

My Journey in Sao Paulo

Introduction:

Sao Paulo is without a doubt one of the most vibrant cities you will ever find. If Rotterdam seems like a busy city, then Sao Paulo is essentially chaotic (but in the best ways). From the massive student body, to the vibrant night life (literally every night of the week), there is always something entertaining to do in Sao Paulo.

When I first embarked on the adventure I was extremely nervous, although I speak Portuguese as a native from Portugal, the culture shock and the “dangers” everyone always talks about weighed heavily in my thoughts. I knew very little about the culture, the people, or if I could even handle courses that the university had to offer. However I need not have worried. From the moment I landed to the day I left, I was treated as one of their own. Brazilians are remarkably lovely when it comes to hospitality and will actively try their best to make you feel at home. All Brazilians will happily introduce you to all their friends, family and volunteer to show you around.

Most of my friends had virtually no contact with crime during their stay in Brazil, and although I happened to be one of the very few unlucky ones, this was not in Sao Paulo (I will develop on this later). I found myself to feel very safe in most areas of Sao Paulo. Although you do observe significantly larger levels of poverty than you might find in the Netherlands, the level of crime in the areas where students live are quite low, and most of you are likely to live in nice areas which provide security. The key factor to feeling safe is what you would expect to have everywhere, just some basic common sense.

Preparation

I strongly advise you to start your document preparations as early as you can, as the bureaucratic process for a VISA takes remarkably long. The consulate is well located right next to central station here in Rotterdam but be aware that before you go you will need several documents (they change every year but they're all easily identified in the consulate website). The document that took the longest to get was the police record. This took me 4 weeks to receive but it's a crucial part of the visa process. I would also recommend you book your appointment at the consulate as early as possible as it is often quite hectic, and slots are limited. In my case I applied too late and my appointment was set 3 weeks later than I wanted, but I got lucky and managed to bargain an earlier date by going to the consulate in person and begging for a quick opportunity. However not everyone gets lucky with this strategy so I do recommend some caution. Next, you will need proof health insurance. Make sure your health insurance covers you for your whole stay in Brazil. If it does not cover you whilst abroad then the cheapest option might be to just get travel insurance for the time of your exchange. Although no vaccinations are necessary, it doesn't hurt to take some precautionary ones. However this can also be done at USP University as they have their own medical facility on campus and are well equipped to help you with any potential problems. For accommodation I was very lucky as I had a family friend who sorted it out for me. Most students usually stay at a hostel when they arrive and find accommodation later on once they meet the other exchange students. There is a bunch of Facebook groups you can use and the university does provide a few listings aswell . In general the best areas to live in are Vila Madalena, Pinheiros, Butanta, Jardins.

Arrival

The most common arrival point if travelling directly to Sao Paulo is to fly to guarulhos will arrive at

Guarulhos, the international airport of São Paulo. The airport is located in the outskirts of São Paulo and around 25km away from the city. There are several forms of transport you can take. Although a lot of people take cabs or the shuttles, I took advantage of the massive large availability of UBER service in Brazil. Given the currency wasn't very strong at the time it was remarkably cheap to travel (usually cheaper than public transport in the Netherlands) and although from the airport it's still quite a distance, it should be no more than roughly 18 euros. I was absolutely exhausted after my flight so having the option to ride in comfort and more speed than your average shuttle was a blessing.

Courses

The University in general offers a couple of courses in English and a massive amount of 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. The course system at USP works quite different to what I was used to from Rotterdam. Courses can be as early as 7.30 in the morning and end as late as 11 pm. However if you pick your courses well, you can have classes as little as 3 days a week.

The university has a huge array of different courses; however, the courses in economics in English are limited (there was about 8 in English when I went). In general I 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, or humanities). I personally took the following courses.

- 1) Accounting History (worth 5 ECTS)
- 2) Desenvolvimento economico (worth 10 ECTS)
- 3) International Management: Doing Business in Brasil(worth 7.5 ECTS)
- 4) Administração de Organizações no Brasil (worth 5 ECTS)

The courses listed above were all in English and consist of some essays and an exam. The only exception was the development economics course, bit the professor did allow you to write the examination in English and most of the texts where in English as the reading consisted mainly of European economists. I honestly advocate that course if you want to further your economic background and truly understand some of the theories discussed I IBEB. Furthermore some of the texts used applied in depth to the South American economies, which gave me refreshing insight on how different economies worldwide. If you are not happy with your courses picked you can always try to change them in the first week (depending on slots available).

Expenses

Although due to political instability the exchange rate varied quite a lot, on average the €/R\$ (1€=3.7R\$) exchange rate was favourable. However, this is an estimated overview of my spending while I was abroad. I spent quite a lot on housing (although no more than your average rent in Rotterdam (roughly 450 Euros a month) and I don't include my travelling expenses to other places in Brazil as that will depend on your preferences but also on how much you are willing to spend (although the travel opportunities are immense!)

Flight	1000€
Living Expenses	2250€
Visa + Brazilian resident expenses	200€
Living expenses (food and utensils)	800€
Parties and nightlife	800€

Transport	250€
Meals at uni (54 cents per meal)	20€
Total	5320

Daily Life

The daily life at university can be as vibrant as you want to make it. You can join plenty of sports teams such as the rugby team or football or even fun new things like capoeira! I personally only tried rugby but I loved it and the team often had sports events. From a class perspective some aspects might be a bit more primitive than EUR but you'll be astonished by how big the campus is (you need a shuttle to get from one end to the other). They don't call the university a mini city for no reason. In terms of the life outside your studies there is so much to do in Sao Paulo. You can go to the Paulista Avenue on Sundays to see all the festivities or the dance festivals, or go to the Ibirapuera Park and enjoy a relaxing afternoon in the sun with some friends. The metro system is very easy to use and some lines you could argue are of higher quality than in the Netherlands. When it comes to having a nice beer at the end of the day or simply wanting to unwind, most students go to Vila Madalena or the Rua Augusta where you can dance samba all night or listen to techno or rock music. That's the best aspect of Brazil, no matter what you prefer, or what type of person you are, you will find somewhere to fit in.

Safety tips:

During my 5 months in SP I never truly felt like I was in danger at any point in time. I had a few friends who lived in bad neighbourhoods and occasionally went down some dodgy streets. But with a little bit of common sense you can almost always ensure you will be safe. The main advice I can give is when going home from a party take an Uber (that way you don't have to carry much cash and you can safely get home). Furthermore avoid taking your phone out in public too much in order not to attract too much attention and not keep your wallet in your back pocket as some streets are so crowded you won't even notice if someone takes it. For girls I would say to always keep your handbag closed and avoid walking alone at night as a precaution. 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.

As I mentioned at the start, I did get robbed during my stay in Brazil. However this was in Recife, a city which is notoriously dangerous and unfortunately the police was on strike. Although it was an unpleasant situation, I recommend just give them what they want in order to avoid any unnecessary escalations. However apart from that one small impasse I had an absolutely amazing time in Brazil, and I would repeat my experience without thinking about it twice. Sao Paulo will always feel like my second home and feel the experience made me grow a lot as a human being and see the world from a different perspective.

In case you still have any questions feel free to contact me via the ESE office or Facebook. I'll be more than happy to share any expertise I gained with potential applicants!

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