

*I Wish I Had Known  
Before Coming to Monterrey*

There are a couple of things a group of new teachers wanted to share with you that they wish they had known before coming to Monterrey—certainly nothing to be a decision-breaker, but just food for thought to make your life easier when you get here!!

### 1. Having a car in Monterrey makes life MUCH easier!!

- If you are debating on whether or not to have a car here—GET ONE!!—(or plan to buy one soon after arriving). If you live in the San Pedro area, there are restaurants and grocery stores easily within walking distance. Many places, though, are much too far away for 2-legged transportation. It's very easy to walk to the main street and hail a cab, but, depending on the time of day and the weather, the wait may be as much as 10-20 minutes. Cabs may also be called from home or wherever you have gone, but there is generally a 10-20 minute wait before one arrives.
- If you live in San Pedro and work at Huasteca campus, you will definitely need transportation or plan to carpool or call a cab. It is a 10-20 minute drive from San Pedro to Huasteca, depending on where you live and the traffic situation. Cab fare runs \$70-\$80 pesos each way, and cab drivers in San Pedro are sometimes reluctant to drive to Santa Catarina due to the distance. If you take a cab from San Pedro to Santa Catarina or vice versa, it is a VERY good idea to have a map or know how to get to where you are going, as many of the cab drivers from one area are not familiar with the streets or neighborhoods in the other.

### 2. Bring warm clothing.

- In my first year I was pleasantly surprised by cold weather. It was actually embarrassing how under-prepared I was for temperatures that could reach as low as 0 degrees Celsius (rare, but can happen). When it began to get a little cooler, I had insufficient wardrobe and about a month to go until I could stock up on warm clothes from home. However, I do not want to misguide you, the weather is normally beautiful, but there are short stints of cold, don't be fooled by the common belief that if you are situated in Mexico, you are always WARM, 100% of the time. Moral of the story: bring at least one-week worth of warm clothes and you won't regret it. (Thermals/Long Underwear, Long sleeve work clothes, Toque/Hat, Winter Jacket/Coat)

### 3. Learning Spanish in Monterrey

- A big draw to teaching in a Latin American country is the opportunity to learn Spanish as a second language. Unfortunately, it's not all that easy to learn Spanish in Monterrey because it's relatively easy to get by without it. However, where there's a will, there's a way – you just have to make the commitment. Here's a list of Top 10 ways to get you started on learning Spanish in Monterrey:
  - 10.) Take classes in the summer before making the move.
  - 9.) Bring audio programs to listen to on your Mexican road trips.
  - 8.) Book your school vacations at a Spanish Language School in one of the neighboring Mexican or Central American cities.
  - 7.) Take the beginning courses offered at the school.
  - 6.) Get a private tutor.
  - 5.) Go out in the community and downtown to practice Spanish as much as possible.
  - 4.) Make Mexican friends who don't speak English.
  - 3.) Participate in an inter-cambio language exchange with someone learning English.
  - 2.) Take Spanish classes at the local community center or school.  
and the #1 way to practice your Spanish in Monterrey:
  - 1.) Don't be afraid: read, write, and speak Spanish every chance you get.

#### 4. What to expect in terms of the professional environment at ASFM.

- If you value becoming a better teacher -- and don't mind the hard work -- then this is the place to be. ASFM offers an incredibly supportive environment where you will grow as a professional. When it comes to improving student learning, weekly team meetings and after-school sessions are geared towards developing best teaching practices. It is inspiring to work in a place where sound educational theory is put into effect.

#### 5. What to expect from ASFM Parents.

- The majority of parent interactions I have experienced have been very positive. For the most part, parents are eager to work with the teacher as a team and willing to go forth with whatever recommendations that are made. Additionally, keeping students after school for additional help, recommending tutoring, or simply giving suggestions for strategies parents could use at home are highly appreciated and often implemented.

#### 6. Health Care

- It's the thing you hope you'll never have to worry about, but it's potentially the most important aspect of any employment contract. I speak, of course, of health care.
- As almost anyone you'll meet here will testify, Monterrey has hospitals and clinics to rival any in the continent. Many doctors here took their specializations in the United States and it is rare that a doctor does not have at least passable English. Many are fluent.
- ASFM offers all of its teachers and staff members a "Major Medical Insurance" policy from MetLife. This insurance covers you 100% for any accident you may have. "Major" illnesses and surgeries are also covered but with a deductible payment and co-insurance.
- "Minor" illnesses are not covered. For these you can buy a "voluntary" minor medical insurance. The current cost (January 2007) is \$100 pesos per month (\$1200 pesos a year). This covers only doctor's fees (family doctor, Gynecologist, Pediatrician, etc.) If you need a specialty like a dermatologist, you have to pay \$250 pesos per visit. Similarly, if you need lab tests, X-rays, or medication, you have to pay for those.
- We took the decision not to buy the minor medical insurance policy. When our younger daughter had a fever that required a brief hospitalization we had to pay the cost of her care for a couple of hours and the injection that cured her. This was because she was treated as an out-patient. Had she required hospitalization overnight, she would have been covered by the school's insurance. However, the total cost was under 500 pesos.
- On that occasion, we drove her to the hospital ourselves. Had we needed an ambulance, there would have been additional costs involved (although, of course, emergency ambulances such as the Red Cross and the Green Cross are free).
- The best hospitals in Monterrey are Hospital San José Tec de Monterrey, Hospital Santa Engracia, Hospital Muguerza, Hospital Conchita and Hospital Ginequito. Hospital Santa Engracia is considered so "fancy" that locals call it the Hotel Santa Engracia! Many ASFM teachers have chosen to stay there to give birth, rather than head back home! As a parent, I can think of no greater testimony.
- Like most policies, it also does not cover elective cosmetic surgery and there is no dental plan attached to this plan. In the past teachers at ASFM have stayed in Monterrey for treatments ranging from knee surgery to heart surgery to cancer treatment. The treatment is affordable (even with the deductibles factored in) and (more importantly) world class.
- The policy is also valid in the U.S. The same deductible applies and the same maximum for co-insurance applies, but the co-insurance rate is 40% since medical costs are so much higher in the U.S. Obviously one could hit the maximum amount far quicker in the U.S. than here in Mexico, but quite frankly, most of us would be perfectly comfortable having any treatment here.