

Exchange report Universidad de los Andes 2016
Bogota, Colombia
Louise Sanders

From Augustus until December (fall semester) I did an exchange at the Universidad de los Andes (Uniandes) in Bogota, Colombia. I hope this report can make you enthusiastic to study at Uniandes and provides you useful information for your own exchange.

Preparation

After being selected and nominated by the Erasmus School of Economics to study at the Universidad de los Andes during the fall semester, I received from the host university an email with important dates and a list of required documents. Important dates were for example the deadline to send those required documents, date of the orientation session for international students (in my case end of July), date of first day of class (in my case beginning of August) and of course the dates of exams and holidays. Besides holidays, it is also very common in Colombia to have long weekends, called "Puentes". The documents required were: a copy of my passport, a grade transcript, a list of courses I was taking at Erasmus at that moment, a list of courses I would like to take at Uniandes, a certificate of at least Spanish B2, a motivation letter in Spanish and two pictures. At that moment I did not have a Spanish certificate. Fortunately, I am raised bilingual, since my mother is Mexican. That is also the reason why I really wanted to study in Latin America. Since I already spoke fluent Spanish, I only took a test at the Language & Training Centre. Afterwards, they provided me with the required certificate and I could send all the required documents. At first, I thought it was strange that Uniandes demands such a high level of Spanish and that the University should provide more courses in English. However, even though if the University would provide courses in English, most of the people on the street barely speak English. In the beginning of June I received my admission letter.

Travel and Accommodation

Traveling to the other side of the planet is never very cheap, so the earlier you get your flight ticket the better. If you are from the Netherlands and you are going to study in Colombia, apparently you do not need a visa. At the airport you will get a PIP (3 or 6). However, after an amount of time you have to renew your PIP in Colombia.

When you arrive in Colombia, the easiest way to get to your accommodation is by taxi. If you arrive at daylight you can easily take a taxi standing near the airport. But if you think that is unsafe and scary, Uniandes offers you to contact a secure taxi company to pick you up. This will all be explained in the email with your admission letter. I did not use this service, since a nephew of a Colombian friend of my mother picked me up. After a while, you will find your own way with busses, transmilenio and taxis. Busses and transmilenio are very cheap, you pay between 1500 and 2000 pesos, that is less than 1€ It does not matter how long and far you travel in the city, you just pay one time that small amount. Taxis are relatively cheap compared to Europe, so enjoy it! By daylight you can easily grab a taxi at the street. At night, it is recommended to ask a taxi through an app or to use Uber. Uber is very common in Latin America.

There are three well known accommodations.

R65

This is the building where I stayed. It is not very close to the University. Most of the time I took a big orange bus, which took me in 20 minutes to Uniandes. However, in Colombia you

do not know at what time the bus picks you up. So, whenever I was waiting too long, I grabbed a taxi. Taking the taxi to the University, will cost you between 6000 and 8000 pesos. The orange bus costs 1700 pesos and you pay with a card, just like our “ov-chipkaart”. R65 is on walking distance of a small night life scenery. One of the largest clubs of Bogota is located there, Theatron. Be prepared if you go there because it is a gay club, so you might see pretty obscene things. Even though a small night life scenery is on walking distance. The neighborhood of R65 is pretty good, better than around the University. That is the reason why I choose R65 as my accommodation. However, since R65 and Seneca are part of the University, there are some strict rules. When I was staying in R65, we were not allowed to drink alcohol inside and if you invited a guest, your guest could not stay after 23:00. R65 has two buildings one building has one kitchen and the other building has two kitchens and washing machines. R65 has different types of rooms; suit, one-person, two-persons and four-persons. I asked for a two-persons room but without a roommate, so I had the whole room for myself.

Seneca

This building opened during one of my last weeks in Colombia. So, it very new and somewhat more expensive than R65. Seneca is located on campus and belongs also to the University, so expect strict rules.

R10

This is the party building because it does not belong to the University. It is located only a 10-minute walking distance from the University. However, as mentioned before the neighborhood around the University is not very well, especially not at night. I know they do not have washing machines, but nearby are different places where you can wash your clothes.

Finances

You can live very cheap in Colombia but you can also make it as expensive as you want. In my case, I paid a total 1.300€ for 4/5 months' accommodation. I took 320.000 pesos every 10 days, that is around 300€ a month. This covered almost all my expenses, including taking the bus (or whenever I wanted the taxi to University), eating outside the house, groceries, phone costs and going out. You do not have to pay for sport facilities. The campus has a large sports complex including a gym, a swimming pool, a squash room and a lot more! And as a student of Uniandes you can use it for free.

During my exchange, I saved some money so I could travel through Colombia after my exams. Useful to know as well, even though you are in Latin America, it is not very hot in Bogota. It about 11 to 15 degrees all year round and you barely see the sun. So, do not only bring summer cloths with you! On the other side, when you go to the coast it is all year round 30 degrees. A nice city to see when you have time to travel is the “city of spring”. In other words, Medellin, well known because of its history of Pablo Escobar.

Courses

My biggest shock was when I was applying for my courses since I saw that some lectures started at 06:30!!! You have two types of courses, “normal” courses and “CBU’s”. CBU’s are considered as easy. However, when CBU’s are type E, they require a lot of writing and reading in Spanish, so for exchange students it might not be always that easy. Studying at Uniandes, reminded me of high school. The classes are small and relative interactive compared to the lectures at Erasmus. Courses consist of lectures, homework, reading papers,

making assignments, mid-terms (called parciales) and final exams. The grading scale is from 1.5-5 and you need a least a 3 to pass a course.

Daily life

One thing I love about Latin America is that everything is possible. One thing I hate about Latin America is that everyone comes late to appointments, so bring every inch of patience you have with you! I also had to get used to eat dinner around 20:00 instead of 18:00. In Colombia it is also common to eat a hot plate as lunch, this is called “almuerzo”. For 2€ you can get a warm soup, a hot meal and a drink.

Colombians are very friendly and helpful. They are proud of their country and want to show you how beautiful their county is. I have seen wonderful nature, when going away a day or a weekend with locals. Grab every opportunity you get to travel and see a lot more of Colombia. A small nice village to visit near Bogota is for example Villa de Leyva. Of course, you can also explore Colombia with exchange students, therefore it convenient to join the facebook-group “Hermanos Sin Fronteras”.

Security

The difference between poor and rich is large in Colombia. The chances of being robbed are therefore much larger than here in the Netherlands. It might sound pessimistic, but before going to Colombia, I already prepared myself mentally that I would get mugged in those 4/5 months. Fortunately, I have not been mugged! I did hear a lot of stories of locals getting robbed. But it is the basic stuff that makes the difference, for example if you are sitting somewhere do not lose your bag out of sight, do not walk with your phone in your hand outside and do not wear to much jewelry. Then you will be fine and have a wonderful experience in Colombia, just like me!