

from: **Dr Kathy Slater** <kathy.slater@opwall.com>
to: Marti Johnston <tortuga.escondida108@gmail.com>, anne.pearce@brockhurst.edu
cc: Jennifer Smith <marrymeakumal@gmail.com>
date: Tue, Mar 6, 2018 at 8:23 PM
subject: Re: Introduction
mailed-by: opwall.com
signed-by: opwall.onmicrosoft.com

Hi Anne

Yes I totally understand that as soon as you mention bringing student to Mexico then it raises safety concerns so I will do my best to give you all the information you need reassure your university, students and parents.

Mexico is a huge country as is the USA, and like the USA, Mexico has some areas that are indeed dangerous and others that are extremely safe. The states in the north of Mexico that border with the USA are unfortunately dangerous places as they are to focus of illegal trafficking of drugs, guns and people. They also contain large numbers of displaced people who have travelled from other countries in Latin American and tried to get to the USA, but never made it further than Mexico. As a result, homelessness and crime are a serious problem in these northern states of Mexico. As these are the cities and towns that border with the USA, obviously the media exposure of Mexico in USA is focussed almost entirely on these problematic areas, rather than the reality of the vast majority of Mexico.

So, the north of Mexico is indeed best avoided, but Akumal is located in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico in the SouthEast of the country. The distance from the dangerous areas of Mexico is a 3 hour plane ride or approximately 2-3 days drive by car so we are really far away from any potential problems. 96% of the economy of the Yucatan Peninsula comes from tourism and so there is a huge collective effort from the federal and state governments, police and businesses to eliminate crime in this area. These efforts are indeed successful as crime rates in the Yucatan are significantly lower than all major cities in the UK and USA. For example, Merida (the capital city of the Yucatan) is rated in the Forbes top 10 safest cities in the world!

In terms of the specifics of Akumal and travel to and from. There is a wide selection of flights from the USA to Cancun International Airport. The airport itself is located outside of Cancun city and only authorised tour operators are allowed to enter the arrivals lounge in each terminal. From arrivals you would be collected a tour operator with a federal license to provide transport for tourists who would meet you and then take you directly to Akumal (roughly 1-1.5 hours from the airport). The entire journey is on a federal highway that is well lit and patrolled by the state and federal police as well as the green angels (free breakdown assistance for any vehicle travelling on the federal highway). Akumal itself is a tiny seaside community. It used to be a yacht club and so the majority of "locals" in Akumal are actually American, but there are also Mayan families who focus on fishing or working as tour guides and Mexicans who have moved to the area to work in the tourism industry.

We bring groups of high school students (aged 16-18) and university students (aged 18-22) from the UK, USA and Canada and the great thing about Akumal is that even though it is a beach resort, there is no real

nightlife (which is obviously a nightmare when dealing with students who would do anything to get hold of alcohol). The restaurants on the beach all close at 9pm and the accommodation at Tortuga Escondida is on a secure site located 10 minutes drive from the beach so we never have to worry about safety of the students when we are back at camp. All diving/snorkelling activities we do are with Akumal Dive Center as they have extensive insurance for working with tourists, have PADI certified dive masters and dive instructors who are all first aid trained. There are also lifeguards on the beach as well as the park wardens for the protected area. Boat traffic in the water is restricted to two specific boat lanes and there are roped off areas for swimming and snorkelling so safety of people in the water is taken very seriously in Akumal.

Access to medical care in Akumal is also really easy. Jen has her own doctor who we use on a regular basis to come to the accommodation to deal with the standard dive related medical complaints such as problems equalizing or ear irritation, or just general illness that can occur from time to time, but there is also a clinic equipped with ambulance, plus the Red Cross who also have an ambulance. Playa del Carmen is only 20 minutes drive away here there is a wide selection of excellent hospitals (we use Costa Med or Hospiten) and hyperbaric chambers to treat decompression sickness from diving (not likely when diving on reefs as the water isn't deep enough, but it's still good to know that the facilities are close to hand).

All in all, Akumal is one of the easiest places that we work in terms of health and safety. We have never had any safety concerns or incidents at Akumal since we started the project in 2012 and I have been living and working in the peninsula (I live in Tulum) since 2002 and I have also never had any negative experiences here. If you would like to read more about the health and safety side of things for our project then you can click on the link below to download our risk assessments, medical reports and evacuation documents. If you download the PDFs of these documents then you should be able to use them as a template for your own risk assessments, which no doubt your department will need to review before they will consider approving your planned field trip.

<https://www.opwall.com/resource/mexico-health-and-safety/>

If there is anything else that you need from me then feel free to get in touch

Best wishes

Kathy

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