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FGV- EAESP in São Paulo



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University & Courses

FGV-EAESP is a small business school, located in the heart of São Paulo, just around the corner from vibrant Avenida Paulista. Besides business, there is an economics and a law department. Seeing the rather unimpressive building that doesn't look any different than all the others around, you wouldn't think that the school is one of the most prestigious business schools in Latin America and even considered the best one in Brazil. Apparently, most of the students come from extremely rich families, but they don't seem posh or anything, no worries. ;) Of course, you see the difference between the school area (you need your student ID to enter) which is a very safe and joyful place and the streets around where there are always homeless people or very poor street vendors.

The school has a nice outside area where you can spend the breaks between classes and always meet one of the other exchange students. The facilities inside are not very modern, but completely fine. On the first floor, there is a small canteen as well as some couches, a pool table and a console where people play FIFA. In addition, there is an ATM and a printing service (1st floor as well) and two smaller cafés on the fifth and seventh floor. One thing I didn't like about FGV was the library. The desks are super small and most of the rooms are quite dark with few windows. If you are a master student, I can highly recommend going up to the third floor of the library building – this floor is only for graduate students (identification through your student ID again) and much nicer than the other ones. There are also small, separate study rooms which are very practical for group work.

One last thing you should know about FGV so that you are not confused: The school has two entrances, one on Avenida Nove de Julho and one on Rua Itapeva. It doesn't matter which one you use, but with the Nove de Julho one you enter on the ground floor and with the Itapeva one on the seventh floor as São Paulo is very hilly!



FGV from Rua Itapeva entrance

In my experience, the academic level and thus the workload at FGV are much lower than at the University of Cologne. Of course, it also depends on the course, e.g. the advanced finance courses seemed to be quite challenging. Besides, I had the impression that the Brazilian students were not that ambitious. When it came to group presentations or reports they were often happy with results I would never hand in at home. That might be because almost all graduate students already work (and we are talking > 25 hours/week) and I've heard that work experience is more important for future employers in Brazil than the grades.

The relationship between professors and students is much closer than in Germany. Some professors even introduce themselves by their first name and there is always some chit chat with the professor. All of my professors spoke English very well.

The number of participants in my courses was always around 20 and you can expect classes to be more interactive than in Germany. Again, it depends on the professor (there was also the typical teacher-centered presentation style), but there is no course that has only an exam and no other types of examination like a paper or a presentation. In some courses, even the oral participation counted.

International Economics for Emerging Markets – Professor: Julia von Maltzan Pacheco

This course was my favorite one because it was the first economics course during my studies that was practical and really helped me understand what is going on in the world. We discussed real country cases and the professor made us think about the connection between different macroeconomic factors and the consequences of potential economic policies. The workload was higher than in my other courses, but still totally manageable.

Consumer Behavior and Research – Professor: Mauricio Morgado

Even if the professor is very enthusiastic and probably quite knowledgeable in his field, you could compare the level of the course with the very first marketing class during the bachelor at the University of Cologne. If you want a professor that is super chill and a course that is not challenging at all, this one is the right choice for you. For me, it was annoying as I didn't learn anything.

Brazilian Business Laws – Professor: Ligia Maura Costa

This course was very helpful to learn more about the political and legal situation in Brazil. It covered topics like the tax system or labor law and what types of companies there are in Brazil. I didn't like the professor that much because her presentation was lacking some structure, but I think, there were also people that liked her teaching style. The workload was fine (a group paper and an individual paper both of which I didn't start before the two last weeks of the semester).

Development & Sustainability – Professor: Renato Orsato

I had been really looking forward to this course before I came to Brazil because sustainability is a matter truly dear to my heart and I would love to combine it with my interest in business. Unfortunately, this course was not only about sustainable strategies (e.g. how to be competitive

AND sustainable, how to get the customers involved etc.), but also a lot about strategy in general. In addition, there was a focus on digital businesses, apparently because this is the professor's second research focus. Don't misunderstand me, the papers we had to read were ok, but if I choose a course about sustainability, I expect to learn a lot about that. Furthermore, the professor was kind of arrogant and didn't seem very competent in the area of sustainability. So the bottom line is: Great topic, bad class.

Life in São Paulo and Brazil

Safety

The first thing you'll probably hear from friends and family telling them that you will go to Brazil is that they worry about your safety. I've been to Brazil twice now (for the semester abroad and for a backpacking trip the year before) and I can assure you, it is much more civilized than people in Germany think (especially the ones that have never been to Latin America ;)). The second point is that São Paulo, and the South of Brazil in general, is much safer than other regions. Personally, I've experienced a big difference between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo – most of the crimes that happened to my friends (stolen phones, bags etc.) happened in Rio, even if they only spent a couple of days there and the rest of the semester in São Paulo. Of course, you need to be careful and can't act the same way as in Germany. That means, you should always pay attention to your surroundings, keep your valuables close to you and you should always walk in a group of people in dodgy areas or at night.

Transportation

That brings me to the next point: how to get around in São Paulo. It is no problem to take the metro or the bus, however, most of the exchange students, including me, used Uber all the time. Uber is very cheap in Brazil, especially when you share it with a group of people, and you are extremely flexible as it takes only a couple of minutes until the driver arrives no matter where you are. If you worry about safety, it is supposed to be safer than the classic taxis and I have never heard of any incident regarding an Uber ride. To get to Uni, most people walked as the majority lived close enough (from 2 up to 20 minutes by foot).

Weather

The good weather might be one of the reasons why you applied for a semester abroad in Brazil. And if that's the case, you were right – you can go to the beach in December, it never gets really cold all year long and of course it is way sunnier than in Germany. BUT: If you go on exchange during the fall term, bring warm clothes!!! The semester starts quite early in August and that's winter in Brazil. Like I said, it never gets really cold (I think, the minimum was 17° Celsius), but the apartments don't have heating, the windows are very thin and so are the blankets. Also in the evening or when there's no sun during the day, it can get pretty cold if your warmest jacket is a jeans jacket (like it was for me). I strongly advise you to bring enough sweaters, long pants, a light coat and maybe even a pair of boots. Of course, it sucks that you don't need these things anymore after one month or one and a half, but otherwise you will really suffer at the beginning (among the people I know, literally everybody got sick, guys as well).

The City

Obviously, you should only consider an exchange semester in São Paulo if you like big cities, lots of people and don't need calmness or being close to nature to be happy. However, São Paulo was less busy than I expected. Of course, Avenida Paulista is always crowded, but you only need to walk a couple of blocks into the surrounding neighborhoods and the streets get smaller and calmer. The architecture in São Paulo is horrible in my opinion, I really can't say that it is a beautiful city, but it has an amazing vibe. There are so many different people (from rich to poor, black to white, gay to hetero, ordinary to crazy...) and there is an endless offer of cultural events, parties, concerts and of course restaurants. You should try to check out different neighborhoods (Vila Madalena, Pinheiros, Jardins...) because there is much more than just the traditional Lanchonete (very simple restaurants, similar to a big "Imbissbude" in Germany) or the stores of the big fashion labels.



A café in Jardins

Prices

The prices for food and rent are higher than in Cologne, but still affordable. The rent was between 400-500€/month for most of the exchange students and a main dish in a good restaurant is about 15€. If it is just for lunch or if you don't care about the restaurant at all, you can eat in a Lanchonete for 5€. The prices for food in the supermarket highly depend on what you want. Fruits, Vegetables, meat and eggs are quite cheap whereas cheese or wine are very

expensive. Things that are way more expensive than in Germany are toiletries, electronic devices and clothes (and for the latter the quality is much worse).

Preparation of the Semester Abroad

Visa

For a semester abroad in Brazil you need a student visa. You can only apply for this visa in person (for me, it was at the Brazilian consulate in Frankfurt) and they require all kind of documents. Getting these documents takes time, effort and money. So, you shouldn't underestimate the process and start the preparation early enough. When the visa is approved you need to go to the consulate/embassy again to pick it up, they don't send it by post. During your first weeks in Brazil, you need to go to the Federal Police where they finally confirm your stay. But don't worry about that before you get to São Paulo. The advisors from the international office will explain everything during the orientation week and even if you miss that, you can always go to their office and they will help you.

Accommodation

It was very easy to find a room in São Paulo and as I said, most of the exchange students even lived within walking distance from the University. I guess, most people found their place via Facebook (groups), but there is also a website called "easyquarto" that is similar to "wg-gesucht". A lot of the exchange students searched for a flat when they were still at home, but it will only take you a couple of days (for me, it was 3 days) to find something on the spot as well. I only have one very important tip for you: Negotiate about the rent!!! I know, this is super weird for Germans, but believe me, for Brazilians it is totally normal and sometimes, they don't even argue with you when you suggest a lower amount. Another tip: Don't be too modest to look for a building with a pool. A lot of apartment buildings have one on the roof and as there are almost no parks in São Paulo (except Ibirapuera), it is a blessing to have a pool in summer.

Courses

Regarding the selection of courses, the advisors from the international office will send you a couple of e-mails prior to the beginning of the semester abroad and explain where you can find information about the courses, how your selection process works and what are the deadlines and important dates. So just check your inbox on a regular basis. ;) As you might have noticed, these advisors are ready to help and I can recommend paying a visit to them shortly after you arrived, even if Uni hasn't started yet. Like this, you get to know the school building, they will give you your student ID, your personal WIFI password etc.

Conclusion

As I wanted to put a lot of practical tips in this report, I'm not sure if I made the following point clear: The exchange in Brazil was one of the best experiences in my life! I met great people from all over the world, saw incredible places (telling about all the trips I did would have been too much ;)) and I just love the atmosphere in São Paulo and the Brazilian way of life!