



Budget Planner for Study in Mérida, Yucatán – Mexico

To begin the process of determining your study abroad budget, you should cross-reference this guide with [Preparing to Study Abroad](#), [Money Matters](#) and the program costs listed on our website, www.ifsabutler.org.

The information in this guide was compiled by our IFSA-Butler Mérida office based on personal experience and student feedback. Despite years of experience, however, we have yet to create a “perfect” budget. If you’re honest with yourself about your expectations and lifestyle, this guide will give you a good idea of how much money you will need while abroad.

Costs are in U.S. dollars unless otherwise stated.

Tips for Determining Your Budget

- When figuring your budget, enter the minimum amounts on which you think you could manage.
- Estimate a second set of figures that are more generous. Include items such as restaurant meals, personal expenses, entertainment and vacation travel. You might be able to afford the more generous projection.
- If your resources are limited, make adjustments based on close questioning of what you *really need*, what would be *nice to have* and what you *can do without*. Your final budget should fall somewhere in the middle.

The budget worksheet (see last page) itemizes costs you will incur in Mexico. It is in three parts: **fixed expenses**, which are expenses prepaid in the United States in U.S. dollars; **variable expenses**, which are mainly incurred in Mexico and include start-up and term-time costs; and **vacation expenses**, which are expenses for your university holidays in Mexico and at the end of the program. We have also added a line where you should enter your personal resources, from which you will subtract your estimated expenses to determine a working budget.

Exchange Rates

The currency in Mexico is the peso (P\$). The latest exchange rate is available at any bank, in most major newspapers and on the web at www.oanda.com.

Fixed Expenses

All students have the fixed expenses of the program fee and their transportation to and from Mexico. Other expenses could include the [Tuition Payment Plan](#) enrollment fee, and travel and personal property insurance.

- **Program fee:** Use the “Services Included in the Program Fee” information in [Money Matters](#) to determine what is included in our program fee. Remember that your \$500 program deposit is credited to the fee.
- **Transportation costs:** Enter the cost of travel from your home city to Mérida. If you choose to travel after the program, make sure you include the fare to the city from which your return flight to the United States will depart.
- **Tuition Payment Plan** (not applicable to all students): If you use the monthly payment plan through Tuition Payment Plan, enter the enrollment fee, which is \$55 for the year or \$35 for the semester.

- **Overload fee:** Some universities abroad charge a fee for taking more than the required credit, called overload fees. These universities do not always tell IFSA-Butler about the overload fee in advance. If you plan to take an overload while in Mérida, investigate the possibility of additional fees. You are responsible for overload fees if they occur. The *Student Handbook* you will receive during orientation discusses a full course load so that you can avoid overloads and their related fees.
- **Cost of medical, travel and personal property insurance:** While in Mexico, you will have medical coverage through an IFSA-Butler group medical plan, the cost of which is included in your IFSA-Butler program fee. See [Preparing to Study Abroad](#) for more information. You might also wish to secure personal property or travel insurance. IFSA-Butler is not responsible for your personal property.
- **Passports:** The fee for obtaining a U.S. passport is \$135 or \$110 to renew an expired one. If you already have a passport, check the expiration date to ensure that it is valid for six months past the time you will be in Mexico. Information about obtaining passports is available at www.travel.state.gov.
- **Visa:** Students do not need to obtain a student visa to study in Mexico. You will enter and legally study in Mexico as a tourist by filling out the FMM card, which will be given to you during your flight. As you pass through customs and passport control after your arrival in Mexico, this card will be stamped with a number of days you can be in Mexico legally.

However, if you receive fewer than 180 days on your card, or if the regulations change during the semester, you will be required to change your status. The fee for changing your status is approximately US\$150. The IFSA-Butler office staff will inform you of all the necessary paperwork you will need in order to obtain your new status, and they will assist you in completing it properly.

Variable Expenses

The costs and estimates in this section are in Mexican pesos (P\$).

- **Personal items:** Estimate what you will spend on clothing, a new backpack or travel items. You will want comfortable, color-coordinated clothes and shoes suitable for walking, but you should also plan on buying some items in Mérida. See the “packing” section in [Preparing to Study Abroad](#) for more information.
- **Orientation:** During the IFSA-Butler orientation in Mérida, housing, meals and group activities are provided. However, budget about P\$500 for entertainment.
- **Course materials:** Our Mérida office estimates that students will spend P\$1,000 on course materials (i.e. photocopies of required readings) for the full year or P\$500 for a semester.
- **Emergency reserve:** Whether it’s a credit card or a cash reserve, set aside money for emergencies. You might want to consider P\$3,000.
- **Meals:** Three meals a day are included in your program fee, but we recommend budgeting P\$100–150 per week for snacks and meals on the run. A dinner out may cost around P\$200, but a cheap meal can be had for about P\$50.
- **Local transportation:** Most students in Mérida take the bus. Buses cost about P\$6 (less with student discount). Taxis, which are less commonly used, are about P\$30–P\$60 to go anywhere in the city. Students can expect to spend approximately P\$45 each week on transportation.
- **Personal expenses:** Students report personal spending at about P\$500 weekly for items such as laundry, postage, school supplies, haircuts, etc. We recommend stocking up on certain toiletries (which average P\$50 weekly) and prescriptions before leaving the United States, if there is room in your luggage. Be sure to set aside money in case you need to visit a doctor or fill a prescription; we recommend P\$200–P\$300.

Mobile phones are available for purchase and are the cheapest, most reliable form of communication. You can purchase a mobile phone for as little as US\$30 and then purchase prepaid airtime. Phone cards for use with your mobile phone are available in increments of P\$100, P\$200, P\$300 and P\$500. Local calls to someone on the same network cost about P\$1; calls to someone on another network cost about P\$4. Text messaging is about P\$0.80. Calling the United States with a phone plan costs about P\$11 for every 20 minutes, while receiving calls from the United States is free.

Also consider the cost of purchasing a prepaid phone card (for use on pay phones). Mexican telephone cards are available in increments of P\$50 or P\$100 and can be used to call within the country or abroad. A phone call from Mérida to the United States costs around P\$7 per minute. Generally speaking, it's cheaper to use a U.S.-based calling card or to have someone from home call you. See your *Student Handbook* for more information about telephones.

- **Entertainment:** Past students report spending about P\$300 a week on entertainment. For some students, the cost of alcohol should be considered. A night in the clubs could cost as little as P\$100 or as much as P\$500, depending on your lifestyle. Some people find this to be a major budgeting problem!

While Mérida boasts numerous free events, concerts or a special evening at the theatre may cost from P\$50 to P\$150. Movies are about P\$65 (P\$40 on Wednesdays). The staff in Mérida will give you suggestions for entertainment that won't wreck your budget. Carry your Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (UADY) student ID card everywhere; it provides special rates on entrance fees to museums, some archaeological sites and local transportation. You will receive additional information on this subject during orientation.

Vacation Expenses

We highly recommend that you invest in a good guidebook—*Let's Go*, *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide* are some of the best. A guidebook can help you find good deals on travel, lodging, dining and entertainment, as well as help you create a realistic vacation budget.

- **Travel:** Most students who travel within Mexico go by air if going on long trips (i.e. from Merida to Mexico City is a 24-hour trip, Merida to Oaxaca is 18 hours). Flying saves time, but it is very expensive (about P\$5,000 round trip to Mexico City). Buses are the best way to get around when traveling shorter distances. They are comfortable, punctual and less expensive. Check with the IFSA-Butler Mérida office for advice on the cheapest and safest ways to travel and take your student ID with you. No matter where you're going be sure to check out U.S. State Department warnings; they're available at most travel agencies and on the web at www.travel.state.gov.
- **Accommodation:** Your program fee includes housing with a host family throughout the program, for as long as classes are in session. Housing is covered during short university breaks. However, students staying over the semester break (December to January) must find alternate accommodation and/or luggage storage. Our Mérida office cannot store luggage.
- **Meals:** While traveling, most of your meals will be consumed in restaurants, so you might want to estimate P\$200 a day, not including beverages.
- **Personal expenses:** The telephone call component of your budget will be higher during vacation periods than during term time, but other expenses should be about the same. Entertainment and recreational expenses will vary. You will obviously need less if you're backpacking and hostelling instead of staying in city hotels. It's difficult to gauge how much you'll spend on clothing and gifts, but keep in mind you must carry (or ship) all those purchases home at the end of your program.

Approximate Costs of Commonly Purchased Items in Mérida

Now you're ready to begin your budget planning. Check for the exchange rate by consulting the business section of any major newspaper or on the web at www.oanda.com.

Grocery Items

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| Liter of milk | P\$13 |
| Bread (loaf) | P\$15 |
| Yogurt (qt) | P\$7 |
| Eggs (dozen) | P\$15 |
| Cheese | P\$45–60/kg |
| Soda | P\$10 |
| Juice | P\$13/L |
| Beef/steak | P\$50/kg |
| Apples | P\$20–30/kg |
| Oranges (25) | P\$10 |
| Bananas | P\$5/kg |
| Potato chips | P\$8–10 |
| Sugar | P\$12/kg |
| Coffee | P\$50/kg |
| Potatoes | P\$12/kg |

Personal Items

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Cigarettes (pack) | P\$24 |
| Toothpaste | P\$40–45 |
| Contact lens solution | P\$70 |
| Deodorant | P\$35 |
| Shampoo/conditioner | P\$25–60 |
| Soap (bar) | P\$8–15 |
| Tampons (box of 10) | P\$30 |
| Hair dryer | P\$250 |
| Clothing iron | P\$300 |
| Box of detergent | P\$12 |

Services

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Haircuts | P\$200–400 |
| Rental movie | P\$25 |
| Movie theatre | P\$35–80 |
| Museum or gallery | free–P\$50 |
| Internet café | P\$10–13/hour |
| Fast food combo meal | P\$50 |
| Beer in a bar | P\$22 |
| Cup of coffee | P\$8 |
| Alcohol/mixed drinks | P\$40+ |
| Theatre (show student ID) | free–P\$150 |
| Massage (one hour, at home) | P\$450 |

Budget Worksheet— Mérida

Mérida program _____ Current exchange rate: _____

Fixed Expenses

U.S.\$

| | |
|---|----------|
| Program fee (see your program fee sheet) | \$ _____ |
| U.S. domestic and round-trip transportation | \$ _____ |
| Passport fee | \$ _____ |
| Tuition Payment Plan enrollment fee* | \$ _____ |

**may not apply to all students*

Total fixed expenses

A \$ _____

Variable Expenses

P\$

| | |
|---|----------|
| Change of status fee (if applicable) | \$ _____ |
| Personal items (clothing, luggage) | \$ _____ |
| Personal expenses | \$ _____ |
| Orientation spending money | \$ _____ |
| Local transportation | \$ _____ |
| Course materials (see your program fee sheet) | \$ _____ |
| Entertainment | \$ _____ |
| Emergency reserve fund | \$ _____ |

Total variable expenses (convert to U.S.\$)

B \$ _____

Vacation expenses (Check with travel professionals and/or guidebooks)

| | |
|--|----------|
| Travel costs (train, airfare, etc.) | \$ _____ |
| | \$ _____ |
| Accommodation | \$ _____ |
| | \$ _____ |
| Meals | \$ _____ |
| Personal expenses, including entertainment | \$ _____ |

Total vacation expenses (convert to U.S.\$)

C \$ _____

Total estimated expenses (add lines A, B and C)

D \$ _____

List personal resources available such as savings, family contribution, financial aid, summer earnings, etc. Subtract your estimated expenses and you can anticipate your study abroad budget.

Total estimated resources \$ _____

Less total estimated expenses (line D) \$ _____

Your study abroad budget \$ _____