

## **IAESTE internship in the Clinical Analysis Laboratory at KNUST in Kumasi, Ghana (01.11. – 22.12.2023)**

After finishing my bachelor's degree and going to Norway for a research internship, I decided to go abroad for another internship to gain more lab experience before starting with my master's. IAESTE is a great opportunity to find paid internships in countries all over the world and presents a safe option to travel to more "exotic" countries. I chose to do my internship in the Clinical Analysis Laboratory at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana and spent roughly two months there, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of November to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2023.

### **Arrival in Kumasi**

My arrival in Kumasi was a bit chaotic, but everything worked out in the end! I arrived in Accra, Ghana's capital, in the evening and was picked up at the airport by a member of IAESTE Ghana. He was very nice and helped me to exchange the euros I brought to Ghanaian Cedis, got me a Ghanaian SIM-card, and brought me to a guest house for the night. Early in the morning, I was supposed to catch another flight from Accra to Kumasi and he wanted to pick me up at the guest house to escort me to the airport. However, he was running late and then got stuck in traffic. Since I had just arrived in a completely new country and did not know my way around yet, I was not sure if it was safe for me to go to the airport on my own. Therefore, I decided to wait for him, but he took so long that I missed my flight, unfortunately. It was all quite stressful, and I was a bit upset because I had already paid for the flight, but in the end, it was not a big problem at all since I could just take the bus to Kumasi. This way, I was also able to see more of the landscape. In Kumasi, everything went very smoothly, and I was picked up at the bus station and brought to the hostel I stayed at by the exchange coordinator of IAESTE Ghana. I instantly felt very welcomed and was able to ask any questions I had. Moreover, I met the three other German interns that had already spent a couple of weeks in Kumasi, so they were also able to give me some practical tips!

### **My accommodation**

In Kumasi, I stayed at "Ultimate Hostel", which is kind of like a student dorm, directly next to the university campus. Each intern had their own room, so you always had a space for yourself if you needed one! My room was very big, and I had a private bathroom and a small balcony where I could hang up my washing. There were no mosquito nets there though, so I would recommend bringing your own! Also, the shower does not have a shower head, there is only a tap. So, you have to get used to washing yourself with a bucket or sitting under the tap. The other interns as well as the students from IAESTE Ghana were all staying on the same floor and therefore, we always had dinner together in one of our rooms or played card games in the evenings. Although there is a kitchen on each floor, we never used it. This was partly because there was not really any equipment in the kitchen except for a couple of camping gas stoves, and because it is



very cheap to eat street food in Ghana. Apart from the rooms, there was also a gym in the hostel, which two of the other interns used quite regularly. However, there were not a lot of people around at the time because it was the semester holidays, and most of the students were at home with their families. Therefore, the hostel was very quiet and there were not any parties going on. If you are a light sleeper, you should still bring some earplugs, since the rooms are very poorly soundproofed, and you hear most of what is happening on the hallway or in the other rooms. A final thing to note is that in Kumasi (or in Ghana in general, really), there often is a power blackout. It happens at least once a week, sometimes even several times in a day or for long hours. So, a small pocket light that runs on batteries definitely comes in handy!

### Work experience

I was doing my internship in the Clinical Analysis Laboratory at KNUST, where they mostly take blood samples from patients and then test them for different diseases, including malaria, hepatitis B and C, HIV, sickle cell disease and typhus. There was also a microbiology department where they analyze clinical samples like urine as well as food products before they are allowed to be sold on the market. The laboratory was only a five-minute walk away from my accommodation. Upon my arrival, I was allowed enough time to settle in before starting work, and my usual workdays were from 8 am until 3 pm, leaving me with a lot of free time in the afternoons. The people in the lab welcomed me warmly and I got along very well with everyone! In the beginning of my internship, there were around six other Ghanaian interns, and it was really cool to learn about how their studies work in comparison to mine in Germany. I was always hanging out with them and when there was nothing to do, we would do some silly dances to pass the time.



Because actually, that was the situation most of the time: there was nothing to do. Or there was something to do, but I was not allowed to help. I had to realize very early on that the perception of an intern is very different in Ghana than in Germany. I was expecting to learn the ropes in the beginning and after a while, do the work independently on my own. Frustratingly, the people in the lab mostly only wanted me to observe what they were doing. This was fine for me in the first couple of days, but at one point, I also wanted to try stuff out on my own. After asking several times, I was allowed to do some tests under supervision, but they never gave me permission to do them without guidance. Therefore, most of the things I learned, I only did because I was pressing a lot for it, or sometimes I also just did them to show the others that they could trust me to do things independently. It was a little bit better in the microbiology department because my supervisor there allowed me to try out a lot of things myself, but there also was not that much work to do. Overall, I felt very underestimated and did not take that much away from the internship. However, that was fine for me since I still really enjoyed going to the lab every day because I loved being with the people and always had very interesting discussions with everyone. Furthermore, I knew beforehand that the internship might not be that challenging to me and therefore, I mostly came to visit the country and for the experience in general!

## Travelling and exploring

Although the internship was disappointing in some ways, the rest of my Ghana experience definitely was not! There were a lot of opportunities to travel around and to explore the country. Especially since Kumasi itself is not that interesting, it was quite nice to be able to visit other places in Ghana. The other German interns and I went on a trip every weekend and most of the time, we were even allowed to take one or two days off at work, so we had enough time to travel to our destinations and spent some time there – since the streets in Ghana are quite bad, the travelling itself often took one whole day. The people from IAESTE Ghana also joined some of the trips and always helped organizing them! Although the trips were definitely the best part of the experience for me, you should keep in mind that they can get quite expensive. Of course, the prices are generally way lower than in Germany, but at the touristic places everything costs more, so you should have enough savings!



Ghana is a very beautiful country! One thing I instantly noticed is how green everything is. There are a lot of rainforests, gorgeous beaches at the coast, and even mountainous areas where you can do nice hikes to impressive waterfalls. But when you travel, you will also see under which conditions a lot of people live there, especially in the rural areas in the north. Although Ghana is a rich country compared to other African states, the standards there are completely different to what we are used to and many people have a hard life. Therefore, it is even more amazing to see the amount of vitality the Ghanaians show. Their energy is indescribable! You will notice it even in a normal conversation, since everything is said with a lot of passion and conviction. But you will especially notice it when there is music playing! Let me tell you, the people there can dance!! It is always so much fun to go out in Ghana because everybody is vibing to the music and showing off their best dance moves. The energy is very infectious! I also learned a lot of dances to the most popular Afro Beat songs and am still listening to my Ghana playlist every day.

Apart from music, food is a very important part of the Ghanaian culture. Usually, I am vegan, but in Ghana I ate vegetarian. It is possible but do keep in mind that a lot of dishes come with meat or fish. Additionally, most of the food is quite spicy! I do not like hot food that much, but I was still able to find appropriate food for me and got used to the spices after time. There are a lot of nice dishes, and they also have very yummy fruits there. However, the food can be hard on the European stomach, and I often had small stomach cramps. Some of the other interns also had diarrhea once, but luckily, I was spared! I was also very relieved that I did not get seriously ill. We all took malaria prophylaxis and therefore, never got malaria although we all had some mosquito bites. However, I once had to go to the



hospital because of an insect bite that got infected. It was nothing serious though, and after one week of taking antibiotics, it was fine again! The IAESTE people were very caring and always checked that we were okay, so if you have any problems, they will help and look after you!



### **Conclusion**

All in all, my internship with IAESTE in Ghana was a great experience! Although the internship itself was not that demanding, I still had a great time in the lab and learned new skills (e.g., how to take blood samples from patients). The weekend trips were a great opportunity to explore the country within the safety of a group and allowed an authentic insight into the people's lives there. I made a lot of new friends and would love to go back there one day!