Thinking of studying in Mexico?
The K-State study abroad office will help you fill out all the necessary information to be able to study abroad. This quick guide is to help you decide if you want to go to Mexico, and if you do, give you some inside first-hand information on studying in Mexico.

Why Mexico is better than you think:
When I went to Mexico, my main motivation was to learn Spanish, but along the way I experienced more than I ever imagined. Here are some of those experiences including information on tourist attractions and information on the cities I stayed in.

Take a look at these pictures and guess where in the world they are at:
All 4 of these pictures are from Mexico and are all definitely options for you to explore. The first is the city of Guanajuato. It is a city that looks like it should be in Europe but is actually a smaller town in Mexico and is famous for its beauty, Universities, and peacefulness. The second picture is from the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico. The southern portion of the country is known for its beautiful forests and outdoor recreational activities. The third is the migration of the Monarch butterflies. In the spring, you can visit cities that are close to these migration spots and you can see forests covered in butterflies. Lastly, this is an example of some of the extreme sports available in Mexico. This is base jumping INTO a cave!

3: http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-JG8btQG1Cxo/TxB_TE7W2SI/AAAAAAAAAHo/MJ3q8YclpX0/s1600/migracion-monarca.jpg
4: http://www.skydiveworld.com/images/cavebase_2way.jpg

Things to do in Mexico
Here are a few tourist attractions that you may find interesting. First I’ll include some of the popular ones such as commonly visited cities and later some of the more rewarding and less traveled attractions.

Cities
Although there are many that you can visit, I’ll talk about what I consider the 4 main types of cities and list some similar cities after incase you would like to check out others. Remember that there are near endless possibilities.

Mexico City:
Mexico City is really a unique city. With so many attractions, you can spend many weekends here and not see everything. The options can really be overwhelming. So what are some options?
A huge attraction associated with Mexico City, that really isn’t in Mexico City is the ancient city of Teotihuacan. This is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and houses some of the largest pyramids in the Americas. One of the things that make this site different is that first, the site is huge. There is more than one pyramid and definitely expect to walk a lot. What I personally like the best about Teotihuacan is that you can climb the pyramids. It is one of the few sites left where you can climb the pyramids free of charge. Coupled with being some of the largest, you can get a good view! For example, this is the view from atop the Sun Pyramid, looking at the Moon pyramid.


Cathedrals in Mexico City are numerous and there seems to be countless in Mexico City and Mexico in general. If you are religious or like that type of architecture, then you are in for a treat. Out of the probable millions, two in Mexico City stick out. One is the Mexico City Metropolitan Cathedral. A beautiful building, but more known for its sinking into the ground. The second is the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe that contains the apron of the image of “Our Lady of Guadalupe.”
Mexico City has almost 9 million inhabitants, so there are plenty of museums, archeological sites, monuments, and parks to visit. For brevity, I will not post everything.

Guadalajara:
Guadalajara is a city on the western edge of Mexico and isn’t a Spanish city. This makes it a bit different. The people that live there tend to be more liberal than the rest of the country, but there is also plenty to do there as well. There are bus tours inside the city, a large and beautiful artisan market, along with museums etc.. Some of the best attractions aren’t actually in Guadalajara itself, but close to it. There are buses that travel from Guadalajara to the little town of Tequila, where tequila the drink originated. Also the famous beach Puerto Vallarta is fairly close. Cities that a lot of people visit and have less of the typical Spanish colonialism include Monterrey and Puebla.

Oaxaca:
The City of Oaxaca is a perfect example of a city for people that want to see some history of Mexico. The city is a Spanish colonial town and has the architecture similar to that in Spain. Also, there are the pyramids of Monte Alban just a taxi ride away (costs less than two dollars). This is a peaceful city with plenty of markets of handmade goods and history everywhere. Cities like Oaxaca are popular to visit simply because they are so beautiful! Others include Puebla, Merida, Veracruz, and Guanajuato. Caution: These cities will make you want to stay for extended periods of time.
Puerto Vallarta:
Puerto Vallarta is a beautiful beach. If you go to Mexico, you must go to one of the beaches. There are numerous and each is unique. There are beaches for all types of people, there are the American tourist beaches (Cancun for example), and there are the beaches that are nearly 100% for Mexican tourists (which are fun, such as Puerto Escondido). Also, there are beaches that are anywhere in between, but all are beautiful. A simple good search will give you a list of lots of them, but I’ll name a few. Some of the more upscale and expensive ones include Cancun, Playa de Carmen, Acapulco, and Puerto Vallarta. Puerto Vallarta can be expensive as well although I consider it more middle of the road. Some of the cheaper beaches are in Oaxaca because they are harder to reach. Because they are harder to reach there are less American tourists and cheaper to visit. I slept in a hammock for less than a dollar a night on the beach of Puerto Escondido. If you are interested in that, some similar beaches are Zipolite, Mazatlan, beaches close to Merida, and Isla Mujeres.
Outdoor Activities
Along with the cities, Mexico has plenty of fantastic outdoor activities. Beaches are excluded from this section because they were partially covered above.

What’s a bit strange about Mexico, is that they don’t really go camping. With that in mind, there are plenty of other activities! These include scuba diving, snorkeling, kayaking, hiking, mountain climbing, volcano climbing, base jumping, sky diving, horse-back riding, trail trekking in the forests, and there are also natural observational activities. Things like that are seeing the huge migration of butterflies, or turtle mating season. As strange as the second sounds, it is fun because sea turtles come much closer to humans, and there are a lot more of them so you can actually swim with sea turtles! With a little research, you’ll be able to find these activities close to where ever you study.

Studying Abroad in Mexico
Although this topic is huge, I’ll try to cover some of the basic and most important topics.

UPAEP
I studied at the Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla (or UPAEP for short). It is in the center of Puebla, Mexico.

Some quick information about the University. They have 42 undergraduate on campus programs, 33 master programs and 13 doctoral programs. So, most likely they will have a program close to whatever you are studying. Of course some programs are larger than others and two very prominent programs they have are in medical and engineering. Medical degrees are huge at UPEAP. If you plan on going into any kind of medical field, I strongly recommend going to UPAEP because of their med programs. Secondly, engineering is pretty important as well. Puebla hosts a Volkswagen factory with over 13,000 employees! The VW market is huge in Mexico, especially in Puebla and VW is always looking for engineers, business majors, and many other degrees to fill their positions. Because UPEAP is a prominent school and in the same city, UPEAP has some degrees that seem tailored to fit this demand. If you are looking to work in the automotive industry (an opportunity that is fairly rare to Kansas), then please consider taking classes at UPAEP. Here is their official site in English.


What is the university like? What is the city like? What can I expect if I study there? These are great questions and I’m sure you are thinking about them. First let’s take a tour of UPAEP, much like if you were taking a campus tour of K-State.
The school: The main campus of UPAEP is fairly smaller than that of K-State, but is beautiful none the less. Most classes will be taken in the A, B, C, or T building. These buildings form a square with a courtyard in the middle where students tend to lounge, much like the Union. There are some other building just across the street or a block or two away that may house some classes, but for the most part, they are in the main building area. The CUC building, much like our Anderson Hall, is where you go to change classes, pay for classes, anything and everything associated with paying for, signing up for, or dropping classes. This building is across the street to the south.

Once a student, you will receive your own g-mail account, a photo ID that grants you access to the buildings (all buildings have security checking IDs making sure any non-students or non-professors don’t enter), and access to at least two of the computer labs. Unlike K-State, you can’t put money on your card. Instead, if you decide to eat in the cafeteria you pay with cash or a credit/debit card.

Classes: You will choose your classes before you go, because that is part of the application process with K-State. These classes may change, when you arrive, but don’t fret. I had plenty of help to sign up for new classes. It is actually built into their orientation week to help you with classes. Whatever your major is, I’m confident that you will be able to find classes. One thing to notes is that I recommend that you study Spanish, or know how speak it. BUT WAIT! If you don’t, don’t worry. I hadn’t taken any Spanish before I arrived, and I got around just fine. They have classes in English, and even though I changed some of my classes, all of them transferred back to K-State. Whether you know Spanish or not, take a
Spanish language class. After just one semester abroad, I came back with a Spanish 3 proficiency. Even my friends that had been studying Spanish for years said that actually practicing it and taking a class helped tremendously. Another note about classes in Mexico: homework is a foreign concept. The best thing about the classes in Mexico is that most classes don’t give out that much homework. Instead, they do more group and in class projects and discussions. This is great for students like us because we don’t want homework while studying abroad, but we also get to interact more with other Mexican students.

Extracurricular activities such as sports are taken as a class. Even weight lifting or gym use is considered a class. When you sign up for these, you will pick a time on when you think you might be in the gym. It doesn’t really matter if you go at that time or not and the attendance is not mandatory. Just like K-State, you go when you want and how often you want. If that is not your thing, I do recommend that you go to some of the sporting events. They are free if you wear a red UPAEP shirt! Their basketball team has 19 national championships and won the championship when I was there.

Living: Now that you have all of your classes situated, where will you stay? There are three options, and UPAEP can provide two of them. One option is to live in the dorm. The dorms have security, and you must have a student ID or have a person sign you in to enter the building. Unlike at K-State, this security is 24/7, not just at night. Meals are not provided for, so remember that you have to cook for yourself. The second and more popular option is to live with a host family. This is a fantastic experience! You will live with a Mexican family that usually has children close to your age. They must provide two meals per day (although some pack lunches for you also). Most of the families take you on little trips to explore the city of Puebla or take you to family gathers such as weddings if you would like to go. This option also allows you to practice your Spanish more. Finally, you can live with other exchange students. Although this is more popular for students taking their second semester there, they occasionally look for first semester students to fill rooms. You will receive a specific e-mail about this if this option is available. Otherwise the living situation is part of the normal application process.

**Puebla**

Let’s take a tour of the city you’ll be staying in.

Puebla started as a colonial city, but unlike others there aren’t ruins under or next to Puebla. The city started as city just for the Spanish, and because of that many of the buildings close to the center of the city are in the old Spanish style. Puebla also has one of the largest cathedrals in the area and is an icon for the city.
Puebla has also continued to keep up with the pace of the modern world. Puebla is not a city stuck in the times of the past. Within the country of Mexico, Puebla is known for having the best schools, and being an economic powerhouse. The top students that don’t go to the United States to study often go to Puebla, with UPAEP being one of those schools. Puebla is known to have many banks and factories that keep the city, state, and country in stable economic conditions. Volkswagen is a major factor since they have a plant with over 13,000 employees. Audi has recently announced that they will build a factory in Puebla that will be able to produce up to 150,000 vehicles annually.

(http://www.thedetroitbureau.com/2012/09/audi-picks-puebla-for-new-north-american-plant/)
All of the major attractions in large cities are also in Puebla. Also they have wrestling matches every Sunday night! A city joined at the hip of Puebla’s is Cholula. Cholula is known around the world for their cathedral, but is known locally as the go-to city for nightlife.

Although this cathedral is built on top of a pyramid in Cholula, the volcano can be clearly seen from Puebla.
Documents
There are a few documents that you need to study abroad, such as your passport. Here I’ll describe two documents that pertain to Mexico, because K-State will help you with your passport and other travel documents you may need.

Mexico (as of the fall of 2012) is in agreement with the United States that an American can be in Mexico technically as a tourist for six months, and does not need a visa. Because of this, getting a visa before going is not required, and I do not recommend it. I heard horror stories of fellow students that had to travel to Chicago to get their Visa approved. That is not a stress that anyone needs right before going abroad. Once you have arrived in Puebla, there is a week of orientation before school starts. The schools hands out safety information, you receive your student ID, and everything is more or less similar as a student orientation here at K-State. Part of that process is getting you a student visa. While it is not required by K-State or the US, UPAEP requires it. They are looking out for you and the visa does provide legal documentation and proof that you are there in Mexico as a student.

The only other forms you will need to fill out are on the plane trip into and out of Mexico. You will receive this on the plane and is easy to fill out. Many sites on the web state that you need to fill out the FMM form, and this is what they are talking about. Don’t worry; it isn’t anything you need to do ahead of time.
Safety in Mexico
You will quickly find out that when you tell people you are thinking of studying abroad in Mexico, they will be concerned for your safety. Although there are parts of Mexico I would not visit (places close to the border), most of what happens in Mexico is just like a large city. As Americans, we think of Mexico as the dangerous county that hates America. Well that is like saying that all of America is made of skyscrapers and hamburgers (which some believe).

Treat Mexico just like any large city. In New York you don’t ride in the back of the subway late at night. You don’t walk around alone at 3 in the morning. Similar advice needs to be followed in Mexico. If you decide to go out, go with friends or a few people so you aren’t alone. If you don’t speak Spanish very well, it is always helpful to have a fluent speaker with you. This just avoids confusion, even if it is just trying to call a taxi.

Besides the basics, there is a lot of information about Mexico on US government webpages. I recommend checking out this site. For the sake of brevity, I don’t want to repeat everything on that page to here. There is a wealth of information; you just have to read it.
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_970.html

In Final
I hope you have looked up a lot of information on Mexico to make an informed decision on whether to study there or not. Hopefully your answer is yes! Remember, Mexico is a culture rich, diverse, and extremely fun country. Get out and travel! Enjoy your time abroad wherever you go. Safe travels!