Semester Abroad
Report

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1. PREPARATION FOR THE SEMESTER ABROAD

Before travelling to Brazil there are mainly four things you will prepare for your stay abroad: Visa permit, housing, vaccines, health insurance.

a. VISA

The first thing you should prepare for Brazil after being accepted in the exchange program is getting your visa paperwork done. It is a very straight forward procedure to be done at the Brazilian Consulate in Munich (Sonnenstr. 31, 80331 Munich). The visa process is for German citizens for free. As a Venezuelan I had to pay 100 EUR for it.

b. HOUSING

Finding the right place to live in São Paulo is crucial to avoid losing travel time between the university and your flat. The city is among the top 10 most populated cities of the world, adding over 13 million people and the state of São Paulo has over 44 million people (over 20% of Brazilian’s current population of 210 million people). This results in a lot of traffic. I personally lived 20 minutes walking distance from the FGV in a neighborhood called Bela Vista. This is also the same neighborhood from the university. Anything below 30 minutes walking to the FGV is considered to be close. The FGV provides incoming exchange students with a small data base with flats to be rented. In comparison to Munich, it is not very hard to find an apartment or a room to move in. However, the question is, where is it located? Make sure you live close to the university and close to grocery stores. Living close to a subway station or a bus station was not very critical for me as most of the trips I did in the city were by Uber. It is very cheap and a lot faster than travelling by bus. The prices of flats are pretty expensive and range between 300-600EUR. Many of the buildings have swimming pools and small gyms within the building installations.

c. VACCINES

Before travelling to Brazil make sure you get the yellow fever shot in Germany. Many German insurance companies will cover 70-80% of the costs. Customs in Brazil won’t ask you to proof you have the shot while entering the country coming from Europe. However, if you plan to travel within South America, some custom agents might ask you to show you have the vaccine. I was personally only asked once to show proof when flying from Brazil to Colombia.
Some German doctors might recommend you to get a whole cocktail of vaccines before going to South America. This is of course your final decision but don’t panic, as far as I know, no student from all 100 exchange students got a disease during the 6 months stay in Brazil.

d. HEALTH INSURANCE

On top of the health insurance that you have to pay in Germany, you will need another one on top for South America. These usually cost between 30-35 EUR per month and provide you full coverage in case of an accident. The health insurance I had was from the company Union Krankenversicherung (UKV).

Product name in German: GesundheitGLOBAL Kompakt A - Auslandsreise-Krankenversicherung bei längerfristigem Auslandsaufenthalt (bis 2 Jahre)

Price: 34,50EUR per month

2. THE CITY – SÃO PAULO

Arriving in São Paulo is at first overwhelming. From the international airport located in Guarulhos to the city it takes you roughly one hour depending on the current traffic. As I had all my valuable belongings with me I decided to take an Uber to my flat, which costed me roughly 18EUR. There is also a subway that takes you to city. However, by February 2018 it was still not done yet (This was planned to be finished for the World Cup 2014 and then for the Olympic Games 2016).

After leaving my stuff at my new flat and meeting my flat mate, I decided to take a walk in the neighborhood Bela Vista to familiarize with the new environment. The streets are very busy (not as in Chinese cities), there are many people selling products in the streets, the roads are full of cars, the buses are very loud and all in all the air quality isn’t optimal. Coming from Munich it will definitely take you a little while to get use to the new city and reality.

On the other hand, the city has many other things to offer. Restaurants from all over the world, Brazilian Rodizios / All you can eat steakhouses, bars in every corner, discos, art galleries and museums, among others. The city also counts with big parks to do exercises and to feel that you left the big city for a little while. One of the biggest parks is the Ibirapuera park, also known as “a green oasis at the heart of a concrete jungle”. It is located roughly 4Km from the FGV. This was my favorite place to do sports for the time being in São Paulo.
a. RESIDENCE PERMIT

After arriving to São Paulo the first thing you will have to do is start the application for the residence permit. The FGV will assist you during the entire process of application. It is very bureaucratic and time consuming. The university will also plan several days to go to the police in groups to take care of this process. Explaining in this report all the documents needed for the residence permit will not be very helpful as it is a changing process and the regulation constantly asks for further documents or different ones. The FGV will get in contact with you roughly three months before the beginning of the semester and provide you with the most updated information. Make sure to bring all the originals they ask with you to Brazil. Forgetting one will be costly afterwards.

b. COSTS

Living in São Paulo isn’t cheap. The monthly expenses are similar to those of students in Munich. Here is a list of the roughly expenses:

- **Housing:** 300-600 EUR per month
- **Groceries:** 200-300 EUR per month
- **Restaurants:**
  - Lunch menus: 4-10 EUR – Many of these offer all-you-can eat buffets
  - Dinner with drinks: 15-25 EUR
  - Rodizios (Steakhouse): Cheap ones 10 EUR – Expensive ones 40 EUR
- **Transportation:**
  - Uber rides range between 3 – 20 EUR
  - Bus and metro is 1 EUR per ride
- **Phone:** 10 EUR per month and it includes 8GB internet + unlimited calls and sms

Monthly expenses range between 1000-1500 EUR depending on how often you travel, go out for food, size of room, among others. Of course, the sky is the limit, spending money in São Paulo is not a hard task.
c. CREDIT CARD / DEBIT CARD

If you still do not have a credit card with the possibility of withdrawing money without paying fees, then get one or change your bank. Currently Comdirect and N26 offer such services. However, I am sure many there are many other players in the market also providing credit cards with favorable conditions.

Paying with credit cards in São Paulo and many parts of Brazil is very common, in contrast to Germany. Even people in the streets selling simple products have very often a point-of-sale and accept the card also for very small amounts of money.

d. TRANSPORTATION

São Paulo has a very well developed public transportation system consisting of subway lines and buses. Depending on where you live and want to go, the public system is always an option. However, with the entrance of Uber in the market, taking an Uber and sharing it with friends is also a very cheap and fast transportation system. The majority of the times my friends and I would take one instead of taking the bus or subway. The subway comes in very handy when wanting to go to the outer part of the city. The soccer stadium of the Corinthians team for instance is very far away in a place called Itaquera. Going by Uber might get very expensive and you might even need more time to get there due to the dense traffic.

e. SAFETY

Safety is always an issue of concern among exchange students. Of course that São Paulo is more dangerous than Munich or many other cities in Europe, but you should not travel to São Paulo being scared. I spent 6 months there and never got robbed. It is an issue of knowing where to be at what time. If you walk the city center alone at 1am don’t be surprised if you actually get robbed. If you stick together in large groups, travel by Uber instead of by bus at night or ask Brazilian students for tips for the city you should not encounter any issue. Indeed some students were robbed during the semester abroad and all cases had the following aspects in common: They got distracted, were under the influence of alcohol or were in open street festivals with huge masses of people.

The biggest difference between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro with regards to security is that in São Paulo if you get robbed you might not even notice it in the event, while in Rio de Janeiro sadly
thieves might threat you with guns. In any case, if you encounter such a situation do not try to defend yourself, just give them what they want.

The FGV will also provide you in the first week of classes with tips and recommendations to live safely in São Paulo.

3. THE UNIVERSITY – FGV

The campus of the university is located in a neighborhood called Bela Vista. It is an eleven-storey building with classrooms in the different floors. It counts with three café’s, a canteen and it is located close to many small restaurants where you get lunch deals for very good prices. It is walking distance from the Avenida Paulista, the biggest avenue of all São Paulo.

The FGV is a very well-known university in Brazil and in South America. When people ask you where you study, they immediately recognize the name. It is a private university with the triple crown accreditation and getting in is very demanding. If you are going to the FGV coming from the TUM you will notice the massive difference between the private and the public education system. Per class there is a max number of 25 students. Professors are well prepared, very often alumni from universities in the USA as Harvard and Stanford. The semester is divided in 2 terms each 8 weeks long plus 1 week of finals. During the terms you usually have weekly reports to deliver, mid-terms, presentations and excursions. Grades do not depend on a single exam at the end of the term.

Personally, I only needed to take three classes equivalent to 18ECTS. However, you really learn a lot from the professors and I finally took 5 classes equivalent to 30ECTS. All credits were recognized by the TUM as they were all master courses and I had not taken anything similar to these courses in Munich yet.

- Negotiation: Perhaps the best class I have had in my masters so far. I fully recommend to take it in case it is offered in the respective semester. Prof. Jaci Leite is a top of the line professor and will provide you with deep good knowledge needed in negotiations. The class is very time demanding, every week you will be carrying exercises and the following week you will deliver a 2-page detailed report on the lessons learned from the exercise. The class is oriented on the book “Getting to Yes” by W. Ury and R. Fisher.
• Project Management: Also a very useful soft skill that many of us will use in our working and personal life. In comparison to negotiation this class is less time consuming and it includes a mid-term, a project and a final exam. I also highly recommend taking it.

• Microfinance and Financial Inclusion: This class will provide with interesting insights on how to finance smaller projects in more rural areas. One of the biggest challenges for financial markets is to include those who do not have access to financial products. Nowadays Fintech companies and blockchain solutions offer possibilities to enable financial inclusion. If you are interest in finance in general, this is a good course you should attend.

• Retailing in a multichannel environment: If you like marketing, this is a course for you. I personally did not have much knowledge in marketing, so I had much to learn. The class is not time consuming, very practical and it includes weekly presentations, excursions and a final exam.

• Customer Relationship and Sales Management: Same as the retailing course, it is not a time-consuming class. Every week one student had to prepare a 1.5h class including a presentation for the rest of students and in some weeks, real life cases were discussed.

• Portuguese classes: Knowing Portuguese is not necessary to study at the FGV as they offer many classes in English. However, many Brazilians do not speak English. Speaking Portuguese is of great advantage to get better prices if you are able to negotiate. It also allows you to better understand the Brazilian culture. The university charges 300 USD for this elective course and depending on the level of the incoming students levels for beginners, intermediate or advanced are offered.

RECOMMENDATION: If you do not mind getting a certificate after taking the course, get private lessons! They are much cheaper if you share the teacher with other 3-4 students. Between 10-15 EUR per hour divided by the number of students. Ask Brazilian FGV students for recommendations in case they know a Brazilian language teacher.

4. TRAVELLING

If you have the time to travel before or after the semester, take advantage of it. Brazil is a huge country and you will for sure not be able to see all of it in the short period of time. I arrived in Brazil in the beginning of February before the beginning of carnival. Carnival in Brazil is massive,
four days of “Blocos” in the streets, which is basically a group of music playing samba songs and people following the band. I spent carnival in Rio de Janeiro and went among other to the “Sambodromo”. This is the biggest samba contest worldwide. The best samba schools of Brazil qualify for this event and at the end of the carnival the best is crowned. Buy tickets in Rio, not in advance, to take advantage of last minute offers. I paid for my ticket 10 EUR, while the tickets online started at 100 EUR up to thousands of euros.

After the semester I travelled 5 weeks through Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru. Plane tickets are very expensive in South America so you will be travelling mostly by bus. Don’t plan too much, make reservations and buy bus tickets as you go. You will always get the best prices if you buy them spontaneously minutes or hours before departure. Ask other tourists what they paid so you get an idea of prices and are able to negotiate better. If there is one thing you will be better at after travelling in South America is negotiating.

5. CONCLUSION

All in all, the semester in São Paulo fulfilled all my expectations. The FGV is a 5-star university, Brazilian and South American people are very open and friendly, and the nature of the continent is beautiful. If you already got accepted for a semester abroad at the FGV get ready for a fascinating time and enjoy your stay in the continent.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to send me an email, I am happy to help with any issues.

Best,

Nicolas Matthies

6. PICTURES
Figure 1: Tarzan rock / Paraty RJ

Figure 2: Paraty RJ
Figure 3: Sambodromo Carnival, Rio de Janeiro

Figure 4: Rio de Janeiro
Figure 5: Farol Santander, Sao Paulo

Figure 6: Stadium Sao Paulo FC
Figure 7: Ibirapuera park Sao Paulo

Figure 8: Campos do Jordao, Sao Paulo State
Figure 9: Campos do Jordao, Sao Paulo state

Figure 10: Pedra do Bau, Sao Bento de Sapucai
Figure 11: Iguacu waterfalls

Figure 12: Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia
Figure 13: La Paz, Bolivia

Figure 14: Cuzco, Peru
Figure 15: Machu Picchu, Peru

Figure 16: Salkantay (6.200m), Peru
Figure 17: Valle del Cocora, Colombia

Figure 18: Flight crossing the Andes, Chile-Argentina