

Magical Mexico

Adia Suricate succumbs to the allure of Mexico for Spanish immersion

Mexico and Spain are the most popular destinations for students wanting to learn Spanish. Both countries each have their plus points but an important issue for many learners is the price factor. Traditionally, Mexico's proximity to the U.S. for travel purposes, its low cost of living and the wide variety of affordable courses on offer combine to make our southern neighbor an attractive option. Budget-conscious travelers will be aware that the dollar has given up some value this year (although not as much as they might have been led to believe) so that in Spain, it has fallen 5.8 percent against the euro, whilst against the Mexican peso the greenback is down 3.1 percent.

Another point worth considering for beginners is that the Spanish spoken in Mexico is relatively easy to understand as it is spoken quite clearly and generally more slowly than the rapid staccato of mainland Castilian.

There are hundreds of Spanish language schools in Mexico, so it should not be a problem to find a school best suited to meet any learner's individual needs. Students may choose to sample the electric atmosphere of the capital, Mexico City, the world's largest urban center, or they may prefer the colonial charms of nearby towns such as Cuernavaca or Puebla. Schools can be found in the desert cities of Sonora, and in towns nestled among the peaks of the two great sierras, Madre Oriental y Madre Occidental, or deep in the southern jungles that are the heartland of the indigenous Mayan people. Students hoping to take some R and R during their stay can head for Puerto Escondido in Oaxaca for the best surf in Mexico while a wannabe

Indiana Jones must visit Chichen Itza, officially one of UNESCO's New Wonders of the World.

When making inquiries of Spanish language schools in Mexico, students should ask if their teachers are fully qualified and have university degrees, so that there is a better chance of being taught by experienced educators. Try to find a school that offers a full program of cultural activities designed to assist students in understanding more about Mexico and the area they are studying in. A homestay can represent an outstanding opportunity for learning how local people really lead their lives but try to find out as much as you can about the host families and ask if you can speak to former students who can share their experiences.

Although Mexico is a very popular destination for English speaking students, it is easy to become immersed in the language and unique culture of this fascinating land. Daily contact with Spanish speakers encourages communication and vocabulary building. Many people who have stayed in Mexico are overwhelmed by the warmth and generosity of the Mexican people, who are delighted to assist visitors who show a real interest in their country. Any students unfortunate enough to suffer from misconceptions or even prejudices about Mexico will soon learn while they are there that *nadie asienta en cabeza ajena*.

Adia Suricate, a company relations officer, studied Spanish for six months in magical Mexico.