

*Christine Tsai* travels to the southern coast of Mexico in search of a Spanish learning experience full of culture

## Mexico's Coast of Culture

**Mexico, also known as the United Mexican States**, is home to more than 108 million people. While the official language is Spanish, there are some small populations who speak regional indigenous languages, such as Mayan or Nahuatl. Such indigenous languages are the signs of Mexico's long and rich history. Great native civilizations such as the Aztecs, Mayans, Olmecs, and Toltecs thrived until the 16th century when Spain conquered the area. The Spanish ruled Mexico until September 16, 1810 when the Mexicans rebelled and independence was won in 1821.

With the U.S. to the north and Belize and Guatemala to the south-east, many tourists travel each year to vacation along the Mexican coast. However, Mexico also offers great opportunities to study the Spanish language. Along the central western coast are the states of Jalisco, Colima, Michoacan, and Guerrero, which offer quality institutions while providing a beautiful coastal landscape to study language and culture.

### Jalisco

**Jalisco, which is right off the Pacific coast of Mexico, is bordered** by seven other states: Nayarit, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, Colima, and Michoacan. Located in the central region of Jalisco is its capital, Guadalajara, whose name is derived from the Arabic phrase "Wadi al-Hijarah," which means "River of Stones." In this bustling city, there are a variety of must-see cultural and historical sights, including El Palacio de Gobierno and El Instituto Cultural Cabañas. Guadalajara is also home to the town of Tequila where tequila was first mass-produced. Today, many tours of Guadalajara include Tequila and some of its most historical areas.

**CIRIMEX**, or the Center for International Resources, in Guadalajara offers complete immersion programs in Spanish language and Latin culture with a one-on-one format. These integrated language and culture programs are presented in a variety of settings. Classroom sessions teaching grammar, vocabulary, rhetoric and other language skills are complemented with pedagogic use of guided tours and lectures.

Students also participate in activities which are designed to familiarize participants with cross-sections of social, economic, political, and ethnic communities to provide a variety of settings for exercising communication skills. The activities acquaint students not only with the language of the groups but also with their lifestyles and dynamics, together with their relation to and interaction with competing and subsuming groups and communities.

Located in Tlaquepaque is **Guadalajara Language Center**. Tlaquepaque, which is known for its mariachis, is a neighborhood of Guadalajara and located only 20 minutes from the city's center. Programs are designed for people interested in improving their understanding of the Spanish language and Mexican culture. The school emphasizes oral communication as well as an understanding of the knowledge and rules of grammar.

In addition to traditional Spanish courses, the school offers a course called "Survival Spanish" for those who want a short but intense experience. The class is a one-day crash course intended to give the basics for communicating with locals.





Tlaquepaque Street, Jalisco Mexico

The **Instituto Cultural Mexicano Norteamericano de Jalisco, A.C.** offers students from all over the world the opportunity to learn Spanish in a very stimulating and friendly atmosphere. ICMNA teaches both English and Spanish to more than 10,000 students each year and its year round Spanish program consists of courses of varying levels. As the first language school founded in Guadalajara in 1949, ICMNA's curriculum features an excellent academic program for foreign students to learn or perfect the language precisely in a Spanish-speaking environment. It also includes cultural activities that will give students a better understanding of the Spanish language and Mexican people.

Located in the little beach community of La Manzanilla is **La Catalina Natural Language School**. La Manzanilla has become an attractive destination for travelers who hope to avoid the large crowds found in Puerto Vallarta and other popular tourist spots. What makes La Catalina Natural Language School unique is that their Spanish instruction methodology imitates the effortless way that people learn language as a child by focusing less on grammar for students who are not fluent, but rather emphasizing the familiarization and usage of Spanish.

La Catalina offers programs for adults, students, as well as children. While there are different accommodation options for students, the school encourages students to stay with a Mexican host family to enrich their immersion experience.

Established in 1968, the **Spanish Language School** in Guadalajara offers five different levels of courses. The first level focuses on developing vocabulary, learning basic grammar and constructing simple sentences. Level five focuses on sharpening skills through extensive conversation and elective studies in Mexican culture, politics and history. Students can choose between group and private lessons or a combination of both. The school also offers classes during vacation periods

for students who want to travel to Mexico during their vacations.

The **Spanish Experience Center** sits in Puerto Vallarta's cultural heart two blocks away from the beach. With no more than five students per class, Spanish is taught in a relaxing and intimate environment, enhanced by the school being housed in a three-story Mexican hacienda. Each teacher at the center holds a college degree and is certified in teaching Spanish as a second language. These quality language classes are complemented with cooking classes and activities that allow students to experience Mexican nightlife, shopping, and whale watching.

## Colima

**Colima is a small state located on the central pacific coast.**

With warm weather nearly all year round, Colima offers visitors stunning beaches and impressive mountain ranges. Divided into ten municipalities, Colima's main cities include Manzanillo and Tecomán.

Located in the capital city of Colima is the University of Colima, which also has other locations throughout the state. Established in 1940, the University of Colima has a population of over 23,000 students and 1,438 professors. Each year more than 200 international students study at the University of Colima.

**The University of Colima** offers two different Spanish programs to international students. The university's School of Literature and Communication offers the academic Spanish for foreigners program, which allows students to enroll in Spanish classes of various levels. Each class has a maximum of 20 students per group where students can foster a personal relationship with their professors. The University's Foreign Language School offers a more flexible Spanish program, ranging from four to six weeks, where groups of international students are