

Exchange Report

Escola de Administração da Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV-EAESP)

Sao Paulo, Brazil

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Master in International Management

Having completed my exchange semester in Sao Paulo, Brazil I can confidently say that I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I would warmly recommend overlooking any possible preconceptions or even fears you may have about Brazil and utilize the amazing opportunity that a study period abroad can offer. You will have the chance to travel and see things in the future, but it's much more difficult to really live in a place for a longer period of time.

1. Preparation

I received a letter from FGV a few months before my departure. If you are feeling nervous, don't hesitate to contact the FGV's international office as they are usually quite good at responding to emails and they will give you any information you may have missed. It is very common to ask for help in the Brazilian culture, so there is usually no harm in making sure. Once you have received the letter of acceptance from FGV, you can start with the visa application process. I would recommend starting the process in good time, because some of the documents must be ordered and most importantly, you usually hear many horror stories about students who had to go through the entire process again because of little formality mistakes. Me personally, I had no problems at all with my visa, having applied for it in the embassy in Munich, which apparently seems much more relaxed (I could even hand in all documents by letter).

The international office was extremely helpful for the entire duration of my exchange. Handling the interactions between the Federal Police visit and forms, which needed to be sorted out. We were given a welcome package and from the day I landed, I was made to feel welcome by the entire office. The communication between the office and students was top notch, we were also kept in the loop whether it be the entire change of a course or an extension of a deadline. The organization of the International Office was one of the many highlights during my exchange to FGV.

2. Studies

The orientation session was basically two info sessions where the same information that we had received in the emails was presented to us about choosing and dropping courses in addition to basic information about the city and the security precautions we should take into consideration. The orientation sessions didn't really provide much valuable information, but it was a good opportunity to get to know fellow exchange students and start the Federal Police registration process. All exchange students are required to officially register their visa at the Federal Police. Most of the paperwork is handled by the international office at FGV, but students have to take official copies of their documents, specific sized passport photos and present themselves at the Federal Police Headquarters. This is not a difficult procedure and you will be informed about how to proceed during the orientation week.

Every semester is divided into two modules, and there are around six courses in both modules offered in English and for Master students. Though FGV uses a different system, all Master courses were 6 ECTS. As the courses have a relatively low work load, some exchange student tried to take all of their courses in one module which would have left more time for travelling. This was not possible unfortunately. All courses had a mandatory attendance rate of 80%, which meant that you could skip 2 lectures during the module. The attendance checking depends heavily on the professor, meaning that some professors religiously check attendance (even after short breaks) and others don't check at all.

Information about the courses offered is not published until just before the semester starts and is not something that should be worried about in advance. The students are well informed about when they have to choose their courses and about the separate period after each module has started when they can be altered. I did not hear of any students that were unable to attend a course that they wanted to, especially if it was organized in English. The majority of Master courses had small group sizes and only a few local students that were completing a MBA degree alongside working. This made making local friends via the university more difficult.

All of the courses offered to us were part of the Management and International Business Program, master courses are also offered in Portuguese and exchange students are welcome to attend them also.

3. Social

Living in Sao Paulo and travelling in Brazil was surprisingly expensive. This is due to the sheer size of Sao Paulo and the political situation in Brazil. Inflation, the political instability and general lack of managerial organization in the country has led to the drastic increase in the cost of living during the past few years. Everything seems to be heavily taxed, and even food bought in the supermarket is close to the European price levels. Rent is high, hostels are rarely that cheap and flight tickets can be surprisingly expensive. This should not be feared but be taken into consideration when planning an exchange in Brazil.

Looking for an apartment can feel overwhelming, but try and resist the urge to take the first apartment that seems acceptable. Often any apartment advertised in English are overpriced and not necessarily that nice. FGV has a facebook group for students that are looking for new roommates; something that we found out about after the semester had started. If it is not mentioned in the welcome emails you receive from the international office, I would recommend asking them for the link. This would be a great way of meeting local students and not overpaying. Another possibility is to book an apartment via Airbnb for the first few weeks. Many exchange students ended up staying the whole semester in a room booked via Airbnb and were completely satisfied. You should be prepared to pay from around 1300 to 2000 reais per month for a room in a shared apartment in the Bela Vista/Jardims/Vila Madelena districts which are the most popular amongst exchange students.

4. All in all

I fully recommend choosing Brazil as your exchange destination, you will be taken care of at FGV, you will learn a lot about a new culture and hopefully you will leave with some basic Portuguese. Travel to the North to see sand dunes and lagoons, travel to the south to see Waterfalls, which are on the edge of the Argentinian and Paraguayan borders. Learn many new things about the country and culture in Brazil and find out the difference between Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries on the continent of South America.