

The City of Good

Student exchange São Paulo – USP 2015

Introduction:

It has been almost half a year since I stepped into the airplane that would take me to some of the most exciting five months of my life. Over this time I have met amazing people, saw some of the most stunning beaches, gotten to know a different approach on Uni life and of course been to some of the craziest parties in South America.

Before I say anything more about São Paulo, I want to get rid of one of the biggest misconceptions about exchange in Brazil; studying in São Paulo is not dangerous. Before I went there, many of my friends decided not to apply to São Paulo because they thought it was too dangerous. Don't make that same mistake of not applying and missing out on an amazing experience because you think it's life threatening.

Before I went to Brazil, my image about the country was mostly defined by movies such as 'City of God' which portrays Brazil as a country full of violence and crime. While this certainly is true about some parts of Brazil, you have to consider that you are an exchange student there. This means that you will most likely not even pass any of the bad neighbourhoods by train, not to mention live there.

I personally had no contact with crime in Brazil and neither did most of my friends. I mean of course the general population in Brazil is poorer compared to the Netherlands and it might, therefore, not be a good idea to leave your phone at the beach, while you go for a swim. However, I think having some 'traveller common sense' will allow you to avoid these kinds of situations! My main point in this paragraph is that there is no reason to be concerned about your physical well being. Yes, there are neighbourhoods in which you should not wonder around at night, but usually there is nothing bringing you there in the first place. So don't let your bad perception of Brazil's crime influence your choice on whether to go there or not!

So now that this is out of the way, let's focus on all the amazing things you can do in Brazil and São Paulo. But first, what do you have to do before you get there?

Preparation

So before you can go to São Paulo and have an amazing time studying at the best University in South America you need to apply for a visa. Don't underestimate the time this takes because there is some additional documents that you will need before you can get your Visa. For people from Rotterdam it is easiest to get the Visa at the consulate that is next to the central station. However, before you go there you will need some things. First, you need a police record which you can request from the municipality, make sure you do this in time because it can take up to 3 weeks. Next, you will need a prove of health insurance. In case your current insurance does not cover it, I believe it is the cheapest option to just get travel insurance for the time of your exchange. Apart from that, you will need some copies of your documents but it is probably best to just go on the embassies website and get an updated list. I would also recommend you to get some of the recommended vaccinations in case you

are planning to travel around. I personally think it is best to find your accommodation only once you get to the city. There is a bunch of Facebook groups which make this not too hard. Once you are accepted to USP, just ask your iFriend if he/she can add you to the group. In general the best areas to live in are Vila Madalena, Pinheiros, Butanta, Jardins. The university in general offers a couple of courses in English and courses in almost any subject in Portuguese. However, once you get there the international office will tell you all about it; therefore I would not worry about choosing courses before you go.

Arrival

You will arrive at Guarulhos, the international airport of São Paulo. The airport is located at the outskirts of São Paulo and around 25km away from the city. To get into the city you can either take a cab which is quite expensive or a bus and the metro. If you are not too exhausted from your flight, I recommend doing the later as you will save yourself around 25€. There is also a shuttle-bus that can take you to some main points in the city, however, for the authentic experience I can recommend the normal bus which not only saves you money but also allows you to get a first impression about your coming 5 months and the city of São Paulo!

Courses

The course system at USP works quite different to what I was used to from Rotterdam. In general every course will be offered in every Semester and even twice a day (during the day and from 21-23h)! The university has a huge array of different courses; however, there are only 4 courses in English. In general I can also recommend looking at some of the courses outside of the economics department, as you will be able to take 12 ECTS worth of courses (e.g Psychology courses, International Relations, or whatever else interests you!)

I personally took the following courses.

- 1) Accounting Control Systems
- 2) Accounting Institutions and Regulation
- 3) International Management: Doing Business in Brasil
- 4) Administração de Organizações no Brasil
- 5) Global Governance (At the International Relations faculty)

The courses listed above were all in English and consist of some essays and an exam. Out of the ones I have chosen I can really recommend doing Global Governance because the professor is very good and I really changed my thinking off and understanding about many different topics. In general it I believe it to be best to just try out some of the courses that you find interesting and then make your choice. After Uni has started there you will get a week to just try out courses before you have to decide which ones you want to take.

Finances

I should point out that at the time that I was in Brazil the €/R\$ (1€=4,2R\$) exchange rate was favourable. However, this is an estimated overview of my spending while I was abroad. This does not include travelling! Also it should be pointed out that I spend relatively little on my housing.

Flight	900€
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Living (food, household stuff, phone,...)	700€
Housing (rent)	1100€
Insurance	180€
Public Transport + Cabs	160€ + 150
Bank fees	65€
Going out (Nightlife, Restaurants, Bars, Festivals, Sports)	800€
SUM	3875€

Daily life – General Information

São Paulo is the biggest city in the southern hemisphere and with that there are an incredible amount of things you can do every day. Starting from street festivals, over museums live music sport events or exotic food you can do almost anything, any day in São Paulo.

One thing I can advise you to do is to join a sports association as soon as you get there. With your student card you get access to an absolutely huge sports areal (2 Olympic sized pools, a stadium, soccer pitches, a gym,) and joining a sports association is not only fun but also a good way to get to know some of the Brazilian students. I can really recommend trying out capoeira, which is a traditional sport in Brazil. The association that organises it has a very open and warm culture and it is nice to get to know a little bit more about the Brazilian culture and traditions. If that is not your thing, don't worry, the University almost offers any sport that you can think off!

Safety tips:

As said before, I don't think that São Paulo is a dangerous place, however in general South America is not Europe so there are some things you should consider.

First, don't give thieves any opportunities by making it easy to reach your wallet or phone. Girls, close your handbags and guys don't store your valuables in the back pocket! Also when you are on the street and, especially when you are crossing a street, while on the phone, make sure to have a tight grip on it. I have seen a guy who tried to grab a phone of a guy while he was cycling past him. Second, if you get money out try to get it out in public places such as big streets, shopping malls or the University. I don't think it happens often but I heard that some ATM's can be rigged. Third, if you are going out in a neighbourhood that you don't know take a cab home, usually they are quite cheap anyway (2-5€). Lastly, in the unlikely event of actually getting robbed, just give all your things away and don't try to resist it! Apart from that I can only one last time recommend you to dive into the adventure called Brazil! In summary, I can certainly say that I had an amazing time during my 5 months of Brazil. I have learned a lot about myself and Brazil as a country. During my time there, I have made many very good Brazilian and international friends and also my courses at the Uni were value adding to my academic career.

In case you still have any questions feel free to contact me via the ESE office.

Best regards,

Laurin Wirth