



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	The Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1 2019
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Politics, Anthropology

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
IRI-9602-Brazilian Foreign Policy	English	POLS 200	4
LET 1280- Level 1 Portuguese	Portuguese and English		
Soc 9174- Brazilian Cultural Debates	English	ANTH 200	4
Soc9175- Political Sociology- Brazil	English	POLS200	4

Any comments about these papers?

Both my sociology papers and my International relations paper were really enjoyable, though the at beginning of the semester studying the history of Brazil from 3 different papers was a bit much. I was told by a Brazilian student that most exchange students end up hating the mandatory Portuguese paper and in my case they were right. The paper focuses a lot more on grammar rules than spoken Portuguese and vocabulary which I think at a beginner level and especially for students who are living day to day in the city is more important.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

The workload in the international relations and Sociology papers was very easy to manage. The courses were generally divided into 2 sections with a mid-semester exam period between the two. The Sociology papers aimed to be more based on discussions, presentations and debates on topics based on readings and there was more of this style of teaching than normal lectures. The international relations paper was a much more traditional lecture format.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

When I arrived in Rio, I stayed at an Airbnb that I had pre-booked for about a month. This was located in the Jardim Botânico district of Rio's South Zone (Zona Sul) It was about a 20 minute walk to PUC every day, however it was quite far removed from the other students and though it may have been possible to stay for longer I chose to find an apartment. The Brother Carioca Facebook group that the university runs for exchange students is a pretty good place to find potential flatmates often from within your exchange group or previous students who were staying a full year. I found my apartment through a friend's roommate who knew of another student who was looking for another roommate. I ended up living in an apartment with 2 French exchange students at Arpoador, between Copacabana and Ipanema beach. Most of the exchange students in my semester lived somewhere along either of these beaches. Transport to uni everyday was pretty straightforward either taking the bus or the metro. Both are really good options especially if you get a Rio-card which you can top up and use on pretty much any public transport.

I opted not to use PUC's homestay program as it ended up being cheaper overall to find my own accommodation. My rent was 1650 reais compared to the homestay rent of 1900 reais. I found most of my fellow exchange students who had signed up for the homestay program generally left to find their own apartments in the first 2 months, mostly due to being able to find cheaper rent but also because they had a bit more freedom with things like bringing guests round.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

I was lucky enough to be selected to receive the Prime Ministers Scholarship for Latin America, which covered the majority of my travel and living costs for the Brazilian part of my exchange. I booked my flights at the end of November 2018 through STA Travel flying from NZ to Brazil and then to the UK and US for my second semester on my scholarship travel allowance. My visa application fee was the biggest cost, as I am a UK citizen which was much more expensive than the NZ citizen application fee. As I'm on exchange for 2 semesters I had to opt for a full year's insurance, again through STA which was around two and a half thousand NZD. I think a shorter period was available and would obviously be cheaper.

I also had my student allowance coming in which I used mostly for groceries and transport and rent in the last few months of my semester.

In terms of prices in Brazil, the NZD is pretty strong compared to the Real and you'll find that you can make your money go a long way.

My rent for my room in a three-person apartment was about 155 NZD per week including power, gas and Wi-Fi. However, I would advise that in an apartment search either finding an exchange student who has been at PUC for a semester already or someone who speaks sufficient Portuguese to avoid any issues with landlords. I was the last person to move into my apartment so I think my roommates had signed any paperwork that was needed but be aware about what sort of paperwork you might have to sign. A general rule for living in Rio is that if you have to pay a bond, you aren't likely to see it back.

Shopping for groceries was also rather cheap but the dining hall at PUC is definitely worth using all the time. For about \$20 NZD you can get 5 meal cards. I often tried to eat one meal a day there

which was a good way to get a pretty balanced diet and cut back on time having to cook. The food is pretty solid and if you're feeling talkative a good way to meet people. In terms of groceries meat, fruit/veg, milk and bread are pretty cheap but unfortunately cheese is just as expensive as it is in NZ. Getting dinner at restaurants is also quite cheap and living along Copacabana and Ipanema there are lots of little burger places and juice bars nearby.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

Initially when I arrived in Brazil, because I was scared of losing my visa card, I brought 2 cash passport cards that I could top up and use in everyday life. However, I lost one of them about a month in and reverted back to using my visa or cash in most situations. I found that using my visa in the supermarket or out at restaurants or shops had a pretty small international transaction fee (only like a few cents) so I wasn't super stressed. However, with withdrawing money from ATMs students need to be careful about having their card info stolen. I pretty much only used one of the ATMs on campus at PUC, which was good because it was a good way to help budget. I considered getting a Brazilian account and this may be something that you may have to do in order to set up a rent payment if that is what your landlord asks for. My roommates and I would do a cash withdrawal and then take money directly to the bank at the beginning of every month. The key issue with this is that often banks require you to provide a CPF identification number which you are unlikely to have until after a visit to the Federal Police which itself is a registration process that can take some time.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

I did have to apply for a visa, the process was a pretty straightforward online application though it may be useful to have someone with some Portuguese proficiency go over your initial application before submitting it because the website has some issues translating some parts correctly. I'd heard that the visa process was quite long however it ended up being really straightforward and quick. I don't think they require an interview step but always worth getting your application in early to make sure it's all good. The lengthiest part of the process was providing an NZ police criminal record check so try request this document early and have it ready for your main application. I'd also check what the processing fees are if you don't hold a NZ passport, I found out that the fees for UK citizens were higher.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

PUC did require me to have insurance and set out guidelines for what my plan should entail, however they did not provide their own insurance plan.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

The International student department ran a couple of events at the beginning of the semester, that were great for getting to know the other exchange students. The best was a trip to a hotel fazenda, which is like a resort out in the countryside. The Brother Carioca student group also organizes quite a few beach days and activities around Rio but as the semester progresses these end up being more infrequent. I think the best way to get involved in extracurricular stuff and meet Brazilian students is to hang out in the Vilas. Each department at the uni has a little house that all the students in that

course can use as a common area and they are seriously underrated. There were only like 4 other exchange students who hung out in my departments vila regularly. I was studying International Relations papers, so I hung out at the IR vila a lot and got to know heaps of people through that. I also joined their basketball team and got to go to a five-day sports tournament with other universities in Rio, which was one of my best experiences of the trip. Plus, a lot of the students at PUC have some English as well so it's a good low-pressure way to practice your Portuguese. The exchange student group is also pretty social usually. My exchange group had a group chat and organised nights out and beach and hiking trips through that. The main thing with both Brazilians and other Exchange students is just kinda inviting yourself along to events or to sports practices. The Brazilians in my course were always letting me know when stuff was happening or if they were going to a party

One warning though would be to pace yourself, it is entirely possible to go out every night of the week to some event or hangout, make sure you get your sleep.

What was the university/ city like?

PUC is a really nice university campus. It's right on the edge of the rainforest so you get a lot of butterflies and monkeys running around campus. It can be a bit of a maze at first. The only downside I really had was that there weren't a lot of great places to study on campus aside from the library which kinda sucks because getting one of the limited outside tables and studying amidst all the green is really nice. Another downside of PUC was the A/C. While you would think that going into a cold classroom after being in 25+ degree heat all the time would be great, you do get cold really quickly and coming in to class pouring with sweat that turns cold is a really great way to get sick. I missed out on doing a lot of travel around Brazil because I ended up getting colds and fevers during the holiday periods. Aside from this PUC is great, the Vilas are a highlight and if you are there during the first semester of the year, you should be around for the Festa Junina carnival they hold on campus. There's also a wide range of food stands just outside the front gate and it's definitely worth trialling all the food on offer, there's a really nice guy who sells frozen cakes most days and they're really good and the best Acai stand is the second one, furthest away from the front gates.

Rio is an amazing city! Going into an exchange there I think most people's biggest concern is their safety. Personally, there were a few times where I didn't feel completely safe and I know quite few people who got mugged or pickpocketed. Ultimately Brazil is like any other major city, it has it's rules and spots to avoid (it just has a few more than normal), don't walk home alone, use Uber to get back from clubs or parties, avoid the favelas, unless you are going hiking or with a group to a baile funk or some volunteer work. I know it's pretty solid student culture in Dunedin but unless you're at a house party don't get hammered, like it's just common sense, getting super drunk in public just puts a target on your back for getting mugged or pickpocketed and removes your ability to keep a good idea of your surroundings. Please don't let this deter you from considering Rio as a place to study, the good things far outweigh the potential bad, you do develop a bit of a sense of what is and isn't safe pretty quickly.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

The main tourist attractions i.e. the beaches, Escaderia Selaron, Jardim Botânico are all definitely worthwhile to check out. Parque Lage is underrated and a really nice spot that isn't super far from the Botanic Gardens, FERIA de Sao Cristovao is a really great place to go to for a night out and if you are around in Festa Junina season it's even better. Try and find some good beaches away from the ones in Zona Sul, Praia de Joatinga out towards Barra is a really great hidden wee spot and try to get out to Niteroi to check out the Modern Art Museum and also for the views from the bridge across.

Another absolute must-see place is Catete Palace, which was the former site of the Brazilian government, it's a colonial era building with the most extravagant decorations that seems almost out of place for the tropical Brazil.

I didn't have much of a chance to travel around the other states of Brazil unfortunately. I have an ongoing trend of getting sick during uni holidays and when a lot of the other exchange students went to Sao Paolo or Salvador or Ilha Grande, I've heard really good things about some of the other places but I think I had a chance to explore some more of

Any tips for future students?

The biggest piece of advice is to get amongst a good group of Brazilian students from PUC, you'll get a much easier time practicing your Portuguese and it's the best way to get invited to things like sports tournaments and parties. Especially during the first few months invite yourself along to things if you hear your classmates or fellow exchange students talking about their plans for the weekend or a trip away. Alternately don't be afraid to do some stuff alone, like I think there's a pressure with the exchange group to always try and involve other people with things but sometimes it's just easier to do stuff by yourself. Note I don't mean going out to parties alone or travelling alone but if you want to go to Parque Lage just go or enjoy a sunset at Arpoador. I think it's good to have those moments of alone time just to absorb the city in another way.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!