

Internship report

Cali, Colombia
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana
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My name is Martina, I am an environmental engineering student from Italy. I have been in Cali for a 5-month internship. The work has been motivating and sometimes challenging. I have met wonderful people and seen the most beautiful landscapes I can remember of.

Activities and working environment

I was working as teaching assistant for the course of water supply and sewage systems for civil engineers in a university: I was helping the students to develop a project for local communities who do not have this infrastructure, organized field activities and meetings with representatives of these communities, sometimes gave lecture. I had to collect information and to be available for them in case they had questions concerning the class or the software used for the project.

I revised reports the students wrote for a seminar, a research related to the operation and maintenance of water supply and sewage systems, such as treatment technologies for emerging pollutants, tariff management, sustainable urban drainage systems.

I also revised articles they wrote for the blog of the course, created to share ideas and opinions about water related and environmental problems in Colombia and in the world (drinking water, sanitation, pollution and preservation of water resources, among others): Ríos de ideas | Defender el recurso más precioso (<https://riosdeideas.wordpress.com/>)

The working environment was very familiar: whenever I had some problem everyone around was doing his/her best to help me. And not just at the faculty, in Colombia in general.

I learned a lot in this internship, not just from the academic point of view, but it also gave me the chance to really get to know the city, not as a tourist, but to see the reality of the territory and the local representatives who strive to improve the conditions of their territory. Another important aspect was the human connection between students and teachers.

Moreover, the local IAESTE team organized a national meeting in the coffee region which has been a particularly enjoyable journey during which I met people I am still in contact with.

Practical aspects

Since the internship was starting in June, the time between the notification of acceptance and the flight was short.

Prices of **plane** tickets were therefore already very high and the economic support from DAAD has been absolutely important. I recommend that you check carefully all the papers you need to get this support because a friend of mine lost it for this reason and that would be sad. I also recommend to check the insurance for changing the date of the flight back, it could be convenient.

Then, I had little time to do all the **vaccinations**, because it needs some time between one and the other and also some time before departure (in case the body reacts badly and for them to be effective).

Check very well which ones you actually need and the time schedule. Yellow fever is compulsory, others no, but I did more because I knew I would travel to Amazonas and other risky regions, like the one against raving madness, which is lifelong. For this you can consult the Tropeninstitut. There, I was recommended to do the one against Typhus in case I would drink not really clean water. In Cali, at home, I drink water from the tub, while outside the city people generally recommend buying bottles. It happened that I had to drink water from a stream, but I was mountain water in national parks and it was super clean and nothing happened (Tayrona and Farallones de Cali, reserva El Topacio). All the vaccinations I did were covered by my public health insurance. There is no vaccination against malaria, but I had emergency pills (also preventive pills exists, but does not really make sense to take them months long). A mom of a friend of mine from Cali got dengue in the city, so it is better to use repellent. If, like me, you hate repellent, people here know some natural tricks. Also, people mostly wear long jeans.

When you **travel**, especially in nature, I recommend to always bring plasters and medicines, because a doctor or a pharmacy might not be that close. If you go to very hot places better to have some mineral salts to dissolve in water. A friend of mine felt sick during a journey, she probably was dehydrated, and they were super useful. Also, wear a money belt.

I got a problem with the **letter for the ICETEX**: it was stating I am German citizen and there was no time to correct it. Despite this was an obvious distraction error, the consul in Milan did not want to give me Visa at first. It is normally possible to get it valid up to 1 month after the end of the job, but I could only until the end of November. If you want to get Visa printed in Germany, you must go to Frankfurt (maybe also Berlin, not sure).

I was staying more than 3 months, so the **Cedula de extranjería** was required (a Colombian id card for foreigners), which costs 183 000 COP (55 €).

Bring **adapters**. I was fine with 2.

I had a good **camera**, a old ugly small camera and a cheap **phone**. Nature is so amazing you definitely should bring a good camera if you have it and like me, your phone does not take good pictures, even if it can be not that comfortable to carry it when you have to walk a lot in nature. Mine is not tropicalized but it survived humidity of Amazonas. But you really cannot take it out of your pocket around Cali. For this, I was using my old compact camera.

It is also not that smart to take out your phone, better **check your route before** getting out of your home or inside buildings and bus. Google maps is perfect to check the buses, you don't really need a special app. I could not even make phone calls with my own phone because of some band issues, so I was using another one bought here.

Anyway, it is pretty easy to find the way because street have not name but numbers, so once you get the system you know whether you are going south or east, for example.

Unfortunately, there is no monthly ticket for the **bus**. You have to buy a magnetic card to charge money in it and pay 1900 COP each time.

Uber and taxis are very important here, especially at night. I recommend Uber because it is safer and cheaper. You can check the route on your phone and the App tells the price. Taxis try to ask more money to foreigners. Better to check if your phone supports Uber.

A friend of mine got on taxi he got and was robbed but this never happened to me. Another friend was robbed after **withdrawing money**: do this inside the university or shopping malls. You would need to do it often, because most of the times you have to pay cash.

Planes are the easiest and fastest way to travel in the country. **Buses** are much cheaper, but journeys can be very long because of orography and sometimes drivers are a bit crazy. I personally like the bus more because you can see the landscapes, but be careful to cross the Andes during the 2 rainy periods: because of heavy rainfalls, we met a landslide and had to wait for the road to be cleaned. There are no trains.

If you are looking for **accommodation**, you can check: Fincaraiz, Olx and look for "apartaestudio" or "habitación". I was living in a shared apartment with 2 other students, 30 min walk from university, in a residential unit with gym and swimming pool for 400 000 COP (120 €). It is a good price, you can find cheaper but also much more expensive.

The **ORI** (international relation office) of the university can provide you a list of people who provide accommodation. The one I found was pretty rare, almost all the others had to live with the landlord. The city centre is not safe at night and on Sunday, when everything is closed, better to live in the south. At the ORI you can also ask for activities for international students. Since I was there for internship, I mostly got to know people in the faculty and Colombians.

Lunch in the university was around 3 €. If you are lazy to cook dinner there are so many people who sell street **food** but it's mostly fried, not that healthy. Hard life for vegetarians.

I later decided to do **stay more time in Colombia**. I talked with my tutor and several people in the faculty supported me with this. My contract for IAESTE was renewed and my current activity is a research work which is also my master thesis. This way, it has been pretty easy to renew the Visa, even if I had to travel to Bogotá just to print it, and I got my new cedula de extranjería. I renewed my health insurance, the one I got via DAAD, but it changed from 32 to 74 €. If you also have in mind to stay longer, I recommend starting the process as soon as possible.

City and culture

Salsa is super important. Nature in this country is amazing, so I was travelling as much as possible, but it definitely is worth it to spend some weekends in the city and go dance, go to museums, to Cristo Rey, Tres Cruces, mariposario Andoke, boulevard del Río...

You can hear salsa almost everywhere all the time, which gives the city such a nice atmosphere.

There are several festivals in Cali, like Feria de Cali, Salsa world festival... check the calendar. There are also several holidays, so you may often go somewhere for a long weekend.

As I said, people are very open, friendly and helpful. You can always ask for the way, you can also ask the bus driver and I was helped a lot while looking for a new accommodation.