



La Escuela  
de Lancaster

WELCOME  
TO MEXICO!



This short document was created by some of our teaching staff (both Mexican and overseas hire) to give people who are interested some insight to what it is like to live and work in Mexico City. We also give candidates a chance to talk to some of our staff about the school and Mexico as part of the interview process. It is all about giving candidates as much information as possible as they decide if they want to join our school.



So, you're thinking about moving to Mexico? What a good idea. There's nowhere quite like it. Stunningly beautiful, frustratingly chaotic, riotously colourful, delightfully challenging and overall an absolute rollercoaster. We want you to enjoy your teaching and your free time so that you'll stay with us for a while, therefore we've put together this little pack to prepare you for the best (and the not-so-best) that Mexican life has to offer through the eyes of our teachers!



We know you can pick up a Lonely Planet or operate a search engine if you want to know how many people live here or where the embassy is, so we'll leave the obvious stuff to you. What we want to show you is how everyday life really is here at Lancaster; why we think you'll love it, how we cope with some of the irritations that jump out of nowhere, and why not everything you've heard about Mexico is true...

Our school is small and social, with talented and unique students. We love working with them and with each other, but we also love exploring this incredible region and there's nowhere better to start than right here in Mexico! Where else can you find a cultural life in Mexico City comparable to any European metropolis, a unique history still interwoven with daily life, incredible food on every street corner, and just about every type of landscape imaginable? You'll need to be adventurous and adaptable, but the rewards far outweigh the risks and we hope you'll want to join us next year.



# MYTH VS REALITY?

## MEXICO CITY IS DANGEROUS?

Let's go straight in at the deep end. Is Mexico City dangerous? There isn't a simple answer to this. Mexico is defined as being an upper middle income country. However, there is also a very high degree of economic disparity in the nation and so a large proportion live in poverty. You will encounter this living in Mexico and it can be a shock. What you will recognise quickly is that as an international school teacher you will be well paid relative to many others in the city. The country faces unique security problems on a daily basis which unleash sensational headlines across the world. But are you, a law-abiding citizen living in Mexico City, likely to come into contact with the worst of it? It's not likely.



That's not to say that you shouldn't be careful in the capital. The crowded metro system is a haven for pickpockets, poorly lit streets can hide unpleasant surprises and there are some areas where you just shouldn't go. But the same common sense which serves you well in any major city will help you stay safe here too. In fact, you may be surprised at the liberal and progressive attitudes prevalent in most parts of the city: women have access to separate carriages on the metro, the Zona Rosa is one of the most important LGBT centres in the region and busy streets are filled with families enjoying restaurants and street performances every day of the week.

As a professional living and working in an international school, you will have absolutely no need to visit some of the less secure neighbourhoods of the city, all of which are located far away from the school's accommodation and the zones frequented by tourists and ordinary Mexicans. However, always keep your wits about you and don't take anything for granted. Phone away, money secure and, if the worst happens, comply immediately. Nothing you own is worth more than your health.

## THE WEATHER IN MEXICO CITY IS HOT AND SUNNY?

Definite myth. Broadly speaking, there are two seasons – and while you're likely to get sunburned in both, you'll need you winter finest to hand at unexpected moments. The dry season runs from late November to April, with hardly a drop of rain falling from the sky and nighttime temperatures occasionally dropping to around 0°C. The rainy season starts up in April and runs through the summer, sending torrential downpours and storms across the city on an almost daily basis, which may even include hail. Due to the city's altitude (around 2,250m above sea level), the heat is rarely extreme and will usually peak between 20-25°C all year round. However, once you leave the sanctuary of the urban area, temperatures can flare up quickly with unpleasant humidity or aridity to match.



## THE SALARY IS LOW?

So you've asked about the salary and you've converted it to pounds/dollars. We understand, we were the same... It's true that there are international schools around the world which will pay a lot more and allow you to save significant quantities of cash. Honestly, that's not going to happen here. However, there are more than a few elements of life at the school and in Mexico which mean that you don't have to write off your dreams of a fun and financially secure life.

**1. Accommodation is provided:** The number one money-saver is the fact that your furnished, well maintained, and conveniently located apartments are privately rented through the school. This means no stress on arrival, trusted landlords and friendly neighbours (your Lancaster colleagues!). With the rent totally taken care of, all the money that arrives in your account every two weeks is for you to save and spend as you wish.

**2. Cost of living is lower:** The salary may be lower, but so is the cost of living. This is a city where a trip on the metro costs 25¢, you can pick up a beer for a dollar, your cinema ticket will set you back less than your Starbucks, and (with your teacher card) you can enter museums and archaeological sites for free. You won't be stuck for places if you're in the mood for luxury or high quality, but living well in Mexico City need not break the bank. You'll be able to travel extensively in the region, socialise frequently and still squirrel some away for a rainy day!



**3. Health insurance is provided:** Never underestimate the costs involved with getting ill. A comprehensive health insurance policy is provided by the school and includes everything from eye tests to root canal surgery to serious accidents. Without this, routine visits to decent facilities can be seriously expensive.

**4. You'll receive a flight allowance, and bonuses at Christmas and at the end of the academic year:** Mexican law stipulates that employers must pay a bonus in December, known as an aguinaldo, to help with Christmas expenses. This equates to a little more than two weeks salary and it is very useful. Each summer, upon completion of the academic year, another bonus heads our way and can be spent on summer adventures or a trip home. If you're in it for the long haul (excuse the pun), every two years overseas staff are entitled to a return trip to their country of origin – again, a massive help.



## MEXICO CITY IS CROWDED AND POLLUTED?

On the face of it, there's no escaping this reality. More than 25 million people are crammed into the Valle de México area commuting in cars and fume-belching buses amongst heavy industry and malfunctioning sewers. In the winter months, after weeks without rain, you may find your allergies are being affected and that it's a little harder to shake a pesky cold. But Mexico City is actually surprisingly green, and there's evidence the situation is improving. City-wide initiatives are promoting more efficient public transport and bike use, recycling is steadily gaining ground, and river and forest recuperation is taking hold in many areas. The southern part of the city, where Lancaster is located, contains a forest, an archaeological site, and even an extensive national park.

## EVERYBODY IN MEXICO SPEAKS ENGLISH?

Falso. In fact, not everyone in Mexico speaks Spanish. Away from the city, you'll find indigenous languages alive and well in close-knit communities. While many young Mexicans have studied English at school and will be happy to test out their skills with you, older generations may have little-to-no knowledge. An important part of life here is understanding the unique mixture of cultures that contribute to the fascinating concept of modern Mexico. You'll need to speak Spanish to truly enjoy yourself, which is why the school provides free language classes for all teachers on-site and will also pay for any exams you sit in order to formalise your skills.

