

IAESTE internship for six weeks at the Russian Academy of Science in Russia, Moscow in October/November 2018 [RU-2018-6-9]

Organisation:

The organisation of the internship was guided well by IAESTE Germany. The local committee in Germany provided the necessary information and usually replied quickly on questions. However, after the final application was sent out to Moscow, I only received an answer more than three months later. IAESTE Moscow sent me information about work (where and when to start) as well as some general information about the life in Moscow including tips about the metro and SIM cards. Although I requested more information about the dormitory and ask several times, I only received it very short-termed and the address for the dormitory was only provided the evening before my arrival. Initially it was said that I would be picked up from the airport. However, when I finally received the information about the dormitory I was told to make my way to the dormitory on my own.

Work:

The internship took place at the Russian Academy of Sciences, in the Institute for Biochemical Physics and lasted six weeks. All in all I learned one new method (ELISA), which I had not practised much in Germany. And I repeated other methods such as liquid chromatography and SDS-PAGE. It sometimes seemed to be a bit disorganised. For example the placement was organised since the application, though only on my arrival at the first day of work it was decided which laboratory group would take me. I had two very nice supervisors. Overall it was more relaxed than I expected. In the first few weeks two other German IAESTE students were in the laboratory group with me. We usually arrived at work at around 12 pm and sometimes still had to wait for one of the supervisors to arrive. Both supervisors could speak English, one better than the other. If words were missing, Google translator helped out. When there was work to do, they put much effort into explaining and allowed independent work. When there was no work to do, they occupied us with methods which were irrelevant for their research and which also included long periods of waiting.

Work and dormitory were about 20 km apart. It took a bit more than one hour to travel to work which included 45 minutes by metro. As my two work colleagues lived next door, we could always go to work together.

At the academy there also was a canteen where there often was a good choice between several types of meat and fish, side dishes, soups, salads and desserts. Depending on how much you take the price was roughly around 200 to 300 Rub (3-4€).

Student dormitory:

I lived in the student dormitory close to the Planernaya metro station. The dormitory was included in the work offer. I shared a room with two other IAESTE students. The toilet and the washbasin/shower room were shared between two rooms. In my case, there was a Russian woman living in the neighbour room with her son (who had just started university). However, in this student dormitory there were also other IAESTE students who shared a flat with each other and were only two people per room.

You needed to get used to the condition and the circumstances of the student dormitory. There was no usable kitchen. However, there was a canteen in the neighbour building of the student dormitory which was comparable to the one at work. As there was no fridge, you could cool your food in a plastic bag which you hang outside the window when it was cold enough outside. There also was no water kettle. It would be advisable to bring one yourself. Otherwise you could buy one at the Planernaya shopping centre. The cheapest one was less than 1000 Rub. After asking, I received the information that bed linen was included, so I did not need to bring my own. Also a blanket and pillow were provided. However, Towels were not provided. The only shelves were a wardrobe with a clothes rail for each person, one table to share and one bedside table per person. It was useful to buy adhesive hooks which you can stick on the wall (especially for the bathroom). There also was no mirror over the wash basin but there was one in the bedroom. The toilet flush was broken two times. As an emergency solution we flushed with water canisters. Also the hot water tap was broken twice but you could still adjust the water temperature with the main valve.

Leisure time:

There was a large group of IAESTE students and many of them were also Germans. I arrived in the second half of the offered time frame but most other students arrived earlier. We were about 15 people. It was a very friendly and open community. We often met in larger groups to do sightseeing and went out to have dinner or drinks together. We even did a trip to St. Petersburg which was definitely one of the highlights. It was especially easy to meet up as many students lived in the same dormitory just next door. However, due to the fast metro it was also possible to meet up with the other students who lived in a different dormitory. IAESTE Russia did also organise some events but unfortunately most of them happened already before I arrived.

General tips:

For SIM cards I can recommend the company tele2 with 15 GB for 400 Rub for a month and if needed 2 GB for 200 Rub for the remaining time. I had no troubles. However you should be careful if they want to charge you an "activation" fee (to make extra money for no reason). In general you should be mindful of "rip-offs" especially when prices are not displayed. In that case you should inform yourself about the prices of comparable products beforehand. For example a stamp for a post card to Europe is 48 Rub and you can get post cards from 15-50 Rub.

Overall conclusion:

The time was definitely well invested and overall I would recommend this internship. However, the requirements for the internship were lower when comparing to German standards. There was less work done on one day as one might be used to from German laboratories. Nevertheless it was a great chance to go abroad and experience a different culture.