Mexico: Migration, Borders, and Transnational Communities

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (The United Mexican States), more commonly known as Mexico, gained independence in 1821 and is a constitutional republic of 31 federated states and the capital, Mexico City (known in Mexico as the *Distrito Federal*, or "DF"). Mexico is the fifth-largest country in the Americas by total land area and has a population of almost 128 million, making it the 11th most populous country and the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world. Mexico City is one of the largest cities (by population count) on Earth.



As the only Latin American member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) since 1994, Mexico is generally a middle-income country that is relatively more "developed" than many other countries in the region. The country was ruled for most of the 20th century by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), which held almost hegemonic power in Mexican politics from 1929 until the end of the century. Beginning in 1977, consecutive electoral reforms allowed opposition parties to win more posts at the local and federal levels, culminating in the 2000 presidential elections in which Vicente Fox, a candidate of the *Partido de Accion Nacional* (PAN), or National Action Party, became the first non-PRI president in 71 years.

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In 2006, Felipe Calderon of the PAN faced Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador of the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD) in an extremely close (0.58% difference) presidential election that was widely criticized as fraudulent. On September 6, 2006 Felipe Calderon was declared President-elect by the electoral tribunal. His cabinet was sworn in at midnight on December 1, 2006 and Calderon was officially sworn in as President on the morning of the same day in a very quick ceremony in Congress, amidst screaming, yelling and insults from opposition lawmakers. Calderon finished his term in 2012.

After a 12-year hiatus, the PRI party, in alliance with the National Action Party (PAN) returned with the election of President Enrique Peña Nieto, drawing protests for alleged voting irregularities, media bias, and campaign fund controversies. In 2018, the vast majority of Mexicans voted for Andrès Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and his political party MORENA which stands for “Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional.” 2024 was an election year and Mexico now has, for the first time in history, a woman representing the entire nation. The new president, Claudia Sheinbaum, was sworn in on October 1, 2024. It is the hope of the Mexican people that the new president can fight systemic corruption and find solution to the systemic violence impacting vast regions of the country.

The state of Oaxaca, with a capital city of the same name, has a population of about 3.5 million; roughly 300,000 live in the city of Oaxaca with 650,000 in the greater metropolitan area**.** Oaxaca is located in the southern part of the country, bordering the states of Guerrero, Puebla, Veracruz and Chiapas as well as the Pacific Ocean. Oaxaca, the historic home of the Zapotec and Mixtec peoples, contains more speakers of indigenous languages than any other Mexican state. Approximately 87% of Oaxacans are indigenous.

Oaxaca was the sight of a popular movement called the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (APPO) that has become a model of creative popular protest for grassroots movements throughout the country. The APPO, a broad-based grassroots organization, initially emerged in solidarity with the objectives of the Oaxaca teachers' union, which staged a massive strike in May 2006, and later in forming a joint front to advocate for the resignation of the corrupt state governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. The APPO continues struggling to create positive social, political and economic change in Oaxaca City and state, along with myriad other grassroots community and non-governmental organizations.

The current Governor of Oaxaca is Salomón Jara, affiliated with the MORENA party, a leftist party in discourse but a more moderate right in practice.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Mexico's climate varies greatly according to altitude, ranging from humid, tropical and rainy in the south and on the coast to semi-arid in the north. The rainy season runs from early summer through October, with September being generally the rainiest month. "Rainy season" does not mean guaranteed rain, though; more often it means sunny mornings and a rainstorm in the afternoon. The city of Oaxaca has a pleasant spring-like climate with regular showers from June to early September. You should be prepared for all of these climate and temperature variations.

[Oaxaca]: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
80/48	84/53	87/55	89/58	88/59

SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
81/58	81/57	81/53	79/51

LOCAL CUSTOMS

The peoples of Oaxaca have a strong value system where politeness, reciprocity and respect play a significant role in the making of their communal identity. Unlike western cultures, individualism is not given as much value as the ability to function in the collective. Social and family networks are especially important and therefore, a person´s responsibility to contribute to these networks is essential to maintain her membership. This shows in the way Oaxacan people talk to each other, in the time invested in everyday interactions, as well as in their ability to foster and maintain relationships.

This cultural system, therefore, requires outsiders to understand that a quick, informal hello during introductions may, for the most part, be seen as rude. The expectation is that you take the time to stop whatever you are doing, make eye contact, shake hands, and state how much pleasure it gives you to meet the new person (mucho gusto), followed by your first and last name. Oaxacans take pride in acknowledging people around them, which reflects on how people make efforts to make eye contact and kindly greet or nod, even in less formal context such as a restaurant or a store.

LOCAL DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in-country. Special or restricted diets may not always be fully understood by your host family, although they may have previously hosted a student with similar dietary restrictions. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.



Mexican cuisine is known for its intense and varied flavors, colorful decoration, and variety of spices. Oaxaca itself boasts a tremendous diversity of regional cuisine. An abundance of fruits and vegetables are grown in the central valley, tropical fruits are found throughout the north, and fish and seafood dominate the cuisine of southern Oaxaca. The state is known for its chocolate, cheese (quesillo) and *tlayudas* – big handmade tortillas stuffed with beans, meat and cheese. Another specialty is *chapulines*, that is, barbecued grasshoppers. Corn is the staple food and the preparation of corn dough varies widely, from tortillas and empanadas (turnovers) to tamales and *entomadas* (tortilla ribbons bathed in salsa and cheese). Black beans are another common ingredient, as is the Oaxacan chili pepper, which gives many dishes a distinctive hot, smoky taste and red color.

Cooked food is safe to eat in homes and restaurants; raw vegetables and food items sold on the street usually are not. Tap water is not potable and should not be used anywhere in Mexico. Program facilities and accommodations will provide boiled or filtered water at all times.

Mexico is a vegetarian-friendly place. Meals are generally not focused on meat, though it is certainly available. Students who are vegan or gluten-free may encounter challenges but the Oaxacan diet is varied and with effort and communication students should be able to follow their diets during the program. There is not a strong Jewish presence in Oaxaca; thus keeping kosher would be very difficult.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing prior to the start of your program (studentwellbeing@sit.edu). We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

MEAL PLANNING

Homestay families generally provide breakfast and dinner during the week and breakfast, lunch, and dinner on the weekend. The estimated cost for meals that are not provided is based on modest eating out and buying groceries to make your own meals when facilities are available for the meals that are not provided during program activities. If you plan on eating out regularly, you should budget more money.

Please remember to budget at least US $700 for your meals not provided during the semester. For a breakdown of your program's estimated out-of-pocket expenses, please see the table in the **Money** section of this document.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the U.S. Department of State website and search their Countries and Areas Archive for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control Traveler's Health page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of

travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's webpage.

If you have any questions, please reach out to the Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team. Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the Safety, Security, and Health document and Student Handbook on your program's predeparture page.

HOUSING



As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both. Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a "home" may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities, and expectations.
Each program's homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible.

Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.

We seek to foster increased cross-cultural understanding in students by immersing them in local culture through daily life in a new family and community. Students are expected to assume roles as family members, respecting and following host family norms around communications, visitors, and activities of daily living.

On this program, you will live with host families for the seven weeks you spend at the program base in Oaxaca. You may also have opportunities for homestays during the excursions into rural communities and during the independent period when you are carrying out an internship or Independent Study Project, giving a unique window into Mexican family and cultural traditions. In Oaxaca homestays will be in middle class homes and have their own bedroom.



Being in a homestay requires following a code of conduct which, among other things, includes respecting the family values and customs, being on time for meals, honoring agreed upon curfew hours during the week and on weekends, not having new acquaintances or other SIT students over, etc. Failure to comply with the homestay code of conduct will be considered a violation and a breach of our student code. This will jeopardize your academic standing and may lead to program dismissal after the second warning.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation/launch and while on excursions. After the group flight from Tucson to Oaxaca, the group will stay in hostels, private homes and small hotels during the rest of the program in Mexico. Most students stay with their homestay family in Oaxaca City during the ISP period. Some may stay in a homestay or hostel in another community most convenient for conducting research. Housing options during your Independent Study Project will be worked on together with program staff and must be approved by your academic director.

TRANSPORTATION

The program office is centrally located in Oaxaca City, and students will be able to walk many destinations in the center. There are inexpensive and efficient public buses on the main routes in and around Oaxaca. Taxis are also plentiful and relatively inexpensive. SIT will only cover transportation costs pertaining to excursions and academic activities. You will be responsible for covering any other transportation expenses, including transportation to internship sites and/or locations you may need to travel to for ISP purposes.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion. Visit our Contact & Communication page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

Cell Phone Policy

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

Since you will obtain a local phone number, we do not recommend purchasing an international plan for your US phone number unless you have a dual SIM smart phone. A local SIM card will cost approximately $10. Students will be responsible for maintaining minutes on their phones and reasonable phone usage should cost about $20 per month. If you do not have an unlocked smartphone, a smartphone can be purchased locally and may cost upwards of $90. Please note, SIT is not responsible for replacing your phone or computer in the event of theft or loss. Your are advised to purchase insurance for your personal electronic equipment.

Mexico is in the Central time zone and does not observe Daylight Savings Time (DST). E-mail and internet access is readily available in urban areas through internet cafes in Oaxaca city and at the program center. When the group is on excursion in rural areas internet and phone service will be difficult to access if available at all. The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours.

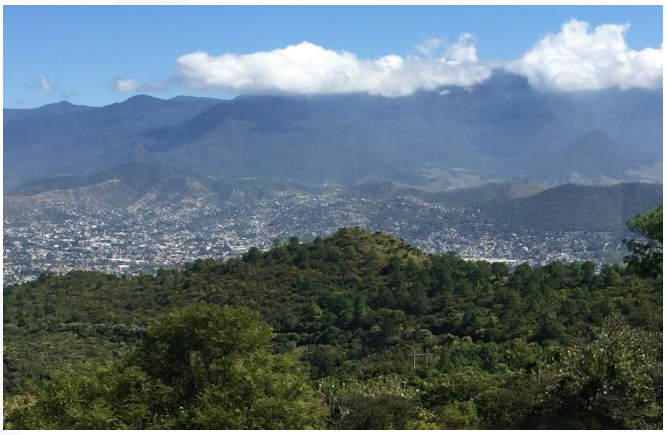
MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, **DHL, FedEx, UPS services are available in country**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

If it is necessary for someone to send you mail then posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name c/o Omar Nuñez Mendez
SIT Study Abroad
Melchor Ocampo 710,
Centro, C.P. 68000
Oaxaca, Oax., México



Packages should be sent to the following address via ***DHL, FedEx, or UPS***:

Student Name c/o Omar Nunez
SIT Study Abroad

Melchor Ocampo 710,
Centro, C.P. 68000
Oaxaca, Oax., Mèxico

MONEY

Students from past semesters recommend that you bring some cash and debit cards. Debit cards, particularly those with a Cirrus, Visa, or Mastercard logo, will work to withdraw money at ATMs up to a certain daily limit in pesos (the official currency). Please be aware that ATMs often do not operate 24 hours and sometimes are "down" for several hours at a time. It can be difficult to exchange traveler's checks, so it is not recommended that you bring them. Wire transfers through companies like Western Union are very expensive but safe and reliable in the case of an emergency. The Mexican currency is the *peso.*

Check current exchange rates: http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

We suggest that you budget between US$3,300 – $3,500 for out-of-pocket costs not covered by the Tuition and Housing Fees. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program. Please carefully consider your personal spending habits when creating your out-of-pocket expense budget. Some items to consider are meals not provided by the program, textbooks, Independent Study Project or Internship-related expenses not covered by the program, interpretation services, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	1,800 USD
Meals not provided	700 USD
Books, printing, supplies:	100 USD
Up-front medical costs:	500 USD
Potential ISP travel expenses:	350 USD
Estimated total:	3,450 USD

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance Blue Cross Blue Shield Global Solutions (BCBS), which you can read more about on our Participant Insurance page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the Attendance and Participation Policy.

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full Independent Travel policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics,

preparations, cancelation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

Please note: the group flight from Tucson to Oaxaca is included in your tuition fee and will be arranged by the program. Do *not* book your own flight from Tucson to Oaxaca.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.



CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a Code of Conduct and clear institutional policies regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.

Packing Guidelines

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. We recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the Safety, Security, and Health pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (http://www.tsa.gov) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

While informal dress is acceptable and common in most settings, it is very important to keep a neat, clean appearance. Oaxacans dress modestly; you should do the same. You will see tourists wearing shorts in Oaxaca, but virtually no Mexicans do. In Mexico, shorts are generally worn by Mexicans at the beach and/or for athletic or recreational purposes only. It is advisable for you to avoid wearing shorts in Mexican cities and towns. It is culturally inappropriate to wear shorts in indigenous communities that we will be visiting. However, it's fine to bring along a pair of shorts for sports activities and/or for the beach. Bring a raincoat, a sweater/fleece and a jacket, and comfortable walking shoes or light-weight hiking boots. Rubber sandals or "flip flops" are NOT recommended, particularly during excursions. Students wearing them have been injured; you will need to wear more protective footwear. However, you may want to bring a pair for showering.

Past students report that they wish that they had packed more underwear and socks (laundry is often hand washed and hung up to dry. Depending upon the season, it may take a few days for your clean clothes to get back to you). Furthermore, they suggest cutting back on everyday clothing items but advise that you bring along something for going out at night and/or to wear to special celebrations. Inexpensive shirts and skirts can be easily found in Oaxaca's stores and principal markets as well. People in offices, development agencies, etc., are apt to be much more open and responsive if the visitor shows respect by dressing accordingly. This is especially true for your ISP interviews. It is not necessary to be fashionable, just neat and clean.

EQUIPMENT

You may want to bring a small digital voice recorder or video camera for recording interviews during ISP research or ensure your phone has enough memory if recording with your phone. A small fold-up umbrella and a parka for rainy weather are handy to have.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/.

You will have also computer access at Internet cafés in Oaxaca and at the program center. Be aware that any technology such as laptops, smartphones and other electronic devices are items that can attract attention. Be careful using such items in public, and aware of the message they might send to those around you (one of wealth as well as detachment).

GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

Former students have recommended calendars, picture books, postcards, music, or souvenirs from your college bookstore as gifts. *Please do not bring alcohol as a gift.*

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Basic toiletries and school supplies are widely available in Mexico, though insect repellent and sunblock are more expensive. If there is a particular item or brand to which you are loyal, you will probably wish to bring it with you as the variety of items available can be limited and/or expensive. It is suggested that you bring enough to get you going (a new tube of toothpaste, etc.) and then plan to buy replacements in Mexico, by which time you will be more familiar with availability and where to obtain things. Items such as batteries, battery chargers, and other electronic equipment can be expensive, so you may wish to bring extra from home.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/.

Don’t miss the Packing List on the next page!



Packing List

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.

GENERAL

- 1-2 dressy/professional outfits for important meetings or events
- 1 outfit appropriate for going out in the evenings
- Socks & Underwear (2-week supply)
- Pajamas
- 1 white shirt to be stamped with SIT logo
- Flip-flops for around the house/bathing
- 1 pair comfortable walking shoes/sneakers/hiking shoes
- 1 pair sandals, comfortable for walking
- 1 pair of nice shoes for events, interviews, or going out that are not walking sandals
- Swimsuit
- Medium weight coat
- Waterproof raincoat or poncho
- 2 sweaters-1 medium and 1 heavier
- 2– 3 lightweight dresses or skirts
- 5–7 blouses or shirts
- 2–3 cotton tank tops/t-shirts
- 2–3 pairs casual pants
- 2–3 pairs of shorts

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- College or University Student ID
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa
- 2 passport photos
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly, including birth control medication

- Small first aid kit with Band-Aids, hydrogen peroxide, moist towelettes, over the counter drugs for minor pain, diarrhea, anti-itching cream, motion sickness medication, and oral rehydration packets for diarrhea and vomiting.
- Extra eye glasses/contacts and contact solution
- 1 bottle of sunscreen (at least SPF 15)
- Sunglasses and or/wide-brimmed hat

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Flashlight/headlamp
- A duffle bag that is larger than a backpack for excursions
- A simple tote bag – better for carrying books and water bottle than a fancy backpack
- Homestay family gifts
- Durable water bottle
- Students are encouraged to bring a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector

OPTIONAL

- Camera and batteries/charger/etc.
- Pocket knife with small scissors (pack in *checked* luggage, not carry on)
- Anti-bacterial hand gel/cleansing towelettes
- Zip-top storage bags of various sizes
- Ear plugs (noise levels in Mexico are different than most US communities)