

Interview with....

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Home university: Tec de Monterrey – Mexico City, Cuernavaca, MEXICO

- **When did you arrive? How long are you going to stay here?**

I arrived on 4 August, 20 days early. I arrived early because I wanted to learn more about Finland before the classes started. My exchange period is for one semester (autumn 2008).

I will leave on 20 December and will visit some (14 cities!!) European cities before returning home to Mexico on 7 January. We will start in Germany and finish in Spain. We will spend Christmas in Rome and New Year in Paris.

- **Why and how did you choose Finland?**

Since January last year, I was thinking of doing an exchange but I did not know yet where to go. I did a lot of research on several countries and with the help of my family; I narrowed my options to Finland, Argentina and Chile. Finland was more expensive but I felt it offered better opportunity and of course I wanted to practice my English.

I chose Finland as I had read a lot of positive things about it – the quality of education, the good economy. I read an article that wrote that Finland was rated as one Europe's best performing economies in terms of economic growth from 2005 to 2007. I also knew that Finland is home to some of the world's best technologies, quality education and has a good business environment.

Most of my classmates were planning to do their exchanges in Central Europe, like Berlin or Paris. Not many Mexican students think of doing their exchange in Scandinavia. My academic advisor at my home university recommended HAAGA-HELIA and so did a friend of mine who had done his exchange here last semester.

- **How did you feel upon arrival here? What was your first day in Finland like?**

It was so exciting and emotional. I thought to myself "I'm in Europe, I'm in Helsinki!" I arrived at night and said to myself "Come on, this summer is so cold!" Then I went to my hostel and took my first walk in Helsinki that evening.

Before the semester began, I spent my time touring Helsinki. I visited Suomenlinna, the zoo, Kauppatori and many other places in Helsinki. When my Mexican friends arrived later, I was their 'tour man'.

- **How did you find your studies at HH as an exchange student?**

The similarities were quite many: We use the Blackboard e-learning system in my home university too so I had no problems getting used to it here. We also use 'Problem Based Learning' in Mexico and it is used a lot at HAAGA-HELIA. In Mexico we have to do a lot of group work and presentations which we do at HAAGA-HELIA too.

The differences are that in Mexico, the semester is not divided into two periods like it is in Finland so I had to get used to that. Also, the lecturers here make use of several different teaching methods and are very flexible in that sense.

Overall, I found the pace of learning comfortable here and I feel I adjusted to the new environment well.

- **Your opinion about the HH International Services**

They were very helpful. For example, I sent an e-mail before the semester began as I had some questions regarding the selection of my courses and they were very helpful. My studies went as planned.

The orientation was very useful and the International Service staff were always available to answer questions and to clear any doubts. It is different from Mexico as in my home university one would have to make an appointment to speak to the international services staff but in HAAGA-HELIA, you can go to their office anytime during their consulting hours.

- **Your views on the Finnish culture/cultural differences between your home country and Finland**

There are some differences:

In the beginning I found it strange as in Mexico, if I were to say 'hi' to a girl, I would give a kiss, but it is impossible to give a kiss to a Finnish girl! They would think "why do you give me a kiss?"

People here tend to want to get straight to business when it comes to meetings and discussions. There is very little small talk which is the norm in Mexico.

Finnish people seem shy and quiet in the beginning but after you know them, you find that they are very nice people. That is the thing that I like about this country. In the beginning when I arrived, I got lost in the city and I asked for directions. The first person I approached did not speak English but I waited till someone who did came along and that was very nice.

Finnish people are very very punctual!

- **Adjustment to Finland, HH and the Finnish culture**

I had to get used to the darkness and short days. I did not like the weather in the beginning but now I am used to it and like the cold weather. Other than that I had

no problems adjusting. Overall it was nice because most people spoke English and one of the reasons why I came here was to practice my English.

- **What do you think of Finnish food?**

I have tried reindeer and leipäjusto with lakkahillo (bread cheese with cloudberry jam) in Lapland. I also like salmon with potatoes.

In the school cafeteria it's always the same, rice and potatoes with something else.... But I like pulla! The food is very expensive in Finland. However it is wonderful that the food in the cafeteria is very affordable. Shopping in the supermarket can be challenging as the labels are all in Finnish!

- **Have you learnt any Finnish?**

Yes I took a Finnish language course for beginners and can now use basic words and phrases like 'mitä kuuluu', 'kiitos', the numbers...

- **Where have you travelled during you stay?**

In Finland, I have visited Tampere, Turku, Porvoo, Vierumäki and Lapland. I also visited Stockholm and Tallinn. Porvoo is a very beautiful place!

- **Have you tried Finnish Sauna?**

Yes and I like it. We have sauna in Mexico too but we don't have frozen lakes or snow. In Lapland I jumped into the snow from the sauna and then into the frozen lake and back into the sauna again! It's very good for health because I was full of energy after!

- **Free time activities in Helsinki?**

I have been to some shopping centers, bars, clubs, and restaurants. I like the Finnish night life even though it is very different from Mexico's. In Helsinki we (exchange students) usually go to the same clubs; Onnela and KY.

I enjoyed the fireworks display in Helsinki at Töölönranta.

Right now we are quite busy with year-end projects and assignments.

- **Your exchange period's top moment**

There were many! The very top must have been my birthday as it was the first time spending it away from family and I am very close to my family. I spent it with the exchange students this year and it was nice. The other top moment was the trip to Lapland when I skied downhill 80m! I also did cross-country skiing. I have never skied before coming to Finland. (I have it on video!)

- **Friends**

I made a lot of very good friends from different countries here.

- **What have you learned during your stay at HH and from your exchange period?**

I now understand better other cultures. We have worked in multicultural teams. There are different languages and different points of view.

I have also learnt to be independent. I feel that I have grown up during my stay here.

- **What tips do you have for the new incoming exchange students who come to HH?**

Firstly don't be afraid of cultural things. Have an open mind and try to understand other cultures. With time you will learn how to communicate with people of different cultures.

Secondly, don't miss your food because you can't cook your (home countries) food here so enjoy the food you have here. Now I love potatoes and rice!

- **Would you recommend HH and Finland to other students?**

Yes, totally, 100%!

- **Are you planning to further your studies here?**

Yes. Probably HAAGA-HELIA or Helsinki School of Economics as I study Finance. I want to do my Master's in Helsinki School of Economics.