

## Universidade Estadual Paulista Rio Claro, Brazil (05.09.-28.10.2022)

After my first application for an IAESTE placement within the annual process was rejected, I could spontaneously apply for this COBE offer in Brazil in the middle of June. One month later, my application was accepted and I could start organising the journey.

After an exhausting 20-hours flight (it was way cheaper to fly via the US), a member of IAESTE Brazil gave me a warm welcome at the airport, helped me getting a SIM card and guided me to the bus station where I took a bus to my final destination – Rio Claro. This a small city (speaking from the Brazilian point of view, it still has 200.000 inhabitants) about three hours by bus from São Paulo.

In Rio Claro, one of my future flatmates picked me up and brought me to what should become my home for the next eight weeks: The accommodation was arranged by IAESTE Brazil and only five minutes by foot from the UNESP campus where I did my internship. They found me a shared room in a *república*, which is the typical way of living for Brazilian students: A big house with a shared kitchen, bathrooms, a living room, a room to study, a backyard and several shared rooms for 10-15 people living together. In my case, there were ten Brazilian girls and a dog living with me and I shared a room with one of the girls. This was a very good opportunity to get to know native people and their way of living. My flatmates are all students at UNESP as well and were very happy to have me living with them, so they explained everything to me, helped when I had questions and showed me a lot of things. For example, they cooked *Feijoada*, a typical Brazilian meal, showed me the city and took me to their favourite restaurants.



I did my internship at the Centre of Environmental Studies at São Paulo State University. I was directly supervised by the professor and could come to him with every question I had. He is very interested in international exchange and wanted to make my stay as informative and pleasant as possible. So, he introduced me to a lot of people and gave me the possibility to participate in many events that took place at the university, even if they weren't exactly related to my internship. For example, I could visit a former uranium mine where a part of the lab collects their samples or attend the annual conference for PhD students at UNESP.



As the actual internship had a duration of only eight weeks, I did not have a project on my own. Instead, I could freely join everybody in the lab and a lot of things were shown and explained to me.

There are two main projects in the group: The one I mostly worked at is part of a huge beach monitoring project. Approximately once a week, the lab receives liver samples of marine tetrapods that were found on the beach at the Atlantic coast. These samples are processed and prepared for the analysis with mass spectrometry and atomic fluorescence spectroscopy, respectively. With these techniques, the concentration of trace elements in the liver samples is determined. Within this project, I could prepare and analyse samples on my own and was given my own tasks. So, I had the feeling to really be a benefit for the team and contribute to their daily work. The other project uses a method named diffusive gradient in thin films. These little devices contain three different gel layers and are placed in water, sediment or soil to extract and measure rare earth elements.



In my free time, especially during the weekends, I had the opportunity to travel around the country. As one can book the flight on one's own when doing an IAESTE internship, I was able to add two weeks of free time afterwards for travelling. The go-to mode of travelling are busses as the bus system in Brazil is really good: the busses are cheap, reliable and comfortable and bring you everywhere you want, even to places far away. However, Brazil is enormous and there was way too little time to see everything of this beautiful and diverse country!

There is a WhatsApp group for all the IAESTE interns staying in Brazil (about 40 at the same time, but in different places). In this group, different trips for weekends or holidays are organised which was a great opportunity to get to know the country and to meet people in the same situation. For example, almost 20 people met in São Paulo for a weekend: we did some sightseeing in the city with some people from IAESTE Brazil that showed us the nicest places and we also went out for parties in the evening. Other times, I visited the Iguazu Falls at the Argentinian border in a group of seven, went on a rafting trip or I met some people in Rio de Janeiro. It was very nice to travel with other people and some of them became really good friends. Moreover, the interns come from all over the world, so it is a great chance to get in touch with even more cultures and ways of living.





It was very helpful that Brazilians are extremely welcoming and accommodating. Everyone I met was interested in me and asked what I'm doing in the country and where I come from. There are not many people that speak English very well, especially the ones I met in daily life (in the supermarket, hostels or shops) are not used to speak English. However, everyone made an effort and used their little knowledge together with hand and feet to communicate or they tried to understand my poor little Portuguese sentences. Together with the Duolingo lessons I started when I knew that I was accepted for the internship, this little everyday practice helped me to gain a basic knowledge of the Brazilian language and I am now able to hold simple conversations and muddle through in everyday life.

In contrast to public perception, I did not feel unsafe in the country, even when I was travelling on my own. As I mentioned, people were always open-minded and willing to help when they've seen me struggling and I did not have the impression that anybody wanted to take advantage of my ignorance as a tourist. Of course, you should not leave your belongings unattended or show around valuables. The people in Rio Claro also told me that it is better not to be out alone when it is dark, but as life is more social and taking place outside anyways, it wasn't hard to find someone to come with me.

Altogether, I really enjoyed my stay in Brazil. It is a beautiful country with nice people that are always helpful and accommodating. The internship enabled me to experience research and life at university in a very different environment, I got to know amazing places, food and people and would definitely recommend everyone to apply for an internship abroad!

