



Central College Study Abroad Merida, Yucatan Student Survival Guide

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Introduction

This student survival guide describes as completely as possible the Yucatán program and provides answers to questions you have about studying in Yucatan. Since you'll want to get the most of this educational opportunity, we want you understand how the program is designed, what it has to offer, and how it can be integrated with your educational goals.

The student survival guide helps you understand the goals of the Yucatán Program: to acquire a broader perspective of the world and an understanding of another culture by living in another country; to learn how to cope with different sets of attitudes, values and beliefs; to study formally and informally the history and culture of another people; to understand and appreciate essential cultural differences.

Central College's Study Abroad program in Yucatan is viewed with high esteem in our host state. For 50 years, our program has not only opened the door to cross-cultural understanding and language learning for students from the United States seeking unique study abroad immersion experiences, but also has mirrored Central College's values and mission to pursue academic excellence in education and to form responsible citizens committed to community involvement. Our positive community presence in Mérida has convinced many local Yucatecan students to spend their study abroad year on Central College's campus in Pella.

The Yucatán Study Abroad program offers students a unique opportunity study abroad. By selecting this program, you are embarking on an adventure that will challenge your flexibility and patience. Studying other cultures and people can be difficult. However, by the end of the semester, you will have acquired cultural survival skills that will equip you to compare cultures and understand people anywhere in the world. You'll leave Yucatan with a better understanding of yourself, as well as your own culture and assumptions. You'll be transformed in ways you never expected. Your worldview will grow infinitely bigger as a result of your experience in Mexico.

The information in this guide comes from many years of staff and student experience in Mérida. Each year, students, directors, and the staff of the Central College Study Abroad office update and adapt this guide to reflect our new learning, experiences, and knowledge about living, working, and learning in Mérida. We also offer advice and help with your pre-departure plans. We wish you the best of luck! Please do not hesitate to call, e-mail or write the Central College Study Abroad office if you have any questions.

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Required Travel Documents

Passports/Visas

A valid U.S. passport is required for travel to your program. A tourist visa will be issued upon arrival at your point of entry into Mexico. Your passport should be valid for up to six months past you anticipated departure date. Application for a passport should be made at least **three months before departure**. If you don't already have a passport, you should apply for one **immediately**. Check USPS for your nearest post office that provides passport services.

What if your passport is lost or stolen abroad?

Should your passport be lost or stolen abroad, report the loss immediately to the local police and to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. If you can provide the consular officer with the information contained in your passport, it will facilitate issuance of a new one. Therefore, keep a photocopy of the issue page of your passport in a safe place. Leave a second copy of the passport with a relative or friend at home.

For the most recent updates on the travel documents and visas please check the U.S. Department of State's travel website at www.travel.state.gov.

Mexican Tourist Visa

During your flight from the U.S. to your destination in Mexico, you will be presented with two forms required by Mexican immigration and customs. Complete both forms accurately. You can often find assistance in filling out the paperwork in the airline's on-board magazine or ask a flight attendant. One form is for immigration, which you'll present to immigration authorities when you reach your first point of entry. The second form is for customs and must be presented to customs officials upon reaching the red light after passing immigration and collecting luggage.

*****The small piece of paper returned to you from the long immigration form is your Mexican Tourist Visa. All visitors MUST have this card. It validates your legal presence in Mexico. The visa is your identification in Mexico and is your official permit for your stay. You MUST present this card at the airport when you leave Mexico. You will not be allowed to leave the country without it. Keep it with your passport.******

Flight Arrangements

You'll want to make travel arrangements early. **Please consult the Program Calendar in your online account before scheduling flight arrangements.** Check with several airlines, travel agents, and websites –shop around for the best deal! Do not assume that the first price you hear is the best — fares may vary by several hundred dollars. For more information check out the 'What to Know Before You Go' section in your online acceptance packet.

Mérida Program Academic Information

The Central College Study Abroad website (www.central.edu/study-abroad) contains course numbers and descriptions available to you in Yucatan, but due to frequent changes in the courses offered by Marista, Modelo or UADY universities, the list may be incomplete. To get the most up to date schedule of courses, contact the Central College Study Abroad office.

You must take Understanding Contemporary Mexico, the required foundation course of the program, as well as one Spanish class. Enrollment and registration in other courses will take place during the week of orientation. If you need a course change once courses have started, speak with the program director.

Grades

Courses given at the Central College site in Yucatan will have U.S. standard credits and grades. The courses taken at Marista, Modelo, or UADY universities will be converted into our standard credits and grades system. Final grades are sent directly to the Central College registrar who forwards them to your home college at the end of the semester.

Books

Most books or reading packets will be available in Mérida. Any books unavailable in Mérida will be listed in your online account.

Internships and Service Learning

Internships are available for all qualified students during either semester. Students should have at least a high intermediate to advanced level of Spanish for internships. Internships require from six to eight hours of work per week, depending on the amount of credit to be awarded. Internships will start in the third week. Keep in mind that 45 contact hours will equal one credit hour. Credit will appear on the Central College transcript as pass/fail.

Service learning is available for all students with all levels of linguistic ability.

Students whose home institution is Central College may take no more than 20 SH of pass/fail or experiential credits (out of the 120 SH required for graduation), and they should keep this in mind when planning their course schedules.

Students from other campuses should check with their home institutions for requirements. Interns are not exempt from the requirement to enroll as full-time students. A list of past internships is provided in the course description catalog, but these may change. Keep in mind that other internship and service learning opportunities exist; think about what you would like to do. Inform the program adviser and the director of your internship goals. They will work with you to find a placement that meets your needs.

Packing

Mérida is a large, well-supplied city, so you'll want to pack light. You will be able to find most common necessities there.

Be aware that because of high humidity and heat, you may want to change clothes more often, and that during the rainy season (fall term), your laundry may not dry as quickly. You will want to make sure that most of your clothing dries quickly; think polyester, nylon, or bamboo viscose. Cotton, although more breathable than many synthetic fabrics, does not wick moisture from your body or dry quickly. Heavy cotton clothing, such as jeans, may not dry for days. As a rule, shorts are not acceptable street attire in the city of Mérida or the surrounding pueblos, but are acceptable within your home, the beach and on some field trips. Be sure to pack a few pairs. You will also want to bring exercise/workout clothes.

In general, Yucatecans dress up more than most people in the United States. Keep this in mind while packing. Dress pants or a nice pair of jeans, heels/dress/skirts are the rule, not the exception, for evening outings. Men generally dress up with a collared dress shirt, slacks, and dress shoes. Some ideas for packing:

Women: casual skirts, Bermudas, capris, pants (not too heavy), T-shirts, tank tops, blouses, dresses, jeans, a swimsuit, one or two dressy things for parties or special events and a light sweater (evenings and winter months can be chilly).

Men: casual wear, t-shirts, pants (not too heavy), swim trunks, a sweater, tennis shoes, one pair of dress shoes, dress shirt with a collar, a good pair of sandals and a light sweater (evenings and winter months can be chilly).

Useful items: sunglasses (a must!), a camera and extra memory cards. Extra batteries for cameras have proved useful for many students. Bug spray, sunscreen and aloe or some type of sunburn relief also come in handy after a weekend at the beach. Electronics are much more expensive in Merida, so if you plan to use an electronic device (such as a laptop, smartphone, or e-reader), plan to bring yours from home.

For students living at the Central College site:

You will find compatible outlets at the Central site, but bring as few appliances as possible. Irons and lamps are already there. If you are going in the fall, you will definitely want some rain gear; an umbrella and light raincoat (or poncho) will suffice. You will be provided with two towels per week. All linens are provided. Sheets and towels will be washed regularly by Central House staff, but students DO NOT have access to Central House's washing machines and dryers for their personal items. Students do have access to an area for hand washing certain items. A laundry service will pick up and deliver washed and folded laundry once per week. Turnaround time is normally 24 hours. Cost of laundry is about \$2.50 USD per kilo.

For students living with host families:

Your host family will provide you with towels and bedding. They will take care of laundering those items, but in general, students will NOT have access to the family's washing machines for their personal items. Students are also welcome to use the same laundry service as the one used by the Central House. The laundry service will pick up and deliver washed and folded laundry once per week. Turnaround time is normally 24 hours. Cost of laundry is about \$2.50 USD per kilo.

For more information on packing and what to bring, check out the **'What to Know Before You Go'** sheet in your online acceptance packet.

Housing

La Sede de Central

The Central College site, known as *la sede*, is located in a quiet residential neighborhood of Mérida. The staff only speaks Spanish and Mayan. All students are encouraged to practice Spanish. In Mérida, the Central College program, with its long history in the city, has been accepted and supported by our neighbors. We treat them with respect and care to maintain this relationship.

You will probably find the atmosphere in Mérida quite different from home. The school day follows a Latin pattern of midday free time with morning classes starting at 8:30 a.m. Afternoon classes usually start at 4:00 p.m. Meals are served family style and combine Yucatecan, Mexican, and international cuisine. We encourage you to dine and converse rather than practice the U.S. custom of "eat and run."

Host Families

Students also have the option to live with a local host family. The host families have been carefully selected and most have a long history of receiving students in their homes. With your host family, you will be able to experience the family aspect of the host culture. Living with a host family is a wonderful

opportunity to immerse yourself in the language and daily life in Yucatan. Home stay houses are equipped with wi-fi, although internet speed may vary.

Arrival

Mérida has an international airport with regular flights that arrive from the United States. We recommend that all students fly into Mérida or Cancún. Flying into Cancún is cheaper than flying into Mérida, but is a 4 hour bus ride from Cancún to Mérida, with a bus fare of about \$35US each way. Many airlines offer flights that go directly from Houston, Miami, Atlanta, or Dallas to Cancún. There are direct flights to Merida from Houston, Dallas, and Miami.

Regardless of your itinerary, at your first Mexican port of entry (Mexico City, Cancún or Mérida) immigration officials will check your passport and stamp your tourist card (obtained on the plane). After collecting your luggage, you'll stop at what looks like a stoplight. Customs official will ask you to press a button. If you get a green light, you're free to pass through. If you get a red light, be prepared to open your luggage and allow the customs officials to check your bags. Mostly, they are looking for fresh food items, drugs, etc. Be sure that all your prescription drugs are in bottles from the pharmacy and clearly labeled. When you arrive at the Mérida airport and have gone through customs and immigration, walk to the front of the airport and outside. You'll find a bunch of taxi drivers offering to drive you to your destination. Transportation from the airport to the Central *sede* is about \$15 per taxi (\$300 MXN). Just tell (or show) the ticket agent the address located in the 'Introduction' section.

Uber cannot pick up passengers from the airport.

If the driver or baggage attendant helps you with your luggage, you should be prepared to tip a couple dollars or the equivalent in pesos (\$50 MXN), depending on how much luggage you have. Upon arriving at the Central *sede*, ring the bell. The night watchman (portero) or one of the house employees will help you in with your bags. Please do not tip them; a "muchas gracias" will do just fine. DO NOT leave your baggage on the street unattended.

Local Transportation

Public transportation is inexpensive and safe way to travel. A taxi to the Central *sede* from the airport costs around \$15 USD and no more than \$5 USD from downtown. The city buses cost about 50 cents. Uber has arrived in Merida and can be the most economic option when groups of students are traveling together, but operates in a legal gray area. Cabify, the Mexican answer to Uber, also works here. Buses also can take you to the beach, outlying villages or major ruins inexpensively.

Communication

Mail

Receiving packages can take 2-6 weeks. Even if living in homestays, letters and packages should be mailed to Central College, using the address listed in the introduction. Receiving packages through the mail usually takes less time than a letter. Any packages you receive may be subject to examination by customs, and possibly a duty or special import permit. Used clothing in any package will cause serious problems, as Mexican law does not permit entry of used clothing. Avoid these problems if possible, bringing plenty of prescription medicines, etc. If you must have an item shipped, you can use USPS, FedEx, DHL, or UPS.

E-mail

There are two computers set-up to high speed internet throughout the sede. Wireless internet is also available. Students are welcome to bring their laptop computers. Wireless internet is available in all home stays.

Skype and Whatsapp

Skype or *Whatsapp* are the easiest ways to stay in touch with friends and family. Both are affordable ways to speak to friends and family via the internet. Visit www.skype.com to set up a free account and to learn about using the program. *Whatsapp* needs to be downloaded to both your phone and that of the person you'd like to call via wifi.

Good Communication Management

Communication with your friends and family at home is easy and accessible through the internet and cell phones, but this can be both a blessing and a curse. While these lines of communication allow you to stay in touch, they can also interfere with your adaptation to the local culture and give you an easy out when you're feeling homesick. Below is a basic list of Dos and Don'ts for managing your communication home:

- Do call your family to assure them you have arrived safely at the program site.
- Do remember to call or answer for all pre-arranged phone calls.
- Do use the internet to stay in touch by email or start blogs to share with those at home.
- Don't use the phone as your first line of defense for problem solving. Think, make a plan and solve your own problem—this is a step toward independence!
- Don't make calls from hotel phones. There is usually an expensive surcharge.
- If you do call home when you are feeling down or during a problem, be sure to call them back to let them know you are feeling better or the problem is solved.
- Limit your time on the internet. Don't use the internet as a way to avoid your new surroundings. Spend your time developing friendships with those around you!

For more information on communication, check out the '**What to Know Before you Go**' sheet in your online acceptance packet.

Maps

It's good to know as much about your host country as possible before you go abroad. Here are a few maps to familiarize you with the area.

