

IAESTE Report

Internship at Anambra Imo River Basin and Rural Development Authority
Owerri, Nigeria

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Introduction

When I first read about an IAESTE internship in Nigeria, I was fascinated by the opportunity to experience a drastically different world and to broaden my mind how life could be beyond my tame and developed country.

The pleasure of my family and friends, however, was rather limited about my purpose to spent three month in Nigeria, esp. regarding the difficult security situation. Nevertheless, I made up my mind to go. And this later turned out to be the very right decision.



Safety

First things first: Safety. Nigeria is an unknown country for most of us. Thinking about Africa, normally, we imagine some stereotypes of African countries. But what we always have in mind is that Africa is a dangerous continent. In fact, Nigeria doesn't really belong to the holiday destination. And even if the situation was rather calm during my time, security was not comparable with the one in Germany.

It is therefore all the more important to mention that all persons around me took all necessary precautions to avoid any unpleasant situations. Security issues were always taken into account, whether it concerned accommodation, transportation or leisure activities. However, it wasn't dominating my daily life.

Personally, I felt safe and secured within the entire stay and I haven't experienced a delicate situation at all.

Arrival

The first steps in an unknown country are always a challenge, especially if it's such a different one. I was really grateful about Prof. Raguel Aguta's assistance as my supervisor. After my arrival at Port Harcourt airport, he picked me up and later he took care about all my arrangements for accommodation, transportation and appointments during the first weeks. All in all, it was a good start in three exiting month.

Accommodation

During my internship I was accommodated at a mid-range hotel in the centre of Owerri that was provided and borne by IAESTE-FUTO. This was, without doubt, a privilege. I enjoyed a level of luxury that was beyond the living standard of the Nigerian majority, air conditioning, fridge, room service and satellite TV, for instance. But more important was the fact that this place offered me an appropriate level of security.

Work

Two weeks after my arrival I started working at the Anambra Imo River Basin Development Authority (AIRBDA), a governmental institution with the objective of developing and managing water resources for the region. I worked at the mechanical workshop in a team of about thirty mechanics and engineers.



The major tasks were to maintain all the project equipment, for instance, the replacement of old clutches of tractors or the reparation of defect generators, bulldozer, wheel loader, etc.

Certainly, technical equipping was not the same as in Germany. Everything was generally older and suffered from limited financial recourses. The lack of steady power and water supply made work even more challenging. But these difficult conditions often led to unconventional and sometimes surprisingly efficient solutions.



Generally, the workload fluctuated depending on the current order situation. In my spare time I tried to learn more about the equipment and took a closer look into the working practices. Here, the engineers were always willing to answer any questions and tried to teach me useful facts.

Apart from the work at the workshop, my boss ED Eng. Uche was keen to give me an insight into the different

projects, whether in some private lectures or with industrial trips. So it was planned to visit local projects and industrial enterprises, such as water schemes, bore holes, palm oil or rice mills. In the end, unfortunately, not all of them could be realised with respect of my security.

Moreover, I spent my time with learning more about the culture and how life in Nigeria really looks like. I loved the long discussions with the staff members about Nigeria and Germany. We discovered small and huge cultural differences and I got a picture about the problems the people are dealing with every day. Even more interesting was the „real live“ experience. My supervisors and administrators were flexible with their time and understood my desire to get as much intercultural experiences as possible.

This allowed me to attend a bush meat hunt, where I caught my own meat (just armed with a club), to join a traditional funeral or to make trips to Benin and Warri.

The atmosphere at work was very friendly and communicative. My supervisor tried always to meet my individual desires. A personal driver was provided for my daily commute to work.



Leisure time

Although Owerri is with approximately 400.000 inhabitants quite a big city, student parties, relaxing barbeque evenings in parks or ordinary tourist attractions are sought in vain. It is the normal life, the countless common and the everyday things that makes this city so exiting.



My faithful friend Emmanuel from FUTO guided me to exactly these things. As the IEASTE-LC chairman, he organised leisure activities together with some friends for almost every weekend. We went to the church to watch an incredible energetic mess and to experience the deep faith of the people. We went swimming, to markets or to bars. Or we just spent some time home cooking, playing a PlayStation soccer tournament, etc. It was always fun. The highlight was a long weekend trip to Benin City and Warri. Emmanuel did a great job and I am really thankful to him. He made it possible to have an exciting time in Nigeria.

The people

From the very first beginning I was received with an incredibly level of friendliness. Whether at FUTO, at work or in my leisure time, I always met open-minded, hospitable and curious people, who were always happy to hear some stories about Germany and Europe.

Especially my health and the quality of my daily lunch caused their concern. Things I had to become accustomed to was the different understanding of

punctuality as well as the very important rule, never to use the left hand to hand over anything or to greet someone.

A bit irritating were the endless requests for some gifts or money. Foreigners and in particular white persons are automatically thought to be rich, who should be willing to spend some dollars – whether one is a student, who scraped the last cents together to make the flight to Africa possible, or not.

Food

Although my hotel offered some “international” dishes, in order to save (FUTO’s)



money and bring variety in my diet there was no way around Nigerian food. So I ventured to the traditional dishes and discovered garri, moimoi, eba, jollof, meat pie and many more. It was usually quite spicy, but I quickly got used of it and eventually, I really liked it.

The food at the workshop was provided by market women. They came every day and sold a decent Nigerian meal for little money, consisting of rice and stew with a little meat, beans or plantain.

I can only advice to try every Nigerian meal at least once. It’s worth it. But, one should always have his diarrhoea medicine at hand.

Health

In order to save any trouble with (tropical) diseases I arranged all recommend vaccinations before my departure. Thus, the biggest threats to my health remained into road accidents and those diseases, for which no fully protection was achievable. This included malaria and diarrhoea. As precaution, I took antimalaria drugs, used a mosquito net, wore long sleeves in the evenings and was also careful with my food. Even though, in the end, I suffered from both. Fortunately, due to adequate medical care, locally treatment was successful without any complications.



Conclusion

Sure, a country that is so different from someone’s own requires a certain amount of tolerance, adaptability and perhaps a little spirit of adventure. If someone meets these requirements, a great experience is possible, that broadens the mind a big piece according to cultural understanding.

Without IAESTE I would never have selected Nigeria for an internship.

Retrospective, I am happy I did. Thanks to IEASTE and especially to Prof. Aguta, to enable me this opportunity!