

Here's my Study Abroad Story

Sarah Servin CIEE Guanajuato: Liberal Arts Guanajuato, Mexico

Major: Government and Spanish

Program: In my program we took half of our classes with the local university in Guanajuato and the other half with CIEE and the other students in the program. The idea behind this way of taking classes is to be able to work on your language skills within the program classes and then actually go out and talk to locals in your university classes. The overall goal of the program is full immersion. You live with a host family for 5 months, take classes with locals, volunteer at local nonprofits, and try and speak Spanish as much as possible. Additionally through the classes and with the program, we did a number of different excursions to big cities like Mexico City and smaller rural towns within the state of Guanajuato.



Typical Day: Days varied from person to person, but typically I would get up in the morning, eat a light breakfast with my host mom and then head off to school. I lived right outside the main downtown part of the city so my walk into town everyday was around 30 minutes. While walking into town I would grab a coffee and *pan dulce* at one of the hundreds of local bakeries that you can find in Guanajuato. After being in class for a couple of hours I would walk back to my house and have "comida" or lunch at around 2:30 or 3:00 pm. After lunch I would usually do homework at the café closest to my house and then take the local city bus to my university art class which was about 20 minutes away. In Mexico, families very rarely have a dinner the size that we are used to in the US, so I would usually just eat something very light in the evening after my art class. The weeks throughout the semester were fairly busy and you definitely develop a routine by the end of your time in Guanajuato. During the weekends my friends and I would explore the city, going to all the "mercados" or markets in town and occasionally leaving Guanajuato for weekend excursions to cities close by.

Highlights: The highlight of the semester that first comes to mind is just the fact that I was able to be in Guanajuato for the International Cervantino festival. This festival takes place during the month of October and hosts a different country and different state of Mexico every year. Pretty much every day of October there is some sort of artistic event ranging from art exhibitions, concerts, dance performances, and culinary events. Thousands of people come into Guanajuato every weekend for these events and fill the city to the brim. It was amazing to see all of these artists from Mexico and from all over the world come and perform, as well as meet people from all over Mexico who come to watch.

Challenges: The biggest challenge was definitely the full language immersion that you are immediately thrown into the minute you arrive in Mexico. I can still remember the first dinner I had with my host family and how overwhelming it was. Over time though it gets better, especially being in university classes where you get to not only practice your Spanish but also get to pick up on the local lingo and phrases that Mexican students use on a daily basis. Host families are also crucial in this aspect because they are really dedicated to help you improve your Spanish and are always there for homework or grammar help. Also, because Guanajuato is a fairly touristy town, the Mexican people there appreciate it so much when you try and speak Spanish. Even if it comes out slightly wrong, they are so helpful and grateful.

Advice: Don't be afraid to jump right into a language! At first it is really scary and nerve wracking to know that you are messing up every other word, but the people around you are so much more understanding and appreciative than you think. There were some people on my program who had very little experience with Spanish and still came out after 5 months being essentially fluent. If language is one of your goals, dive right in and try the best you can, it's definitely worth it in the end.

