

Information for Students
Centre of Exchange and Research in Volcanology

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Duration

Assistants are required for periods from two months up to one year (or more!). In special circumstances a period of one month can be considered. Preference will be given for those who want to work in Colima for a longer period. Many students are obviously keen to see some of Mexico during their stay and travel for several days. Of course this is a great idea, but only is really practical for students who are here for over 2 months. For stays of less, you will be expected to be working in Colima for the whole uninterrupted period. Please let me know of any travel plans in advance. Obviously how much time depends upon the length of your stay. It would be disruptive if more than one period is taken off for travel.

Financial assistance

Unfortunately none is available in Colima. Many students have managed to get full or partial support from their universities.

Accommodation

A room in a student house should be available. The house is only 10 minutes from the university and the rent is around US\$4 per day. Please request more information once your participation is confirmed.

Number of students

The ideal number of students at any one time is 5 or 6. Depending upon the time of year there could be any number from 1 to 9 students present at a certain time. Some work will be undertaken alone, some in groups. We are an international group with most students having come from the UK, USA and Germany. I have also had people from France, Italy, Canada, Israel, Poland, Denmark, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Puerto Rico, Ireland, Netherlands, Latvia, South Africa, Bangladesh and Chile. You will also be working with Mexican students.

Hours

For a volunteer position I cannot really insist on specific hours, it is flexible. Generally students are working from around 9:00 until 19:00, with a lunch break. The keener ones might start earlier and/or finish later. Saturdays usually count as working days with many students also happy to work on some Sundays, but this is up to you. Sometimes field trips will be arranged during the weekend. 95% students who have come to Colima have been very keen and worked very hard. Really it is these same students that set the standard by which others will be judged. It should not be thought of as a holiday.

Language

The more Spanish you know the easier your time here will be. The majority of Mexican people in general do not speak any English. It is recommended to take a course or read some language books prior to your arrival if necessary. Most students who have come have only had very basic Spanish.

Travel to Colima

Prices are given in US dollars and are approx. due to fluctuating exchange rates.

There are various options:

1) Fly to Mexico City and then take an overnight bus to Colima. Journey is 10.5 hours, cost US\$66 one-way. Travel between airport and bus station (Autobus del Norte) can be via metro which costs only \$0.25. The journey takes about 30 mins. Companies that service Colima are Primera Plus, Omnibus de México & ETN. The last direct departure leaves at 23:45, but there are buses all night to Guadalajara where you can get another bus to Colima.

The information available in Mexico City airport is not good. To find the metro after leaving the departure gate turn left and continue for a few hundred metres until you leave the building (Terminal 1). Keep walking ignoring the taxi drivers, the road bends twice then you reach the entrance to the metro. You go down the stairs and should then see the ticket window where you can buy your tickets (3 pesos).

The cost via taxi from the airport to the bus station is between \$40 and \$80. Tickets should be purchased in the booths within the airport.

2) There are daily flights from Mexico City to Colima but these are quite expensive. However, some students have got quite good deals by including this return journey within one ticket when booking in their home country.

3) Fly to Guadalajara and take a taxi from the airport to the bus station (cost is \$22). From here a bus to Colima costs \$19 and takes about 3 hours. Companies that service Colima are Primera Plus, La Linea and Omnibus de México. They are located within terminals 1 and 2. There are buses throughout most of the night. The return is easier since there are some buses that go directly from Colima to the airport for your return journey.

4) Fly to Manzanillo airport. From there a taxi to the bus station is expensive and would cost around \$25 (you could try and share with someone). The alternative is to walk 5 km to the main road to get a bus into Manzanillo, so not recommended. Then a bus from Manzanillo to Colima costs \$9 and takes 1.5 hours. Better to get the bus to the new bus station in Colima – Primera Plus, La Linea or Omnibus de Mexico all go to the new station. They cost slightly more but it is a much faster non-stop service compared to the service to 'Las Rojas'. There are buses usually every 30 minutes.

5) Some students have found cheap charter flights to resorts such as Cancún and Puerto Vallarta. Cancún is far and unless you have plenty of time will require an internal flight, however, Puerto Vallarta is only some 6 hours away by bus and a good option.

Arrival

Whether arriving at Colima airport or the bus station I will usually be able to collect you. You should email me the day before you leave then call me upon arrival or from say Guadalajara to give me some warning.

Taxi

If I cannot collect you, you will need to get a taxi to the university or student house. From the airport the cost is about 160 pesos, from the bus station it is 20 pesos, you can buy the ticket in the booth at the bus station.

Medical

It can be difficult to obtain specific drugs here and they are often expensive. It is recommended that you bring with you sufficient supplies of any special requirements (e.g. for allergies, asthma etc.).

Travel clinics and doctors are generally using out-of-date information. The only part of Mexico that still has some malaria is the jungles of Chiapas. There is no need to take anti-malaria drugs. There is no need to consider other vaccinations such as typhoid or hepatitis A unless you are particularly paranoid. I know of no visitor who has spent time here without these and later had a problem.

Visa

The rules for visa changed in 2012. You can now do volunteer work in Mexico for a period of 6 months or less without a visa. When arriving in Mexico you will receive a FMT card which has a section for arriving and one for when you depart. There is a question requesting the purpose of your visit. Here you should tick "Other". If they ask, just tell them you are volunteering at the university, but to date not one student has been questioned in immigration since the new regulations came into act in Nov. 2012. If you have the letter from the university, you might want to have it handy just in case. Only in the case of visits of more than 6 months is the situation is different.

An exception to the above is for people from countries who require visas in advance for tourism e.g. India. In this case you will need to get a special Professional Practise visa.

University letter

If I receive all the documents at least a month before your arrival you should receive a standard letter from the International Office that mentions fees. You don't have to pay them. It is a standard letter but I have a special arrangement since you are not receiving anything from the university in tuition. Also ignore anything you receive regarding visas since you do not need one as specified above. The university can be slow in issuing the letter. If you do not receive one you don't need to worry.

Insurance

The university insists that every student has insurance to cover medical expenses and repatriation of your body. Don't be alarmed! This is because there was a bad experience some years ago with a student who was killed in a car accident and did not have this covered. Ideally you would send a copy of the certificate to me once you have it, but if you get it at the last minute just bring it along with you.

It should be made clear that each person will be going into the field accepting the all the inherent risks, whether of the usual kind (car accident, fall, insect bites) or associated with volcano activity. We will discuss the current activity before any trip into the exclusion zone so we are all clear of the risks involved. If the student feels uncomfortable with the risks, of course they can decide to stay behind.

I should add that so far there have been no problems whatsoever.

Living Expenses

Living expenses are generally much lower than the US or Europe with a good lunch costing around US\$5. You could probably live on an additional US\$120 per month.

Money

You can easily withdraw cash from cashpoint/ATM machines. It is difficult to change any currency other than US dollars (cash or travellers cheques). Traveller's cheques in dollars can also present problems; American Express cheques should be OK.

Danger

The risk of working in the field close to the volcano is constantly changing. I can give you an update if you ask me prior to your arrival. We will never take unnecessary chances and carefully consider the activity prior to planning any fieldwork. The 'exclusion zone' is currently 8.5 km. People are not usually allowed within this distance of the volcano. I have permission to work within the zone.

The city of Colima at 35 km distance is completely safe.

Electrical appliances

The voltage here is 110v with an identical socket to that in the US – 2 or sometimes 3 pins.

Presentation

For those who have finished or are still working on projects as part of your studies (final years or masters etc.) I would like to encourage you to bring material to make a powerpoint presentation to the rest of the group. It could last from 40 minutes to 1.5 hours. Previously various students have made some very interesting presentations.

A separate list of what to bring is available.

Please don't hesitate to ask any other questions.

Nick Varley