight fee.
If losing something would affect your happiness, we suggest you leave it at home.

Leave room in your luggage to bring home souvenirs you acquire in Mexico.

In the Yucatán, you will need clothes suitable for hot, tropical weather. Dark colored clothing doesn’t show dirt or wear as much as lighter colored clothes do. Feel free to adapt the following list to your personal preferences:

- Short-sleeved dress shirts
- A pair of dress pants or skirt
- Casual pants (light cotton is best)
- Short-sleeve casual shirts
- Shorts
- T-shirts
- A light sweater
- A sweatshirt
- A swimsuit
- Waterproof jacket
- Underclothes
- Pajamas
- A pair of sturdy walking shoes
- A pair of sandals or flip flops
- Hygiene kit with basic toiletries
- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Prescription medication
- If you wear contacts, pack a spare set of lenses as well as your glasses

**Electronics**

If you decide to take a laptop, we recommend that you insure it in case it gets damaged or stolen while you are abroad. Ask your parents to check their homeowners’ policy to see if your laptop is covered while abroad. (The same is true for digital cameras, iPods, etc.). Mexico uses the same voltage as the United States, so you will not need a voltage adapter for your laptop. However, you shouldn’t leave your laptop plugged in when not in use, in case there is a power surge.

It may be much simpler for you to get a cell phone in Mexico than to go through the process of unlocking your current phone so that it works outside of the U.S. Please note that many students have reported difficulties using their smartphones to make calls and recommend purchasing a local phone for calls/texts and using the smartphone for internet access when Wi-Fi is available. If you do take your phone, make sure you have it insured.

If you decide to purchase a cell phone in Mexico, you don’t need to sign a contract to get one. Cell phone companies in Mexico work like a prepaid phone service. You purchase the phone (for approximately US $40) and time cards; when you run out of minutes on your card, you just buy a new one with more time. Most of these phones can make and receive international calls and text messages.
The electrical system in Mexico is 110 volts AC (60 cycles), as in the United States and Canada. In reality, however, it may cycle more slowly and overheat your appliances. To compensate, select a medium or low speed on hair dryers. Do not leave laptop computers connected as it could be struck by lightning during electrical storms, which are common in the tropics, and fry it. Many older hotels and homes still have electrical outlets for flat two-prong plugs; you'll need an adapter for any plug with an enlarged end on one prong or with three prongs. Many better hotels have three-hole outlets trifásicos (three-hole outlets). If you need an adapter, talk with the IFSA-Mexico staff so that you can find a place where you can purchase one.

Travel and Arrival Information

12/26: Arrival at Cancun International Airport
12/26: Departure by bus from Cancun
12/27 – 12/30: Valladolid and Izamal
12/31 – 1/15: Merida
1/16: Departure by bus for Cancun International Airport

You are responsible for booking your round-trip travel to and from Mexico. Once you arrive in Cancun, you will join Professor Rengel, IFSA-Butler, and the other students on your program and will leave Cancun together as a group. For the first several days of your program, you will be touring a number of different archaeological sites together and will be moving from place to place. Once you arrive in Merida, it will act as your “home base” until the conclusion of the program. Though you will go on several co-curricular excursions while there, you will return to your lodgings in Merida each evening. You will depart Merida by bus as a group to return to Cancun at the conclusion of the program. A more comprehensive schedule will be provided to you once you are on site.

The Academic Program

General Information
UW Design Studies in Mexico is a collaboration between UW-Madison and IFSA-Butler in Mexico. Professor Rengel leads your program and will teach the course, and IFSA will provide assistance and logistical support. Though you will have some traditional classroom time, you will also be actively learning through excursions to various architectural and archaeological sites.

Course Information
Professor Rengel’s course focuses on the spirit of place. When architects, designers or artists engage with a project in a given place, they strive to understand that place and capture and express its spirit or essence. The focus of Placemaking: The Essence of Place is to learn how to read and interpret the spirit of the Yucatan in Mexico and to use the found qualities and elements to create a language, which then can be used to approach design and other artistic pursuits with the appropriate insight and sensibility. This study abroad program was created for students who enjoy doing creative work, team learning, and have an interest in the study of culture and place.

Students will work individually and in teams as they accumulate impressions, photos, sketches, diagrams, poems and short essays to inform their understanding of the area’s spirit of place and its characteristics. You will then apply this understanding to the creation of a design language
which, in turn, will inform a chosen architectural and/or creative project. At the end of the program, each group will create a visual presentation and share it with the rest of the class.

Registration
IAP will register you for a special “Study Abroad Course” for the term(s) you will be studying abroad; therefore, it is not necessary for you to register on the UW-Madison campus. This is a temporary registration, which will be converted into graded UW-Madison credit after the completion of your program. As UW-Madison has no winter term, your study abroad course will be recorded in your Spring 2016 course list. This will not affect the amount of credits you can take in the spring. If you plan to take over 15 credits in the spring semester, please contact your Enrollment Specialist Advisor for further instructions.

Credits
You will receive 3 credits in Design Studies 545: Placemaking.

Grades and Grade Conversions
The course will be taught by Professor Rengel and graded on the standard UW-Madison grading scale.

Living Abroad
Educate yourself about your host country. Read the Preparing to Live in Another Culture section of the IAP Study Abroad Handbook. Remember- it won't be possible to prepare yourself completely. There will be situations you will not have anticipated and your flexibility will determine in great part the kind of experience you will have while abroad.

Native Cultures in Mexico
Mesoamerica is a term used by scholars to designate people that occupied the area from central Mexico down to Guatemala and Honduras. This region is populated by many different people with their own ethnic origin and linguistic differences and was culturally homogeneous. For instance, they cultivated corn; had a singular structure of government; used the 365 day calendar; built pyramids; performed similar rituals; and worshiped the same gods and goddesses (of the sky, nature, fertility and war). They also shared a similar concept of cosmic duality - the beginning and the end – which is evident in religion and art through all Mesoamerican cultures. The most evident example of this cosmic duality is the god Quetzalcoatl (or Kukulkán in the Mayan area) which is represented as a feathered serpent. While Mexico is composed of many native cultures, six are considered to be the most influential. Each belongs to a different era in the history of ancient Mexico:

1. **The Olmecs**: The Olmecs were Mexico’s first-established culture; they had far-reaching influence. Their culture is quite mysterious, very little is known about their origins and reasons for their decline.
2. **Teotihuacans**: This city/state of Teotihuacán located in the central highland of Mexico covered an area of 22.5 sq. km. with a population that reached 200,000 inhabitants by the year 350 AD (probably the largest city in the world at the time). Being the most highly urbanized center in the New World, its religious, political and economic influence covered almost all the Mesoamerican territory.
3. **The Toltecs:** The Toltecs occupied the northern areas of the Valley of Mexico. Tula, one of Mexico's most impressive ancient cities was built by them. The Toltecs also influenced the Mayan and Aztec cultures.

4. **The Mayans:** Their achievements are noteworthy as they controlled perhaps the largest empire. The Mayans were master architects and engineers, as can be appreciated in the archaeological sites. They also created complex systems of mathematics and astrology. Mayans were skilled traders. Of all the native cultures, they are considered to have been the most influential. It is believed that every other Pre-Columbian culture has been influenced by the Mayans. Descendants of the Mayans today populate mainly the Yucatán Peninsula.

5. **The Zapotec and Mixtec:** The Zapotec and Mixtec cultures occupied what is now the Valley of Oaxaca. They were superlative builders and artists; they created magnificent temples, pottery, and metal work. Remarkably, these two ancient cultures still survive today. Descendants of both ancient Zapotecs and Mixtecs today inhabit the state of Oaxaca.

6. **The Aztecs:** The Aztecs are probably the best known of all Mexico's ancient cultures. The Aztec empire was composed of three Nahua's groups established in the Valley of Mexico with Tenochtitlán (presently Mexico City) as the main city-state. Their vast empire was conquered by the Spanish troops of Hernan Cortes in 1521. Descendants of the Aztecs or Nahuats still reside in Mexico.

**City/Site Specific Information**

Yucatán is part of the Mayan area, which prior to the Spanish Conquest included the Mexican southeast, Guatemala, Belize, part of Honduras and El Salvador. The state of Yucatán is bordered by the Gulf of Mexico, the state of Quintana Roo and the state of Campeche. It has an extension of 38,402 km divided into 106 municipalities. Among the most important cities in the state besides Mérida, are Valladolid, Progreso, Izamal, Tizimín, Motul and Ticul. The economy of the state is centered mainly on agriculture, cattle, beekeeping and tourism. Recently the *maquiladoras* have become major players in the Yucatecan economy, influencing the local economy and ethnic make-up.

Mérida, the capital of the state of Yucatan, with a population of approximately 800,000 people, is the official IFSA-Butler program site. It was founded in 1542 by the Spanish conquistador Francisco de Montejo el Mozo. Modern Mérida is the result of the mixture or “mestizaje” of Spaniards and Mayans that took place over a period of approximately 500 years. Downtown Mérida is full of colonial buildings, such as La Casa de Montejo, which is located at the Plaza Grande, the Cathedral, the oldest to be built in the continent, and several other colonial churches, plazas, markets, and also 19th century mansions. You will also notice that some of the old villages are now part of urban area. Mérida is organized in *colonias*, which are the different neighborhoods spread around the city. The *colonias* located to the north and northeastern parts of the city are the wealthier areas, where mainly middle and upper-middle class families live. These areas are also better served in terms of having the most modern shopping malls, international food franchises, private schools and universities. The south and southwestern colonias are poorer and, unfortunately, not as safe.
Most of the population consider themselves Roman Catholic, with very small percentages of Protestants and other faiths. Therefore, church and religious-related activities play an important role in the social, everyday life of Mérida. The population is rather conservative and homogenous with a social life that revolves more around family than friends.

As the capital of the Yucatan, Mérida offers numerous social, cultural and academic opportunities, which, in combination with the program-sponsored activities, create a wonderfully diverse and attractive site. Mérida’s location will also give you easy access to other cities, small pueblos and villages located within a short drive. For instance, the closest beach to Mérida, the Port of Progreso, is only a half-hour drive away. This is the most important port in the state with an intense domestic and international commercial activity. It is also a tourist attraction, where local Meridanos like to escape to enjoy the wonderful weather and relax, while savoring some fresh fish and seafood. There are also many world-renowned archaeological sites, biological reserves, protected seashores and beautiful resorts, such as Cancún, only a few hours away. We hope that this diversity of cultures, climates and natural resources will give you an extraordinary insight into southeastern Mexico. Take advantage of all these and have an unforgettable experience.

**Housing**

You will share hotel rooms with the other UW-Madison students on this program. In total, you will stay at three separate hotels – one each in Izamal and Valladolid, during the traveling portion of the program, and your “home base” hotel in Merida.

**Transportation**

In Mérida, people drive on the right side of the road. Although traffic is not particularly heavy, one of the first things you will notice is that pedestrians have very few rights and drivers generally do not respect pedestrian crossings. Therefore, when you walk down the street, please exercise caution and do not trust that the incoming traffic will stop to let you cross the street. Additionally, do not walk alone at night and use caution when exploring new neighborhoods.

It is not recommended to rent bikes. Bikers have even fewer rights than pedestrians. Mérida does not have bike-lanes anywhere in the city. If you choose to ride a bicycle, wear a helmet. Also, you will need to purchase and consistently use a sturdy lock.

**Safety**

Mexico is a very large country, where you will find safe, as well as not-so-safe areas. Although Mérida is generally a safe city we recommend that you follow the usual precautions and use your common sense when going into a new situation.

- Do not carry too much cash or valuables on you.
- Be especially cautious when visiting tourist areas. Pick-pocketing and purse-snatching are everyday occurrences.
- Always try to blend in; don’t wear bright or revealing clothing.
- Wear your valuables in a neck-pouch. If you must carry a backpack, wear it on the front.
- Remember that flashy jewelry and cameras are lures for thieves.
• Theft/muggings in Mérida are isolated events. However, should you find yourself in such situation, please give up your personal items; nothing is worth the risk of fighting back and placing your life at risk. Once you are in a safe place, report the theft to the resident director who can assist you with filing a claim with the police.
• Report all incidents of crime to your Program Leader and IFSA-Mexico.

Health
Taking Prescriptions to Mexico
If you will be taking prescription medicines to Mexico, we suggest you have a copy of the prescription and the name of the generic form of the drug, as brand names are different abroad. For Mexico, we recommend you also bring a letter from your doctor (on his or her official letterhead) stating which medications you take and for what reason you take them and that this letter be accompanied by a Spanish translation.

Try to bring enough of your prescription to last for your entire program. The same prescriptions aren’t always available abroad, so you may not be able to get the same medication you are currently taking. This is also true for birth control pills.

If you need a new prescription while abroad (assuming the medicine is available in Mexico), a local doctor will require you to have a checkup before he will be willing to write you a prescription. Pharmacies abroad will not accept prescriptions written in the U.S. Medicines sent from the United States will not make it through customs.

The greatest risk to your health is intestinal bacteria infections that arise from consuming tainted food or drink. Turista is the name given to this discomfort and can be avoided by taken reasonable precautions. Good judgment is essential in these cases:

• Avoid eating food sold at open markets, roadside stands or from street vendors.
• Make sure your meals are well cooked.
• Peel and clean raw fruits and vegetables.
• Always drink bottled water.
• Always wash your hands before handling food.

Mérida is located in the tropics and therefore it is hot. You need to drink plenty of liquids and bottled water to prevent dehydration. Alcohol consumption exacerbates dehydration, so be very careful.

Although common in Mexico, hepatitis and typhoid do not represent a problem in the city or other urban areas, especially if taken basic sanitary precautions listed above. Malaria and dengue fever are extremely rare in the Yucatán, especially in Mérida and cities nearby; both are mosquito-borne illnesses that are easily avoided by the use of a good insect repellent.

Vaccinations
It is recommended that you keep your tetanus, typhoid, and diphtheria vaccinations up-to-date. Please check out the CDC Web site for a current list of any recommended vaccinations and immunizations for Mexico. Make an appointment with your physician to check on any shots you might need. See your doctor at least four to six weeks prior to your departure to give the
immunizations time to take effect. Keep in mind that travel clinic appointments through University Health Services book up quickly.

Communication
To make an international call to the United States, dial the access code for the country from which you are calling plus the United States country code (always “1”) followed by the appropriate U.S. area code and local number. To call internationally from the United States, dial “011”, the country code, city access code (if necessary) and the phone number. Country and city codes can be found online (www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/dialing.html). Some of above steps can vary if you are using a calling card.

Applications like Skype and Google Voice allow users to make live video and voice calls over the internet. Users can also add money to their account and can then use the service to call land lines and cell phones internationally at very low rates. Students in the past have found programs like these helpful for reaching family and friends back home.

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT INFORMATION/WEBSITES OF INTEREST
U.S. State Department Students Abroad site:
http://www.studentsabroad.state.gov/

UW-Madison International Academic Programs
http://www.studyabroad.wisc.edu

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

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

Current exchange rates
http://www.oanda.com

Lonely Planet
http://www.lonelyplanet.com