

Exchange in Colombia, Armenia

I was lucky to receive a „last minute“ space for Colombia and I was glad because Colombia would have been my next travel destination anyway.

When I applied, I already expected it not to be easy because Latin American countries are always a bit different from western countries. So I just booked my flight in February and hoped everything would fit into the two months I planned to stay in Colombia. About 4 weeks before my departure I still haven't had any message from the host country, so I panicked a little and ask AMSA Austria what I should do. They sent a message to Colombia and after that I finally received my invitation letter. I got the exact time I wanted (27.09.2017-25.08.2017) and was going to do the internship in Gynaecology/Obstetrics in a town called Armenia in the Quindío Coffee Region.

I arrived in Bogotá 4 days before my starting day, so I spent 2 days in Bogotá, which I really didn't like that much, and went to Armenia on Saturday. My contact person told me it was fine to come the weekend before, so I expected my host family already had time to receive me. I was wrong. Since I took the night bus from Bogotá to Armenia (7h) and arrived too early, no one was there to pick me up. It was 5am and I was really tired.

At about 7am (after 2 hours waiting and drinking about 4 coffees) I was picked up by parents who weren't even my host family. They told me that I could spend the weekend at their finca (Coffee Farm) and on Monday I would be meeting my real host family. I was glad because they seemed really nice and I was looking forward to their finca.

When we arrived there, I loved that place immediately. I slept for a few hours and when I got up, I met the whole family. I got into a family reunion and I met all the sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents and so on. I also met the parents daughter Lucy who also studied medicine and was in the IFMSA of Colombia. She was the one who suggested I stayed with them for the weekend.

After two long and enjoyable days family Ramirez asked me if I would like to stay with them during my internship and I was really glad they wanted me to stay. I couldn't have been more lucky to find a family like them.

On Monday the father brought Lucy and me to the hospital where I was to meet the other interns and my Tutor. They all seemed really nice and the gynaecologist who was to tutor me took me to an emergency C-Section immediately. I was thrilled and happy to have chosen Colombia. The rest of the week passed quickly and I learned a lot. I assisted many C-sections, witnessed births and had little exams everyday. Everyone was really nice: the doctors were interested in everything about Austria, the nurses always invited me for coffee, the interns took me for lunch. I didn't see my contact person the whole week, I only saw my host sister in the morning and the other exchange students only when we met up for lunch or after the hospital to go to the mall.

On the weekend we organised trips for ourselves because there wasn't any social program at all. We went to Salento, Filandia, Medellín, Guatapé and so on.

The weeks also stayed quite the same. In my second week I was taught to attend births alone and I loved it. The doctors teach students really a lot there. I always followed the other four students around who were in their fifth year. In Colombia they start going regularly to the hospital in their second semester. So I think they learn more than we do in Europe.

Also the hospital was quite nice. I expected it far worse. The OR has European standard and seems to have the same hygiene standards as we are used to. The rest of the hospital is a bit old. For example the beds, the equipment and what I really hated was the disinfect liquid they used (it was so sticky).

So to sum it up: I really loved my internship in Colombia. I learned more than in any hospital in Europe. I was never afraid to go out alone and was never robbed. If you don't speak Spanish it is really difficult to understand anything (I speak fluent Spanish so I never had a problem). The Colombians are a really nice people and will always help you with anything.

My only suggestion is not to go to Armenia. Any other city in Colombia is better than this one. In the afternoons we were really bored cause there wasn't anything to do besides the mall. There wasn't any social program at all. We were completely left alone (besides the host parents). I didn't find a single Colombian friend in the hospital (besides the adults) and I think that is quite sad, since Colombian people in general are really nice.

And one more thing: We were supposed to get pocket money (about 100€ for 4 weeks). The money comes from the University and our contact person was supposed to get it for us. She didn't. So, in the end, we didn't receive anything and had to sign a sheet to give permission that our host can get the money in our stead. They PROMISED to send us the money once they receive it but I doubt that will ever happen. I feel really cheated even though I don't care about the money.

I hope my report helps you to apply for Colombia, and please don't get me wrong. Go to Colombia, it's one of the most beautiful countries in South America. Just choose a different city.

Greetings,

Astrid

PS: If you have any more questions write me an email: ix3live@hotmail.com