

Winter semester 2022/23

## São Paulo, Brazil

### Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo da Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV-EAESP)

Thomas Kern (M.Sc. Management & Technology)

#### **Application Process**

The first step before your trip is probably the most important one, deciding for your desired partner university. In my case, for my choice of São Paulo I considered factors like cultural experience, language requirements, the quality of the school, course offering and living costs in the given country. I already participated in an exchange in Portugal in my Bachelors that had an immense impact on me. I grew personally as well as academically and in order to gain a similar impact I tried to “challenge” myself by aiming for an experience outside of Europe. Brazil sparked my interest since I made some very good Brazilian friends during my first exchange and it seemed like their country allows it for foreigners to be easily immersed in its culture. Hereby it came in handy that in Brazil the official language is Portuguese, which I already had some basic knowledge of. At the same time the courses, at least at the FGV in São Paulo, were partly offered in English. Another significant criterium for me was the ranking of the university. The FGV-EAESP, just like the TUM-SOM, was awarded with the Triple-Crown accreditation, a widely recognized university standard. Since the courses this school offered seemed interesting as well, I finally decided to apply for it. On a side note, I also considered the living costs in the country of choice, which are comparatively low in Brazil.

The international office supports in the decision making process, on their website they provide an overview of all partner universities, statistics on how likely it is to get into them, as well as the given language requirements.

Once the decision is made you need to prepare your application documents. If you are doing ERASMUS or TUM-Exchange the international office is carrying out the application and preliminary communication for you. Again on their web-site, the TUM-SOMex provides a list with all the documents they require.

It is wise that you make up your mind as early as possible, as for many schools it is mandatory to provide a proof of language proficiency (usually a DAAD certificate). If you are new to the language it may take some time to reach the required level that needs to be proven at the time (!) of the application.

#### **Organizational Preparations**

##### *Visa*

As soon as you good your spot, the preparation phase begins. To stay a longer time in Brazil a Visa is necessary. The Brazilian consulate demands a range of different documents, so planning ahead may be useful. Receiving your original international birth certificate with apostille can take up to three weeks and costs around 30€. The same time span is to be expected for the police clearance certificate, which is a 15€ payment. I decided for an international health insurance by PROTRIP-WORLD, which is cheaper compared to the main

insurance providers, while seemingly providing the same services. However, I never needed to claim their services during my trip. Important: You also already need a copy of your flight ticket to and back from Brazil, so knowing your preferred time frame is essential. Being early with booking is beneficial anyway, as this saves you costs for the quite expensive flights.

### *Scholarships*

The FGV is a private university, one of the best in South America. Study fees are high, but as a TUM-SOMex exchange student they are free of charge. Living costs in Brazil are normally quite low, still a scholarship may be a valuable option for financing support. BAYLAT offers scholarships for students studying in Bavaria that wish to participate in an exchange in South and Central America. Unfortunately, during my application, they did not offer any scholarships due to the Covid situation. Another option may be the DAAD that provides a large database of scholarships of all kinds. If your stay is dependent on external financing the ERASMUS program may be a better option for you as they guarantee financial support.

### *Courses*

Some weeks before your actual stay begins, the host university will ask you to apply for your desired courses. Your coordinator will send you a catalogue of all the available courses for you to make up your mind. The distribution is done on a first-come first-serve basis, so being early pays off. However, later on, still the possibility exists to make changes. You can register your courses in a Learning Agreement and send it to the international office to secure the credits transfer after your stay. As a MMT student, if you desire a credit transfer in your specialization, you have to find a similar subject in your home-program and clarify with the respective chair if the host-course may be eligible. TUM SOMex provides a list with courses that were (and were not) approved in the past. In my case, I am transferring the credits as electives, as the FGV did not offer suitable courses for my specialties. To be approved as an elective, courses must solely be roughly related to your management or technology area to be eligible.

## **Preparation for Everyday-Life**

### *Language*

Brazil is a country which is very welcoming to foreigners, however some preparations may serve useful to make the everyday life easier once you arrive. First of all, I highly recommend to improve your Portuguese skills, even if it is not required by your host university. In everyday life only very few people speak English, which can make simple things like shopping in the supermarket or riding a bus extremely difficult. The TUM offers free language courses, applying early is important since seats are limited. However, it may be wise to diversify your learning efforts since between the decision process and the actual stay there is usually no more time than for taking part in two courses. Upon my arrival I had the A2.1 level which was far from sufficient. There are several language courses that partnered with the FGV, but they were all pretty expensive. Instead I can highly recommend language applications like Anki or Tandem. Anki is an app that provides prefabricated vocabulary sets. Tandem connects you with other language learners that are eager to help you with your issues. A positive side effect is that you can already make friends at your destination. I texted with several people from São Paulo beforehand who I met there later on. Lastly, watching YouTube videos or dubbing Netflix shows with Portuguese gives you a good feel for the language. The most helpful channel for me was "Speaking Brazilian Language School".

### *Vaccines*

Second, get your vaccines. If you are planning to do trips around the country you will encounter areas with increased exposure of certain diseases. Consult a travel doctor on your plans, and he or she will help you. I got shots for yellow fever, Hepatitis A and B. Some vaccines require repeating shots, between my first and second Hepatitis B shot lay 6 months! Note that commonly insurances cover the costs almost entirely.

### *Accommodation*

Next, plan your accommodation. Most students try to fix up their housing from home, before they arrive. The host university sends some housing options, however they are usually limited. Other options are local real estate providers or Airbnb and Hostels. The downside of booking from the distance is that those options are more expensive and there exists no possibility to visit the desired place before. This increases the risk to be scammed, however during my time I encountered no one who was affected by this. Me personally, I booked an Airbnb for three weeks and tried to search a flat locally in this time. Airbnb in São Paulo is comparatively cheap, but booking a private flat is usually way cheaper.

### *Other*

Payment in Brazil is almost entirely done by debit or credit card. Even most street vendors provide the option to pay with card. Exchanging or withdrawing money therefore is hardly necessary. So, in most cases, it is sufficient to continue using your current card. I used my N26 card and had no problems in that aspect. Most friends that visited me as well just used their current card without problem.

Consider getting an international SIM card before you arrive. I got a prepaid one with 2GB of data for around 15€. This way you can guarantee that your trip from the airport to your initial destination runs smoothly and you are set for the following days as well, before you get a local SIM.

Also, apply for an CPF, the Brazilian social security number. This can be already done from Germany and takes around a week to receive. You simply need to send an E-Mail to the Brazilian consulate and they will tell you what documents they require. The CPF is needed for buying certain goods and some landlords may even demand it before renting an apartment. Lastly, be aware that Brazil uses slightly different sockets and plugs, buying a fitting adapter is usually much cheaper online than at the airport.

### **Arriving**

There is no real train connection from the airport to the inner city, so Uber and Taxi are your main options, with Uber generally being cheaper and safer. If you do not have an international SIM card you can take advantage of the free hour of internet at the airport to call one. Once you settled down, you can buy a cheap local SIM card. The most common providers are Vivo and Claro. If you want to buy the SIM card in an official store you already need a CPF, street vendors usually do not require one.

For my first place to stay I booked an Airbnb shared with two Brazilians. This made my start there easier since they could help me out with all my questions. The FGV supports you in this acclimatization process as well. The school will send you several documents beforehand with tips for living in the city and they organize several welcoming events where they provide even more input. These sessions are also perfect to meet your first friends. If you have any further

questions there will be a coordinator designated just for exchange students that is happy to help anytime.

After your arrival you have to register your stay at the federal police to get your residence permit, the RNM. This has to happen within 90 days, the FGV will let you know in time what you have to do. I also recommend to issue a notarized copy of your passport at a so called Cartório. The copy is considered an official document and can be used as a replacement for the passport. You can also apply for a public transport card which reduces the fares by half. Be aware that this takes time, since you need your RNM before you can apply (which I received after 2 months). Most of my study colleagues preferred to commute with Uber entirely.

## **University**

While many universities in Brazil are following the European public model, the FGV as a private university differs quite a lot. First, note that the semester times diverge. I undertook my exchange during the German winter semester, which corresponds to the Brazilian summer semester, that starts around July/August. At this time usually exams at the TUM take place. I missed the first two weeks at the FGV because of that, which made the start of my stay in Brazil a bit more complicated. Most classes have mandatory attendance, where you are not allowed to miss more than 25% of classes if you want to pass the course. However, most professors are quite loose in keeping track on who attends courses and who does not. Classes at FGV are generally much smaller, seats are limited to around 20-40. This enables a much more personal atmosphere in the class room. Also, most courses are not graded by a final exam, but by a combination of assignments and presentations throughout the semester. This spreads out the workload, however it also means you have to stay on track during the semester. The semester is split into two so called *modulos*, all courses take place within one *modulo* and usually account for 6 ECTS. I participated in a total of four courses, two in the first and two in the second *modulo*. With "Research Design" I hoped to gain practical skills on how to conduct my upcoming master thesis. Unfortunately the course was from a more theoretical nature, however the professor was extremely engaging. "Management of Technology and Innovation" sounded interesting to me, however the structure of the course did not suit me well, which made it hard to follow at times. In "Agile Project Management" the professor applied a quite unique teaching approach with games and practical lessons, which gave fresh impulses. Lastly, "International Economics for Emerging Markets" provided insight in the functionality of economies of the region, which was extremely interesting and as a bonus, the professor of the course was really nice as well. In total, the workload seemed smaller than compared to the TUM, at least in my case, and the grading seemed to be fair. The university itself was well equipped, there are two libraries, a canteen, modern classrooms as well as sport facilities. The English taught classes usually consisted of around one quarter Brazilian students and three quarters foreign students, so if you want to meet locals, consider taking Brazilian taught courses. Classes were offered in a hybrid format, however the professors usually focused on the students that were present in person.

## **Living in São Paulo**

### *Culture*

Brazil is a wonderful country with wonderful people, everyone is extremely open and easy going. It is not uncommon that immediately after you met a person they invite you to go out

with them and it does not take long until they will introduce you to their family and friends. This facilitates life as a foreigner extremely. Overall, living in Brazil has a somewhat loose feeling to it. Plans seem to be made in the moment and people appear rarely stressed, although they work a lot and suffer large inequalities. It is not uncommon to see Brazilian students work remotely during a lecture. At this point I advise you not to point out problems you perceive in the Brazilian society. Brazilians love to complain about the state of their politics, however when a foreigner does so they may become irritated. One reason for this is, that foreigners, especially from the western world, are responsible for many of the issues Brazil faces the consequences of today (colonization, slavery, etc.). On the other hand if you talk about the aspects you love about Brazil it will be extremely easy to make friends. And in my opinion there were endless aspects to love about Brazil.

### *City*

São Paulo in its appearance is probably not the most beautiful city. It consists of a sea of concrete buildings with rarely any green in between. Especially in the old city center buildings are run down and streets are not particularly clean. However, while it may not be an appealing destination to visit, it is an amazing city to live. São Paulo is a melting pot of people from all over Brazil as well as the world. As a result the culture offering is enormous. The city seems to have an endless supply of diverse restaurants, bars, clubs, cinemas and theaters. At any time of the day or night you can find something interesting to do in São Paulo. And while the city may appear massive, most important places still can be visited within a 30 mins car / bus ride.

### *Living*

The diversity of São Paulo also allows you to find a place to live that suits your wishes. If you are interested in Samba Bixiga is a good option. Consolação is perfect to meet other students and foreigners. Bela Vista is close to the main financial district and the university. Pinheiros and Vila Madalena are more alternative and artsy, although also more expensive. If you want something in between Santa Cecilia may be a good choice. Be aware that you should avoid some areas for safety reasons such as Santa Ifigenia or Sé. I found my place via a facebook group in a few days, my study colleagues using official sites usually took longer.

### *Living Costs*

Where you stay will also determine your costs of living, which can vary extremely. I stayed in a small shared apartment close to the old city center which costed me around 200€ per month. However, many students who lived in more residential neighborhoods like Pinheiros paid prices similar to the ones in Munich. The same holds true for food. If you live close to the old center it is usually quite cheap. There was one time we paid 6€ for a total of three persons, each of us having a dish, caipirinha and café! Whereas when you go to restaurants and bars in more hip neighborhoods like Vila Madalena you can expect to not even get one drink for 6€. Public transport is quite cheap (less than 1€ for a ticket that takes you through the whole city), however most foreigners use Uber which is also comparatively cheap (3-5€ for an average distance). Supermarkets on the other hand are quite expensive with prices similar to Germany.

### *Safety*

One topic you will not get around when moving to Brazil is safety. Before I even entered the country I was told countless dangerous stories that supposedly have taken place there. This is very sad because in my opinion it conveys a distorted image of the country. Brazil is a country

of extremes, consequently there may be some aspects that make living in certain areas more dangerous. However, if you stick to a certain set of rules nothing should happen to you. First of all there are some areas you should avoid completely, especially in the night, just like in most giant cities around the world. Parts of Santa Ifigenia for example, the FGV however will give you a complete update. Also, when you go out at night you should always call an Uber when returning back home. Moreover, try to avoid to show objects of value. Do not carry expensive watches, store your notebook in a backpack, and maybe consider to wear a more basic wardrobe. Lastly, it may be wise to not keep too much money on your card. Have a back-up account and store only the amount of cash on your card you do not mind to lose. In case you do get in a robbery, do not fight, just hand over your money and nothing else should happen. These are solely recommendations and they usually only count for a few dangerous neighborhoods in the city. You will see many Brazilians who do not follow these guidelines at all. Many neighborhoods are completely safe. It is wise to be careful, but at the same time it makes me sad there is such an emphasize on this topic when it comes to Brazil. I lived in an area, Republica, which was declared by the FGV as very unsafe. However, once you live there and meet local people you will realize that everyone is friendly (considering you are friendly as well) and as long as you stick to the rules nothing will happen. If this is too risky for you just pick one of the neighborhoods deemed safe and you will have a wonderful time.

### *Traveling*

Brazil is an enormous country and if you want to get to know its appeal in its entirety you have to travel. The South is European influenced whereas the north has many roots in Africa. Rio de Janeiro is definitely something you cannot miss, as it resembles the essence of what we as foreigners picture when we think of Brazil. A trip along the coastline from São Paulo to Rio is very worthwhile, there are many beautiful beaches and islands. The most common mean of travel is the bus. They are comparatively cheap and their quality exceeds the ones in Europe by far. If you book an option like "leito" or "semi-leito" you get bedlike seats, which allow for a smooth long distance ride in the night. Flights are more expensive, but unavoidable if you want to visit the whole country. Don't miss out on the food, while it may not seem so at the beginning, Brazil has an extremely diverse cuisine. Especially the north-east and the Amazon are areas famous for their food.

For me Brazil and São Paulo was the perfect choice. I wanted to get to know as much as possible of the Brazilian culture, while also getting the feeling of living in a mega-city. The university gave me interesting impulses and I made some very good friends. The city never sleeps, if this is what you are searching for, São Paulo is the place to be.