



## Spanish and Culture Immersion Course

October 29-November 3, 2018

CSU Todos Santos Center

The program concept was simple: stay at the CSU Todos Santos Center, learn about Mexican culture, and practice Spanish with native speakers. However, the program outcomes surpassed all expectations. Kim Kita (Director of special projects and partnerships for the center) did an excellent job of organizing the program and ensuring everything ran smoothly before, after, and during the course.

Olaf Morales, a language instructor with over 10 years of experience, was the primary instructor for the week-long program. The schedule for the days varied considerably, but each contained a mixture of traditional (classroom) and non-traditional learning activities (primarily culturally based). This format made learning enjoyable and helped with language acquisition. Language acquisition is more successful when it is integrated into activities that allow for interaction with other people and use different parts of the brain. This is not to say the class was fun all the time. Immersion style learning can be frustrating due to the abrupt shift to another language. Olaf's teaching style played well to this hurdle. He was able to speak slowly and clearly enough that novice learners could pick out words they knew before and piece



together the concept of the sentence. Common phrases from the students were “¿Como se dice (English word)?” and “¿Que significa (Spanish word)?” The students in this inaugural course varied considerably in language ability, some were nearly fluent, while others only knew “hola y adios”. Students who were beginners had the opportunity to emulate their more advanced peers, and the immersion setting encouraged them to start speaking on day one. Olaf challenged more advanced students too, enabling them to become as proficient in the language as possible in the short amount of time available.

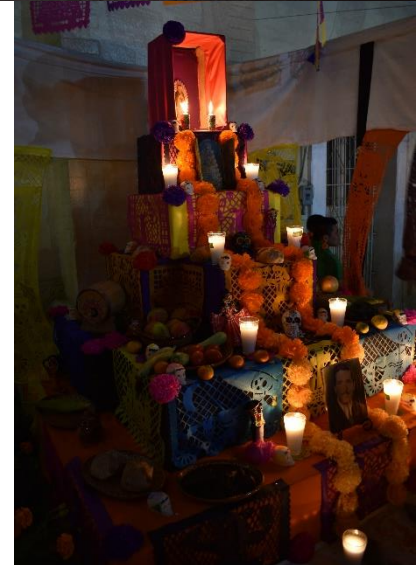
Survival Spanish, basics, food, vacation/travel, culture, and entertainment were primary focuses for classroom instruction. These teachings were incorporated into the cultural portions of the course easily as the Los Dias de los Muertos celebrations were happening during the second half of the program. The significance of the celebration and how it reflects Mexican culture was a cornerstone of the program.

Approximately half of the program occurred outside of the classroom. During these times the group walked or was bussed to a location/event relevant to the program or local culture, these included: Day of the dead parade, altar tour and Ofrenda creation, visit to cemetery and listen to local music, turtle hatchling release, Todos Santos cultural center, and a local family ranch. The center was aware and cognizant of the special needs of the students, staff always provided alternative options if the distance was too far to walk or an activity was limiting to students in any way.

The Todos Santos center is set up as a mini campus and includes many features of a typical college. Students had the option of staying in single apartments or in group rooms, all of which included bathrooms, sinks, and showers. Breakfast and lunch were served on campus each day and wonderfully prepared by chef Anna Maria and her team (who gave cooking lessons when asked!). The meals were a spectacular combination of local fresh fruits and vegetables and traditional Mexican cuisine. Dietary preferences were always accommodated, for example, this group included individuals with gluten sensitivities and vegetarian preferences. Since the tap water in the town was not safe to drink the center provided bottled water for students.

Water conservation is a major focus in the area since they are considered a desert climate, receiving only about 6 inches of precipitation each year (primarily from hurricanes!). One of the more creative conservation practices was to use a bucket to collect the water lost during the warm-up period of a shower and use it to flush toilets. Farming in the area is also limited due to moisture, their growing season occurs in the winter months because the days are much cooler compared to summer months.

Another industry complication for the area are the strong waves and currents on the beaches. These have prevented the establishment of an actual harbor or dock for fishermen. A compromise the locals have developed is to use smaller boats and launch the first at just the right moment and then use a rope system to pull the other boats out to sea. When returning with their catch, fishermen accelerate and ride a wave into the shore beaching the boat hard and far enough up the bank to prevent another wave from taking it back out to sea!





The Todos Santos center proved to be a spectacular facility for this program. While a language cannot be learned in a week, spending a week submersed in the language and culture certainly helps to foster the desire to continue learning and gives learners a better idea of what they do know. If you are interested in bettering your Spanish or learning more about the Mexican culture, consider signing up for the next round of this program!



<https://todossantos.colostate.edu/>