



HOW TO

study abroad in

Latin America

UPDATED for 2018





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Introduction

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Keen to explore the heights of Machu Picchu or gaze in wonder at the Milky Way reflected over Lake Titicaca in Peru? Stretching from Mexico's northern border with the US, down to the southernmost tip of Argentina, Latin America is packed with striking natural settings, historic sites, culinary delights and thriving urban hubs.

Among the world's most urbanized regions, Latin America has enjoyed steady economic growth in recent years, and was one of just a few parts of the world in which the middle classes grew during the first decade of the 21st century, according to a 2015 report from Pew Research Center.

The region has long held a strong appeal for travelers and tourists, thanks to its array of beautiful sights, immense natural diversity, rich historic heritage, opportunities for outdoor pursuits and adventure, and colorful urban hubs. As growing numbers of students seek out opportunities to study abroad, Latin American nations are also keen to welcome newcomers to their universities.

There are plenty of good options to choose from, whether you want to practice your Spanish or Portuguese, spend a semester abroad as part of an exchange program, or complete the entirety of your degree at a Latin American institution. Each year, the dedicated QS Latin America University Rankings highlights the region's top-performers, which also have a growing presence in the overall QS World University Rankings®.



If spending your university years overseas in a buzzing Latin American city, with incredible natural and historic sites within close reach, while also boosting your CV sounds ideal – read on for more information about higher education systems in Latin American countries, the admissions process, study costs, and more...



Higher education in Latin America

Over the past four decades, the Latin American region has seen stupendous growth to its higher education sector. This is now comprised of more than 3,000 universities

With a total of 20 countries featured in the latest **QS Latin America University Rankings**, this incredibly diverse region is home to a good selection of attractive study abroad destinations, including Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina and Peru.

While very few courses in Latin America are taught in English, governments in the region are continuing to invest significant amounts of money in improving and internationalizing their higher education systems, to attract international students and develop into knowledge economies. The region is already home to many highly research-intensive universities in Latin America; indeed, Brazil alone generates almost 3 percent of global scientific publications.

Over the past four decades, the Latin American region has seen stupendous growth to its higher education sector. This is now comprised of more than 3,000 universities – the greatest number of which are concentrated in Brazil, Mexico and Argentina. There’s been a rise in postgraduate qualifications too, with increasing numbers of universities in the region offering master’s degrees and doctorates.



Universities have also benefited from a continent-wide move towards internationalization, with many governments also welcoming the opening of new private universities. In some countries much still remains to be done in terms of both policy and infrastructure development, including the implementation of tougher regulations on accreditation and greater accountability for universities.

Many Latin American governments and universities offer study abroad internships and funding opportunities for international students, such as the [OAS Scholarships Program](#), the [Mente Argentina Scholarships](#) and the [CIEE Bowman Travel Grants](#).



Admissions

When applying for undergraduate courses, you will need to write a personal statement and show that you have obtained or expect to obtain your chosen university's minimum grade requirement

To study in Latin America, you will need to apply either directly to each university, or through an exchange program. It's worth checking individual application deadlines as far in advance as possible, to avoid disappointment, as application timelines may vary between institutions.

Undergraduate

When applying for undergraduate courses, you will need to write a personal statement and show that you have obtained or expect to obtain your chosen university's minimum grade requirement (in your GPA, International Baccalaureate or A-Levels). For some courses, you may be required to have studied a particular set of subjects, and you may also need to take exams such as a Spanish or Portuguese proficiency test, national exams and/or a subject-specific test.

Postgraduate

For postgraduate courses, you will be asked for a relevant undergraduate qualification from an internationally recognized university, as well as letters of recommendation from professors and, in some cases, past employers, as well as a personal statement. Depending on the course, you may also need to submit a research proposal.



Language tests

To study abroad in Latin America, you will need to pass the language requirements first. Brazilian universities may ask you to sit for a CELPE-Bras certificate, which is the only Portuguese proficiency test. To sit the exam, you need to be over 16 years of age, provide a photocopy of your ID and pay the registration fee. You can register online at portal.inep.gov.br/celpebras and choose from the test dates and locations listed.

Other universities in Latin America may ask you to sit a Spanish proficiency test such as the CELU (Certificado de Español: Lengua y Uso). You will need to be over 16 years of age and have undertaken three years of high school. The CELU is a written and oral exam with two possible pass grades, intermediate and advanced. Exams are typically taken in June and November at venues in Paris, Berlin, Milan, Argentina and Brazil.



Student visas

Application procedures can be more or less demanding, depending on the host country and your nationality

International students will need a visa to study in most Latin American countries. Application procedures can be more or less demanding, depending on the host country and your nationality. Below are visa guidelines for some of the most popular study destinations in the region.

Brazil

Most international students will be asked to obtain a student visa – which should be done at least two to three months before traveling. To apply, you will need various documents, including:

- Proof of sufficient funds or financial support during your stay
- Medical examination results
- Certificate of your criminal record
- A copy of a letter of acceptance from your Brazilian university
- A passport
- Your birth certificate



Chile

To study in Chile for longer than 90 days, you will need to apply for a student visa six months before traveling, for which you will need to provide evidence of:

- A passport valid for at least six months beyond your expected stay
- Sufficient funds to cover tuition and living expenses during your stay (note that it is illegal for internationals to work in Chile!)
- List of countries you've visited in the past five years
- Proof of a return travel ticket
- Letter of acceptance to study at a university in Chile
- Police clearance
- Bill of health

Mexico

If you're planning to study in Mexico for a period of over six months, you will need to apply for a visa (which will cost approximately up to US\$30) in your home country, providing:

- Proof of sufficient funds
- Proof of acceptance to study at a Mexican university
- A return travel ticket

You will need to apply for a resident's permit with the National Registry of Foreign Citizens within 30 days of arriving in Mexico, which will be valid for up to a year, allowing multiple entries. You can't work during your studies in Mexico.

If you're planning to study in Mexico for a period of over six months, you will need to apply for a visa (which will cost approximately up to US\$30) in your home country



For a student visa valid for over six months, you will need a police certificate confirming that you have no criminal record in Argentina

Colombia

You will need a student visa to study in Colombia for longer than three months, for which you will need to provide:

- A certificate of enrollment
- Sufficient funds to cover your tuition fees
- A valid passport

Once in Colombia, you will need to register for a citizen card at La Unidad Administrativa Especial Migración Colombia within 15 days of your arrival.

Argentina

To study in Argentina for a period of over 90 days, you will need to apply for a student visa. You can do this after arrival in the country, showing:

- A valid passport
- Proof of enrollment provided by your university
- A visa fee of US\$150

For a student visa valid for over six months, you will need a police certificate confirming that you have no criminal record in Argentina. If you are staying for longer than a year, you will need to leave Argentina and reapply for a second visa. If unable to leave the country, contact ISA (Study Abroad Argentina).



Peru

Depending on your nationality, you may or may not need to apply for a tourist visa before arriving in Peru. To stay in Peru for longer than six months, you will need to apply for a student visa through your university or in Peru with the DIGEM (Dirección General de Migraciones). Note that non-nationals cannot work in Peru without a work permit. Your visa will be valid for three months and must be extended every three months of your stay.

To apply for a student visa, you will need:

- A valid passport
- Return flights
- Letter of enrollment from your university



Tuition fees & living costs

Tuition fees tend to be lower in Latin America than in many other parts of the world. Many public Latin American universities, in fact, do not charge any tuition fees at all and even subsidize student meals. Of course, tuition fees largely depend on the university and country.

An overview of the costs of an undergraduate degree:

Tuition fees tend to be lower in Latin America than in many other parts of the world

- Colombian private universities charge up to **US\$5,330 per semester** for an undergraduate course, while public universities in the country usually charge around **US\$970 per semester**
- Almost all Argentinian universities offer free education, save for a small number of private establishments which charge tuition fees of up to **US\$5,000 a year**
- Most public universities in Brazil offer free tuition (with a small registration fee), while private higher education institutions charge wide-ranging fees from **US\$2,000 to up to US\$10,000 a year**
- Tuition fees in Mexico vary greatly depending on your course and university. Public universities charge from **US\$400 to US\$900**, while private courses can cost from **US\$1,600 up to US\$16,500 per year**.



Living costs are also on the affordable side in most Latin American countries. A cappuccino in Bogotá, Colombia will set you back approximately US\$1.49, and a one-bedroom rental in the city center about US\$392 per month. That being said, living costs will vary depending on the country and the city. Argentina, for instance, is more expensive than Colombia, but prices do remain comparatively low, with a one-bed rental in Buenos Aires city center costing US\$402 and a loaf of bread US\$1.54.

All living costs data was taken from Numbeo.com



Funding opportunities

It's always worth checking with your university for any governmental or university-sponsored scholarships you may be eligible for as an international student

While Latin American countries tend to be inexpensive places to study due to low tuition fees and relatively low living costs, it may not always be possible for you to work part-time alongside your studies, as non-nationals are often required to apply for a work permit. In fact, you are likely to be asked to provide evidence of sufficient funds to cover your tuition fees and living expenses as part of your student visa application. There are, however, a number of funding options available to you, through universities and organizations within both your home and host country.

It's always worth checking with your university for any governmental or university-sponsored scholarships you may be eligible for as an international student. Some governments and organizations are also fairly active in supporting international students to move to Latin America, either for a full degree or for a semester. Find below a list of some of the many options available to you.

Eureka SD Partnership

The EU's EURICA Partnership awards a number of scholarships to students looking to study abroad in Latin America and Europe on an exchange program or for a master's degree. To be eligible for a EURICA scholarship to study in Latin America, you need to:

- Be a European citizen



- Have sufficient knowledge of the language of the course or one of the languages spoken in the host country
- Have completed at least one year of study at higher education level

OAS Scholarships

The Organization of American States (OAS) offers scholarships to Canadian and US students to pursue their master's or PhD with **one of these universities located in South America**. To be eligible, students must be:

- Canadian citizens or residents
- Fulfill the entry requirements of their chosen course
- Be in good health
- Have sufficient fluency in the language of study

OAS Scholarships are awarded to students wishing to undertake their studies in the natural sciences, engineering, humanities, social sciences or arts, full-time and on-site. The scholarship is worth up to US\$30,000 per year and includes medical insurance, a monthly allowance, tuition fees, and a round-trip airfare ticket to the host country.

CIEE Global Access Initiative (GAIN) Grant

CIEE offers several grants, including the Global Access Initiative (GAIN) Grant, which awards up to US\$2,000 to students from lower economic backgrounds looking to pursue their studies in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe or the Caribbean.

OAS Scholarships are awarded to students wishing to undertake their studies in the natural sciences, engineering, humanities, social sciences or arts, full-time and on-site



Roberto Rocca Scholarships

Granted to undergraduate engineering students to study in Latin America, the Roberto Rocca Scholarships are open to residents of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Romania, UK, Uruguay and the US.

There are many country-specific scholarships open to international students wishing to study in Latin America. Find out more [here](#).



Student cities

Buenos Aires

Ranked in the top 50 of the **QS Best Student Cities**, Buenos Aires scores particularly well for “employer activity”. It’s not hard to see why. Home to three universities ranked in the global top 400 of the **QS World University Rankings® 2019**, Argentina’s capital city is a dynamic cosmopolitan hub of opportunities, particularly for international students and graduates. Another major draw, of course, is the student lifestyle. With incredible nightlife, a pleasant climate and moderate living costs, Buenos Aires remains a favored tourist spot for a wide mix of travelers. Living costs remain affordable, with the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the city center going for approximately US\$402 each month, while a loaf of bread will cost approximately US\$1.54.

São Paulo

Also included in the QS Best Student Cities, Brazil’s sprawling financial hub is a prime study abroad destination and home to an impressive six internationally ranked universities. In addition to the rapid progress of its universities in the rankings, São Paulo of course has a lot to offer prospective students both in terms of lifestyle incentives and job prospects. One of the fastest-growing world economies, Brazil is included in the BRICS and TIMBI groups of fast-developing nations. Renting a studio in the city center will set you back US\$525 each month, while a loaf of bread will cost approximately US\$1.66.

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Rio de Janeiro

Tucked in between beautiful beaches and Sugarloaf Mountain, Brazil's most iconic city is a vibrant urban hub with a warm climate, famed arts and cultural scene and a growing tech sector, with some work opportunities available to international graduates.

Top universities in the city include the [Universidade Federal Do Rio De Janeiro \(UFRJ\)](#), [Pontificia Universidade Católica Do Rio De Janeiro \(PUC-Rio\)](#), [Universidade Federal Fluminense \(UFF\)](#) and [Universidade Do Estado Do Rio De Janeiro \(UERJ\)](#), all of which are ranked in the QS World University Rankings 2019. Rio itself was a new entry in the QS Best Student Cities in 2017. Renting a studio in the city center will cost you approximately US\$491 and a loaf of bread about US\$1.66.



Cordoba

Not to be confused with its Spanish namesake, Cordoba is one of the fastest-growing cities in Argentina and is also home to the **Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC)**. The gorgeous pedestrian-friendly city features leafy patios, interlocking narrow streets and architectural gems dating back several centuries. Home to a vibrant nightlife, with gorgeous wine bars and clubs, Cordoba is animated all year long, but really takes flight during the summer months when music festivals and live bands occupy its riverfront streets and fill the city with young people and musicians. Life in Cordoba is comparatively cheap: renting a studio flat in the city center will cost you US\$250 each month and a loaf of white bread about US\$0.82.

Mexico City

Mexico's capital Mexico City is currently featured in the top 60 of the QS Best Student Cities index, receiving very high scores for affordability and employer activity. Its highest-ranked university, **Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)**, is one of the largest universities in Latin America and is consistently in the top 150 of the QS World University Rankings®.

Mexico City is noted for its historical legacy (with many museums and grand colonial-era buildings), delicious street food, cultural diversity and great nightlife. In terms of living costs, a one-bed apartment in the city center costs around US\$545 per month, going down to US\$333 if you live outside the city center.

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Santiago

Home to the **Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile**, the highest-ranked university in Latin America according to the latest QS Latin America University Rankings, Chile's capital Santiago was included in the top 100 of the QS Best Student Cities index.

Santiago is known for its flourishing modern arts scene, traditional street markets, buzzing nightlife, and stunning backdrop of the Andes mountains. Living costs in Chile are slightly higher than those elsewhere in Latin America, but Santiago is still a relatively affordable city, with a one-bed apartment costing US\$489 a month while a loaf of bread is US\$1.30.

All living costs data was taken from Numbeo.com



Working in Latin America

While Latin American countries have done much to attract and recruit highly skilled workers from overseas, many countries in the area require international job applicants to apply for a work permit. The process will vary depending on the location, but you will typically be required to pay a fee averaging around US\$200 depending on the country, as well as showing that you have an employment contract, a valid passport and a birth certificate.

Major industries in Latin America include agriculture, manufacturing, mining and services, with some growth in renewable energy and cars. As of 2017, there's a shortage in Brazil for highly skilled workers in engineering, IT, environment management, food and mining. Fluency in Portuguese and/or Spanish, as well as an interest in and good knowledge of the host country would be advantageous.

There are many places where you could begin your job search, such as in the jobs section of local newspapers or using websites such as *Xpat Jobs*, *BrazilBiz*, *Catho.com*, or *JobsinBuenosAires.com*.

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Teaching jobs in Latin America

Teaching jobs in secondary schools and English language centers remain a popular choice for graduates looking to work in Latin American countries. Opportunities to teach English as a foreign language can be found online using platforms such as *Bridge TEFL Jobs*, *GoAbroad.com* and *LoveTEFL*. Depending on the position, you may be required to hold an undergraduate qualification, two years of experience in a similar role, and/or a TEFL certificate.



More questions?

Want to find out more about studying abroad in Latin America? Get advice from international students and graduates in our [online forums](#).