

## Mexico Semester Information



The Mexico semester combines 3 different courses. The standard format consists of mountaineering and rock climbing, sea kayaking, and backpacking and canyoneering. One instructor stays with the group for the entire semester. The 3 courses are cumulative. They build upon each other to create a comprehensive outdoor leadership and guide training semester. Students that complete a semester with IWLS are given top priority for an employment position.

### Course Location:

The semester starts and ends in Mexico City. From Mexico City, the semester takes us to some of the most beautiful and exciting areas of Mexico. The first portion of the semester takes place on the heights of Ixtaccihuatl and Pico de Orizaba. Orizaba reaches heights of 18,600ft, towering above the surrounding landscape. Following the high altitude volcanoes (Orizaba is the 3rd highest peak in North America), the rock climbing portion of the semester explores the sierra madre oriental of the state of Nuevo Leon. The rock climbing mecca of El Potrero Chico is the perfect setting for learning rock climbing skills and techniques.

After rock climbing, we'll head to Baja and explore the southern Sea of Cortez beginning in La Paz. The east side of the Baja peninsula is home to rugged mountain vistas, secluded coves, tropical waters, and great weather. It is the perfect winter location for learning sea kayaking leadership and guiding skills. We'll explore the azure waters and coastline in kayaks, on foot, and with snorkels.

The final portion of the semester explores the Copper Canyon region in the state of Chihuahua. It is home to the Tarahumara Indians, renowned for their long-distance running prowess. The system of canyons that make up the Copper Canyon country comprise some of the deepest canyons in North America. The beauty, ruggedness, displacement, and square mileage of these canyons rival any in the world.

### Semester Itinerary:

This is a flexible trip itinerary that shows the general progression of the semester.

**Day 0:** Arrive in Mexico city, we will stay in a hotel in historical district of Mexico City.

**Day 1:** After meeting up in Mexico City, we'll dive into food and equipment preparation for the 1st segment of the course. We also use this first day to begin our acclimatization process (Mexico City is at about 7,000ft).

Pre-trip meeting. We talk about expectations for the course from the students and from the instructors. We'll go over the planning and logistical considerations associated with the course.





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**Day 2:** Acclimatization Hike, sleep in the town of Amecameca. Spanish skills.

**Day 3:** Establish 1st camp on Ixtaccihuatl (17,200ft)

**Days 4 - 7:** Attempt Ixtaccihuatl via the Ayoloco glacier. Introduce mountaineering skills.

**Day 8:** Transport to Tlachichuca. Spanish skills. Tlachichuca is a small town at the base of Pico de Orizaba.

**Days 9 – 12:** Attempt Pico de Orizaba (18,600ft). We will establish a high camp, and continue to develop mountaineering skills.

**Day 13:** Mid-course evaluation and Transport to town of Hidalgo, Nuevo Leon. Lead instructors will assess participants' level of involvement and assessment rubrics associated with the WEA 18 point curriculum. These, in conjunction with peer evaluations, allow participants to receive positive feedback and develop an awareness in regards to fulfilling the requirements to receive certification as an outdoor leader through the WEA and IWLS certifications.

**Day 14 – 23:** Rock climbing at Potrero Chico.

Throughout these 10 days we will follow an intensive and thorough rock climbing program. Beginning with the basics, we will progress from top-rope, belaying, and anchor building to multi-pitch climbing, mock leading, high-angle rescue, and guiding considerations. We will stay at a nearby campground.

**Day 24:** Return to Mexico City. In the last few days of the course we will have final peer and instructor evaluations. Students will be evaluated on their understanding and completion of the IWLS and WEA curriculums.

**Day 25:** We'll finish de-rigging the first portion of our semester, get cleaned up and have some personal time.

**Days 26-27:** Travel to La Paz. Re-coup, do laundry, talk with loved ones etc... We will stay at a hostel in La Paz.

**Day 28-29:** In La Paz we will pack and prepare for our next expedition on the sea of Cortez. Trip preparation, planning, food and equipment packing. Pre-trip meeting. We talk about expectations for the course from the students and from the instructors.

**Day 30:** We head out onto the water of the Sea of Cortez.

**Days 31 – 40:** Initially we will focus on kayaking skills while we explore islands such as Isla Espiritu Santo and head north from La Paz.

**Day 41:** Mid-Course Evaluation and re-supply. Lead instructors will assess participants' level of involvement and assessment rubrics associated with the IWLS and WEA curriculums. These, in conjunction with peer evaluations, allow participants to receive positive feedback and develop an awareness in regards to fulfilling course curriculums.

**Day 42 – 51:** We'll continue to explore the rugged coast and islands of the southern Baja peninsula. Participants will have the opportunity to be in leadership roles.

**Day 52:** Take out at Loreto and return by van to La Paz. In the last few days of the course we will have final



peer and instructor evaluations. Students will be evaluated on their understanding and completion of the IWLS and WEA curriculums.

**Day 53-54:** Re-coup, do laundry, talk with loved ones etc...

**Day 55-56:** Travel to Chihuahua. Pack and prepare for our next expedition into the Copper Canyon country. Trip preparation, planning, food and equipment packing. Pre-trip meeting. We talk about expectations for the course from the students and from the instructors.

**Day 57:** Head into the Copper Canyon from Cusarare.

**Day 58-67:** Skill intensive backpacking/canyoneering instruction. This portion of the course focuses on the technical skills associated with backpacking and canyoneering. We will make our way south and west towards Divisadero, crossing the Copper Canyon and traveling through remote villages such as Pamachi.

**Day 68:** mid-course evaluation and re-supply at Divisadero. Lead instructors will assess participants' level of involvement and assessment rubrics associated with the WEA and IWLS curriculums.

**Day 69-78:** leadership, judgment, decision making development. Students will have the opportunity to be in leadership roles. We'll continue exploring secluded side canyons and develop technical canyoneering skills. We will continue south through the remote town of Urique and end up at Batopilas. At this point in the semester, students will be able to demonstrate their leadership abilities independent of the course instructors.

**Day 79:** Return to Chihuahua. In the last few days of the course we will have final peer and instructor evaluations. Students will be evaluated on their understanding and completion of the IWLS and WEA curriculums.

**Day 80: Return to Mexico City for flights home**

## Course Curriculum

The International Wilderness Leadership Schools' educational model nurtures leadership development and creates an awareness of the guiding mentality essential for leading safe, fun adventures in the wilderness. The combination of technical skills training, experiential education and practical leadership experience make the IWLS curriculum world class.

We believe that experiences drive our learning, and therefore we use formal and informal classes taught by both instructors and students. Instructors are eager to help facilitate the learning process, but, ultimately, how much you learn will be dependent upon the amount of effort you put into the course.

A detailed curriculum will be provided at the beginning of the course. Below is a partial list of curriculum points that will be covered throughout your course.

**IWLS General Curriculum** outlines essential components for effective outdoor leadership. Below are a few points that will be covered in this course.

**Decision Making and Problem Solving:** Over the course of 12 or 24 days, we'll discover ways to assess problems, explore solutions and evaluate options in order to make effective and safe decisions in the field.

**Leadership:** Opportunities to lead the group will be abundant, and you'll have the time to learn and practice



multiple styles of leadership in varied situations.

**Expedition Behavior and Group Dynamics:** Because this course is a true wilderness expedition, interactions between group members need to be supportive and contribute to the efficacy of the group. The daily dynamics of the group, combined with instruction, will teach participants not only how to be a member of a team, but how to influence and lead an expedition.

**Environmental Ethics:** As adventurers in some of the most pristine environments on the planet, it is our duty to respect the natural world. All of our courses practice and teach Leave No Trace® principles.

**Basic Camping Skills:** Mastering these essential skills will prove valuable whether you are pitching a tent in gale force winds or melting snow for drinking water.

**Equipment/Clothing Selection and Use:** You'll learn to choose the right gear for the correct application, whether enjoying a sunny afternoon on a snow slope or trekking through a tropical rainforest.

**Weather:** Will the storm arrive in the next 12 hours or the next 48? Understanding weather patterns and trends will help you plan successful trips in a wilderness setting.

**Health and Sanitation:** You'll learn water treatment techniques and waste management skills for healthy backcountry living.

**Travel Techniques:** Course instruction will help you discover ways to safely maximize your efficiency, whether hiking down a well-beaten path or traversing an exposed ridge.

**Navigation:** Learn how to take a bearing, read a topographical map, triangulate your position, or navigate in a whiteout.

**Safety and Risk Management:** Safety is always the #1 consideration. As the course progresses, you'll develop an awareness to appropriately assess risk and make safe decisions.

**Wilderness Emergency Procedures and Treatment:** Learn how to effectively manage safe, efficient and timely backcountry rescues.

**Natural and Cultural History:** Having a strong understanding of cultural history, flora, and fauna is an integral part of leading people in an outdoor environment. You'll learn some of the botany, ecology, and geology that apply to these remarkable areas.

**Communication Skills:** Speaking in public, managing a personal conflict, or leading a group in the wilderness, all of these situations require effective communication. You'll gain confidence in your communication abilities as you develop your personal leadership style over the length of this course.

**Trip Planning:** The first day of the 24-day course is devoted to planning, packing, and organizing the logistics, food, and equipment for the expedition.

**Teaching:** You'll have the opportunity to develop lesson plans, teach in front of the group, and learn the importance of progressions for teaching technical skills and leadership.

**IWLS Mountaineering Curriculum** is built from countless expeditions in Alaska and around the world. You'll learn how to be a confident and proficient mountaineer in a variety of different environments. Below are some topics we'll cover.

**Pre-trip Activities:** Learn how to plan and prepare for an extended wilderness expedition. We'll cover everything from technical climbing equipment to group and personal expectations.

**Camping Skills:** Basic expedition skills, such as tent set-up, site selection, and leaving camp, are essential to a



successful trip into the mountains. We'll learn these skills through practical experience.

**General Mountaineering Skills:** The mountain environment is an exciting and potentially dangerous place. You'll discover how to travel on steep mountain slopes using equipment such as an ice axe and crampons, as well as how to teach these skills to your fellow students.

**Anchors:** Anchor building is a fun, yet intricate subject. We'll examine single, double, triple and complex anchors, and their different applications. Learn how to place anchors in snow, rock, and ice.

**Ropes:** 50 meters or 70 meters? 8.0mm or 10.5mm? Single, double or twin? These are all questions you'll be able to knowledgeably answer. We'll also learn how to care for and maintain these important pieces of equipment.

**Knots:** Learn the appropriate applications for the figure 8, water knot, double fisherman, bowline, and other essential climbing knots.

**Belaying:** Should we use a fixed belay or a running belay? Our team will learn and practice the finer points of different belay techniques such as the hip belay, running belay, boot axe belay or fixed belay.

**Ascending:** Fixed lines are an important tool for large groups and guiding applications. We'll learn how to efficiently build, use and maintain them.

**Rappelling:** Rappelling down a steep rock face is a thrilling moment and our team will learn how to do it safely. We'll also look at different methods for teaching rappelling and dealing with incapacitated climbers.

**Rope Teams:** Rope team travel is a complicated endeavor that requires skill, technique and teamwork. We'll cover everything from prussic arrangement to team management for this form of mountain travel.

**Crevasse Rescue:** Traveling in glaciated terrain requires that every member of the team be proficient in crevasse rescue. We'll learn how to get a teammate out of a crevasse quickly and efficiently.

**Glaciology:** Through climbing, walking and traversing on glaciers and ice fields, students will learn and experience first hand the intriguing complexities of these enormous rivers of ice and their effect on the land.

**Objective Hazards:** Rock fall, river crossings, and avalanches are examples of objective hazards. Learn how to identify such hazards and minimize group exposure.

**Subjective Hazards:** Among other things, dehydration, fatigue and personal pride can be detrimental to group safety. Learn how to implement measures to mitigate these potential hazards.

**Technical Climbing:** Rock climbing, ice climbing and steep snow climbing are all included in the IWLS' curriculum.

**Top Rope Setup:** Top ropes allow people to push their limits and learn solid climbing technique in a fun and safe environment. We'll cover sight selection, rope management and group management.

**Escaping the Belay:** What happens when things go bad? We'll practice escaping the belay and getting to the aid of an injured climber.

**Short Roping:** Learn different applications of short roping technique and times and places to utilize it.

**Sleds:** Key for long expeditions in the mountains. Learn how to maneuver, pack, and construct expedition



sleds.

**Altitude Considerations:** Learn how to recognize signs and symptoms of acute mountain sickness, and steps to take to avoid it. We'll also discuss the most effective treatment for all altitude illnesses: descent.

**Timing:** In the mountains, timing is everything: when to leave camp, when to turn around, and when to push for the summit. Time management is a critical component of safe travel and plays into many aspects of mountaineering.

**IWLS Sea Kayaking Curriculum** is oriented to providing students with a solid skill set of paddling techniques to be safe and confident in a coastal environment. Here are a few of the topics students will learn on the course.

**Paddling Equipment:** Safely traveling the waters of the Caribbean requires that you have a thorough knowledge of your equipment and its use. We'll talk about kayak design, appropriate clothing, rescue gear, guide gear, and more!

**Strokes:** Forward, reverse, sweep, beam draw, and sculling draw: we'll cover them all, and you'll get ample opportunities to practice and refine your strokes.

**Maneuvers:** When coming in for a rescue, speed and efficiency are of utmost importance. We'll learn and practice maneuvers such as the low brace turn, bow rudder and hanging draw.

**Braces:** Paddling in rough conditions requires solid bracing skills. We'll learn and practice the low brace, high brace and sculling brace in a fun, controlled environment.

**Rescues:** What happens when you're paddling with clients in open waters and a boat capsizes? We'll learn everything from the paddle-float rescue to the assisted bow rescue to kayak rolling.

**Towing:** Whether you are pulling an injured kayaker away from booming surf or lending a helping hand to a seasick client, you'll learn the finer points of a towing system and the criteria for towing.

**Navigation:** Expeditions in the coastal waters of the Caribbean require solid navigational skills, including how to use deck compasses, read charts and position off land features.

**Group Management:** Managing a pod of kayakers on a windy day is challenging. You'll learn techniques for managing safety with a group on the water.

**Tides and Currents:** We'll learn about tide charts, the "Rule of 12's", and how to identify and avoid strong currents.

**Communication:** VHF marine radios, satellite phones, EPIRBs, and signaling devices are among some of the communication devices that we'll review during the course. You'll learn the protocols for effective communication in a wilderness setting.



**IWLS International Curriculum** is designed to provide students with a fundamental understanding of planning and leading expeditions in foreign countries. Here are just a few topics that will be covered:



**Cultural History:** As visitors to this remarkable place, we place a premium on being respectful and learning about the local culture and history. The rich history of Mexico provides great insight into the culture of the region today.

**Language Skills:** The ability to ask directions, purchase items, and communicate on any level is an essential element of leading an expedition to a foreign country. Throughout the course, we'll develop our Spanish language skills through dialog and lesson plans.

**Trip Preparation:** Logistics in a foreign country have the potential to be complex and tenuous. You'll take part in shopping at the local market, arranging transportation, and securing permits in preparation for your expedition to the Sian Ka'an.

**IWLS Backpacking Curriculum** prepares students for exploration into remote, backcountry settings.

**Pre-trip Activities:** Learn how to plan and prepare for an extended wilderness expedition. We'll cover everything from technical camping equipment to group and personal expectations.

**Backpacks:** Proper packing and fitting of backpacks improves efficiency and helps avoid injury.

**Tents:** Staying dry in the wilderness is an essential survival skill. You'll learn how to repair a damaged tent, how to set up camp in high winds, and techniques to secure your dry space for the night.

**Stoves and Campfires:** The ability to repair a broken stove, make an emergency fire after being submerged in an icy river, and melt snow efficiently for water are key components for leading a group in the wilderness.

**Cooking:** Sometimes in the backcountry, the meal makes the day. Whether cooking oatmeal or Thanksgiving dinner, you'll develop your skills at making tasty treats.

**Lightning Hazards:** Learn how to read weather patterns and avoid exposure, and how to manage a group in an emergency situation.

**River and Stream Crossings:** In river crossings, attention to detail and safety are #1. You'll learn and practice safe techniques for wading across a small stream or doing a Tyrolean traverse across a raging river.

**Travel on Scree and Talus:** The term 'talus' originated from a Greek name for a giant who throws rocks. Learn how to safely travel on this potentially dangerous terrain.

**Geology:** From plate tectonics to granitic batholiths, you'll learn the history of the land you are exploring and how these forces create and influence the environment around you.

**Objective Hazards:** We'll learn how to effectively deal with or avoid these hazards.

**Subjective Hazards:** Among other things, dehydration, fatigue and personal pride can be detrimental to group safety. Learn how to implement measures to mitigate these potential hazards.

**Timing:** This is a key component of group management. You'll develop this awareness and how it affects all



aspects of a day on an expedition.

## IWLS Canyoneering Curriculum

**Environmental Ethics:** The desert is home to a dynamic, yet fragile ecosystem. As responsible users, we'll focus on teaching ways to minimize our impact on the environment.

**Meteorology and Flash Floods:** The topography and geology of canyon country contribute to dangerous flash floods. You'll learn how to interpret meteorological events, make safe decisions, and avoid being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**Rappelling:** Learn the principles of safe rappelling in a canyon environment for dropping into slot canyons or over big sandstone cliffs.

**Ascending:** The ability to escape canyons by ascending a rope is an important canyoneering skill. You'll learn different ascending techniques and how to do them safely.

**Pothole Escapes:** Shoulder stands, backpack toss and body belays are some of the techniques that we'll teach and learn as means to escape canyon potholes.

**Anchors:** Anchor building is a fun, yet intricate subject. We'll examine single, double, triple and complex anchors, and their different applications. Learn how to place anchors, assess quality, and rig for rappelling.

**Rivers and Streams:** Creeks at canyon bottoms can be hazardous if not given the proper respect. You'll learn to identify water features and navigate through these waters safely and efficiently.

**Canyoneering Equipment:** The hot, dry landscape of the southwest, abrasive canyon walls, and turbulent canyon creeks demand the right equipment. You'll get hands on experience with the equipment necessary for adventuring in canyon country.

**Routefinding:** Picking a canyon to descend, a spot to ford the river, or a cliff to rappel requires good routefinding skills. Through experience and learning, you'll develop the awareness and decision making skills to navigate and routefind in canyon country.

**Desert Flora and Fauna:** Mountain lions, coyotes, yucca, prickly pear cactus and eagles are among the multitude of species that make their home in this environment. We'll spend time observing and learning about the balance of this pristine ecosystem.



## The American Canoe Association (ACA)

These trips utilize kayak instruction by certified American Canoe Association Instructors.

The American Canoe Association (ACA) has been the governing body of paddle sports instruction and active





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voice for paddlers in North America for over 100 years. Instructor Certification ensures quality, consistent instruction on the most current paddling techniques, rescues, and safety procedures.

The International Wilderness Leadership School is one of few programs in the state offering certified sea kayaking instruction. Quality instruction is an investment made for your own safety as well as enjoyment. Our instructors are not only certified by the ACA, they also bring a wealth of wilderness guiding, formal teaching, and risk management experience to our program.

The following ACA programs will be incorporated into the 24-day course\*

- Essentials of Kayak Touring
- Coastal Kayaking Basic Strokes and Rescues
- Coastal Kayaking Open Water Skills
- Self and Assisted Deep Water Rescues
- Eskimo Rolling

*\*Completion of ACA programs is highly dependent upon weather, strength of the group, and time of the year.*

## The Wilderness Education Association

The WEA has been training and certifying outdoor leaders around the world for nearly 25 years, and teaching students to safely and effectively lead groups in the outdoors without harming the environment.

Legendary mountaineer Paul K. Petzoldt, Chuck Gregory, Robert Christie, and Dr. Frank Lupton, founded the WEA in 1977. The organization's mission includes "...promoting the professionalism of outdoor leadership and to thereby improve the safety of outdoor trips and to enhance the conservation of the wild outdoors..."

## Journal Writing

Keeping a wilderness journal can help students to record, reflect, and gain from experiences throughout the expedition. The following are examples of topics that may be assigned throughout the course: First-Aid SOAP notes, incident management forms, leadership analyses, trip reports, lesson plans and decision making analyses.

## Evaluation and Grading

Students who take this course for credit will receive a letter grade. Grading is a measurement of one's knowledge of material, participation, written and oral communication, and one's judgment and awareness. Students will be evaluated on their skills, level of participation, their knowledge and awareness of their own abilities as outdoor leaders, their level of judgment as applied to decisions, and written projects assigned during the trip. Students that don't take the course for credit will receive an evaluation in place of a grade.





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Additionally, the grading will be a reflection of student's peer and instructor evaluations as per the WEA and IWLS assessment rubrics.

**Certifications** upon completion of the 80-day course participants may qualify for the following certifications:

- Certified Outdoor Leader  
Wilderness Education Association
- ACA Certificates of Completion  
American Canoe Association
- 24 Day Guide Training Certificates of Completion  
International Wilderness Leadership School

*\*Dependent on weather and season*

