

Living the Gaucho Culture

General Information

University: Universidad de Montevideo (UM)

City: Montevideo

Country: Uruguay

Period: 8th of July 2016 – 3rd of January 2017

Preparation

In order to get ready to live, the most basic things to arrange include booking your flight ticket, finding a place to stay, arranging your insurance and sending in the required transcripts. Finally, do not forget to arrange your scholarship and your compensation for your OV.

One important detail regarding the required documents consists of the fact that you do not need a visa to stay in Uruguay. Instead, all Latin-American countries automatically give you a tourist visa upon arrival in the country. This visa expires after 90 days, so the only essential detail is that you have to leave the country before your visa expires. This can be easily done from Uruguay, as you can book a weekend trip to Buenos Aires or visit any other country for vacations.

Secondly, UM obliges you to have an international insurance, so that you cannot forget to arrange this. I was insured via my parents, so I did not need to take care of this point. Furthermore, the UM requires an administration fee of about 80 USD, which has to be paid before arrival. Another important thing involves the application process, for which you need to send in all the required documents, including a valid passport, proof of insurance and grade list (this last one is only a formality). Communication with the university was rather easy through the international coordinator, who usually responded quite quickly.

As I planned to leave early and travel in Argentina beforehand, I booked my flight tickets as soon as possible through the travel agency D-reizen. This way, I could be sure everything was done correctly, but of course internet works too for a simple ticket. At the time, I booked my return flight within the 90 day limit, taking the visa limit into account, but customs never gave me any issues.

I found a room before my arrival through Facebook (the pages: 'Montevideo International Students' and 'Rental in Montevideo'). However, since a lot of rooms are depicted better than they actually look, it could be better to search upon arrival and stay in a Hostel the first few days. A third, yet more expensive option is to book a room (you will get one roommate)

at the International Student Housing in Montevideo. UM provides a list of possibilities to find housing too, in which they indicate the best neighbourhoods and options. When searching for a place, I recommend searching in the areas of Punta Carretas (safest & richest), Pocitos (most bars & restaurants), Tres Cruces (closest to university). Definitely avoid the outskirts or anything further from the center than those areas I mentioned due to increased violence. Ciudad Vieja is fine during the day, however, can get dangerous at night.

Arrival

After your plane lands or your ferry (from Buenos Aires) arrives in Montevideo and dropping your belongings at the hostel/room, you want to exchange some cash or open up a bank account. I didn't have a Uruguayan bank account, but this could give you high discounts in shops and restaurants. This way, you also avoid the additional fee for using an international bank account.

Almost all the international students also got a Uruguayan mobile number, as there are very cheap prepaid cards available. I got mine at Antel (state-owned telephone network) and paid 100 Uruguayan Pesos for 500 MB (about 3 to 4 Euros for 500 MB) which was valid for a whole month.

Furthermore, I got a membership for a gym and a special card for the busses so I wouldn't need change every time I took one (1 hour costs 28 pesos \approx 1 Euro).

UM organizes two days with presentations about the university/Uruguay/important information and fun activities, at which presence is mandatory. Your classes do not start until one week after, so you have some time to explore the city.

Courses

You have a mandatory attendance to all the courses and regular homework, so keep that in mind as almost all grades are partly determined by your participation in class. The classes consist of small groups of about 20 people. The maximum grade is a 12 instead of a 10. In general the courses were easier than EUR courses and can be completed without putting in a lot of effort. However, this also depends on the language of the course, as Spanish courses proved to be more challenging. All my courses were meant to fill my elective space.

I took the following courses:

- *International Business Finance (9 ECTS)*

The course load is very high and aims to explain ways for multinational companies to finance themselves, including trading stocks or hedging. During the semester, they taught us all the ins and outs of foreign exchange trading and other methods of financing. The course had two midterms and a big group project. However, you could

be exonerated for the final exam if you had a 9 (out of 12) or higher. I found the course rather easy, yet a lot of material had to be studied and finished during the semester.

- *Strategy (7 ECTS)*

This was by far the course I enjoyed most due to the contents. The course involves strategic instruments (Porter's Five Forces, SWOT analyses, competitive advantages and capabilities) a company uses to determine its strategy. Several guest speakers came to talk about the strategy of their companies (e.g. Pepsi and the credit card company OCA). This made the course livelier. There was one midterm and one final presentation, in which we presented improvements for a company's business strategy.

- *Marketing I (7 ECTS)*

This course is much like the marketing course of first year economics, but a bit more elaborate. However, since it was basically a repetition of all the material, it cost no effort at all. The main marketing tools are explained, such as marketing research, marketing reports and the P's of the marketing mix. The course had two midterms and one final exam. During the semester, we also had to do business cases in groups, which had very clearly stated questions to answer and present them.

- *Managing Cultural Diversity (5 ECTS)*

The main goal of this course is to explain the cultural differences that arise within multinational companies nowadays. Several frameworks to rank countries are introduced and used to analyse weekly cases (which are graded). I really enjoyed this course and found it the second-best one of the semester, as it was innovative, practical and essential for today's economics student. Besides the weekly cases, we had to give a presentation about a country's cultural profile and one final exam.

- *International Business Communication (5 ECTS)*

One of the easiest courses to take would be this one. It lasts until half October (so it finishes one month early) and discusses the tools needed for communication within businesses. The classes were very interactive and discussed ways of writing emails, handling presentation and even phone calls. Nobody had a final exam for this course (everybody had a grade higher than a 9 and got exonerated), but only one final presentation and one report about how to do business with a specific country. Once again, this course definitely had the easiest workload.

- *Antropología (7 ECTS)*

This was the one course I took in Spanish, which also helped me a lot to learn the language. However, it is a very challenging course, even for Uruguayan students. The course entails different philosophical views about the world and the role of human beings in it. It also focuses on several traits (love, trust and what defines a person) of the human being a bit. The course had several small group assignments that were graded and two midterms (of which one was an online midterm so I could do it at

home and, especially for me, allowed to do in English). If you had a grade of 8 or higher, you were exonerated from the final exam.

- *Spanish B1 level (3 ECTS; additional cost of 200 USD)*

This course was offered specifically to international students. The teacher makes the course very interactive with multiple little assignments (written, short presentations and listening to lyrics of music videos) to help our level of Spanish improve. She also puts focus on the Rioplatense accent of Uruguay and northern Argentina, as they have several differences compared to the 'traditional' Spanish. The course had two midterms and with a 9 or higher you were, once again, exonerated from the final exam.

Finances

The main point you need to take into account is that Uruguay is quite expensive, even the supermarkets. Furthermore, I travelled a lot, so made a lot of expenses there. But in general:

Rent: 450 USD/month

Sports Facilities: ≈ 40 USD/month (unlimited membership)

Phone costs: ≈ 5 USD/month

Transport: ≈ 70 – 80 USD/month

Drinks/bars/restaurants: ≈ 60 – 80 USD/month

Supermarket: ≈ 100 USD/month

Additional trips (5 days to Santiago, Chile/ 8 days to São Paulo & Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) were around 600 USD including flight ticket, hostel, food and entrance fees to tourist hot spots.

Daily Life

Living in Uruguay can be summarized by one word: relaxation. The daily life is by far not as high paced as in the Netherlands. Everybody likes to take their time for food, activities and parties. This also means Uruguayans are ALWAYS late, by at least 30 minutes. This also goes for busses. You get used to this rather quickly and enjoy the cultural ease of life. Moreover, Uruguayans are very helpful and friendly, even though they do not speak English at all.

I spent my days mainly with friends, discovering new bars and places to eat or exploring the city. At night I ate at home with my housemates. Soccer is quite a happening, so the internationals had to go at least once to a soccer game of the national team. Feeling the passion of the Uruguayans for what they do is an incredible experience. As it was never really cold (min 15 degrees Celsius) and lived in Punta Carretas within one block of the rambla/beach, I spent most days outside of the house or even on the beaches or the Rambla (the road and wide pavement that directly follows the coastal line in Montevideo). This is

where all the locals gather as soon as the sun comes out to enjoy a nice mate (a traditional tea, which is prepared and consumed in a special manner).

UM organized multiple trips, one of which to a city of the province of Maldonado, where we walked through the forest, met local wildlife and rode horses on the beach at sunset. Furthermore, there is Punta Weekend, which is a weekend full of parties in Punta del Este, one of the richest cities of South America on a 2 hour distance from Montevideo. All your fellow students and internationals will be there, so it is a weekend not to miss.

Besides local festivities, I travelled a lot during the semester. I started already upon arrival, as I stayed 10 days in Buenos Aires and visited several cities along Argentina's coastal line. My second trip was to visit a friend, who got assigned to Santiago in Chile and stayed there for four days with a day trip to Valparaíso, where most of the walls have amazing graffiti paintings on them. My third semester trip was to visit a friend in São Paulo, where I stayed for two days and then I continued to Rio de Janeiro by plane and spent four more days there. Noticing the differences in nature and culture between the countries has truly enriched my experience and is highly recommendable. Flight tickets are also a lot cheaper, since you are already pretty close compared to Europe.

Lastly, due to the many exonerations and the possibility to take exams earlier as an exchange student, I had almost a full month of holiday in December (summer for South America with average temperatures of 25 to 35 degrees, depending where you are in the continent). Therefore, after I celebrated my birthday with friends, I began my road trip (when renting a car to go abroad, make sure it is insured and the company enables you to actually cross the border) and made a small circle through Puerto Iguazú (where I visited the water falls on both side of the border), Curitiba, Florianópolis, Porto Alegre and Punta del Este. It took me three weeks, with an average of 2 to 3 days spent in each city and the other days driving to new places. Lastly, I spent New Year's Eve in Buenos Aires again, as my flight left on the 2nd already. This experience has enriched me a lot and I enjoyed every second.

As a girl travelling mostly by myself, I must say that South America didn't give me many difficulties (even though you often hear different stories). Nothing got stolen and I didn't experience any harassment from the local citizens. However, I made sure I stayed in touristic areas and researched beforehand which areas were safe for me to visit. Also, I did most of my travelling within the city by taxi or Uber or together with friends. Furthermore, I was quite cautious about talking to random people in the streets, as there are many homeless people who might try to take advantage of that.

Besos,

Veronique

If you have any other questions or need any help, just contact me: veronique.voeten@live.nl