

Internship Report: IAESTE internship at the Universidade Federal de Viçosa, Brazil (August/September 2022)

Preparation for the internship

I started the application in November on the IAESTE online platform. At the end of January, I received a list of available internship offers and submitted my top three preferred spots. About a week later, we were informed of the internships that were offered to the Heidelberg committee. Fortunately, my second choice was among the assigned offers and I subsequently applied for it. An interview was conducted shortly afterwards and I was elated to receive the nomination. By beginning of March, I uploaded all necessary application documents to the exchange platform and was informed that I had been accepted by my employer about a month later. I filled out the acceptance forms and booked my flights in May/June. Since my stay in Brazil was going to be less than 90 days, there was no need to apply for a visa. For the university, I had to bring the following documents for registration: passport, birth certificate, proof of insurance (copies were fine). Even though I was first told otherwise, I needed to apply for a CPF. This could be easily done once I arrived in Brazil and definitely facilitated my stay. The CPF is a number used to identify persons for tax purposes, but it has many other uses too. A CPF is also needed to get a SIM card, book bus tickets online, open bank accounts, etc. Since the university paid me in cash, there was no need for me to open a Brazilian bank account, but it is advisable to do so for longer stays. I was already up to date on vaccines, but I got a second precautionary COVID booster prior to my departure. During my entire stay, I was not once checked for my vaccination status even though I was advised to bring my official vaccination booklet, since the digital COVID pass used in the EU was not recognized in Brazil. I contacted the local committee in Brazil prior to my departure and was informed of my housing arrangement and pick-up from the airport.

Lastly, I should mention that it is highly recommendable to learn some Portuguese. I picked up some basics with Duolingo in the three months leading up to my internship and my rusty Spanish got me quite far as well.

Arriving and getting settled in Brazil

Two members of the local committee picked me up from the airport in Belo Horizonte and helped me get safely to Viçosa (big thanks to Júlia and Mateus!). A student from the university in Viçosa picked me up at the bus station and took me to the host family I was to stay at. I shared a room with another IAESTE intern during my stay and I paid 450 reais per month. The university was in walking distance (about 20 minutes) and I started my internship shortly after arrival. The campus of the university was huge, but fortunately, the buildings of the biology faculty were all located near the entrance.

My internship project

I worked in the lab of professor José Eduardo Serrão. For my project, I assisted a PhD student, Pedro Nere, with an ecotoxicology study on the effects of sublethal doses of the insecticide lambda-cyhalothrin on the development of bee larvae (*Apis mellifera*). After feeding the bee larvae with diets with and without the insecticide for about a week, they were fixed and prepared for microtomy. Using the microtomes, we made thin cuts of the samples and performed different stainings to study morphological differences

on a cellular scale between control and treatment. I found the project to be very interesting and I was fortunate to gain practical experience of new skills. However, I should mention that I did not reach the contractually stipulated working hours (30h/week). On some days, I came into the lab just to exchange medium or feed larvae. But this allowed great flexibility in planning trips. I was paid 500 reais per month by the university.

Lastly, the people I worked with in the lab were very friendly and helpful. Big thanks go to professor Serrão and Pedro Nere for giving me the opportunity to work on their projects.



Travelling in Brazil

Since my stay was only two months long, I did not travel as much as I would have liked. Also, it took quite some time to reach travel destinations from Viçosa. Main modes of transportation in Brazil are either by bus, car or by plane. I mostly opted for buses, as they are inexpensive, reliable and reach many destinations. Domestic flights can be very expensive, especially if they are booked on short notice.

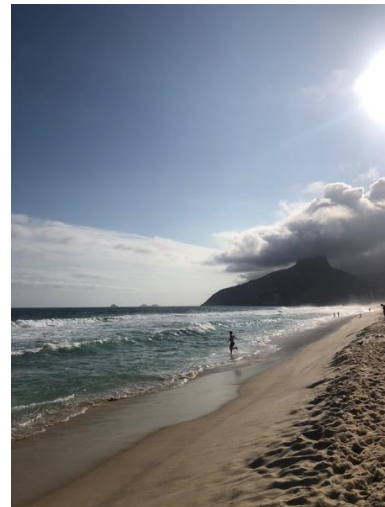
During my stay, I took trips to the Iguazú falls, São Paulo, Ouro Preto, and Rio de Janeiro.

The Iguazú falls were the absolute highlight of my stay. With other interns, I visited both the national parks on the Brazilian and Argentinian side. The waterfalls were impressive to say the least and since we visited during the off season, there were not too many other visitors. I spent an afternoon in São Paulo on the way back. I did not see much of the city, but I can recommend going to Liberdade for excellent Japanese food (the largest Japanese diaspora in any city is in São Paulo).

On another weekend, I visited Ouro Preto, about three and a half hours by bus from Viçosa. It is a city with rich history, as it is located in the main areas of the Brazilian gold rush. There are many churches, museums and mines scattered throughout the city. Top tip: hike up Morro São Sebastião for a great view.

Since I flew out from Rio de Janeiro on my return trip, I spent my last weekend there. I highly recommend visiting the Museu do Amanhã, a futuristic science museum featuring modern architecture and interactive exhibits.

Finally, I want to point out that contrary to common misconceptions, I did not feel unsafe at any time while travelling. Though I mostly travelled with other interns, I did not get the impression that it is inadvisable to travel alone. Common sense goes a long way: get Uber, do not store all your cash in the same place, do not flash valuables, be aware of your surroundings, etc.



Conclusion

I would like to extend my thanks to all parties that enabled and supported my internship: the IAESTE committee in Heidelberg and Brazil, administrative personnel at the university who helped me with registration and navigating the campus, my host family, my PI and supervising PhD student. The two months in Brazil have been formative to my scientific and personal advancement. Therefore, I would highly recommend applying for an internship there.