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The thirty-five hour flight had taken its toll on me, but now I had almost arrived at my final destination; the city of Ribeirão Preto in southeast Brazil. I really knew almost nothing about where I was going, apart from sneak-peaking at my workplace through Google street view. You see, the amount of information in english about less famous cities here is quite limited.

As I looked through the window while my plane started to descend, I could see the large slum neighbourhoods around the airport, the so called "favelas". Many had warned me before I left about the safety situation in Brazil, so I really hoped I wasn't putting myself in too much danger with this internship. Regardless though, missing out on an opportunity like this because of fear is not really in my nature.

Upon landing, the airplane actually bumped into the ground and went briefly back up in the air again, which was definitely a first for me. The second landing however went much better, and I was looking forward to arrive at my new home to change out of these clothes that I had been wearing for the entire trip. Sure, cozy pants, sneakers and hoodie was a comfortable choice for such long flights, but the Brazilian sun proved unforgiving as soon as I set my foot outside the plane.

To my surprise, four workers from my soon to be employer were already waiting for me at the airport, and among them the chief director. I learned later that a feeling of suspicion had erupted among them upon first impressions, seeing me there with my cap backwards and Adidas sneakers. They had expected someone with a suit and briefcase. In a similar way though, I wondered what on earth the chief director was doing here. Are these all of the employees they have maybe? At this time I did not yet know that SENAI was an enormous company with faculties all over the nation, so being welcomed in this great manner is certainly not something I'll forget.

My roommates and their friends from University of São Paulo

In Brazil, it is common for university students to use their combined income for renting a house together, and I rented a room in such a house. Admittedly, living with seven party-loving students could prove messy at times, but I appreciated getting such deep insights into their daily lives. More crucially, my roommates who would soon become dear friends of mine, taught me how to stay safe. Their tips could be about things like to not keep too much cash in my wallet, to not walk around with my phone visible, and to not wear any shiny jewellery. In addition to this, they allowed to take part in their university life, which opened up many new connections with people in my age, as well as some splendid parties.

The size of SENAI impressed me a lot. As stated, not much information was available to me in english through the internet. But not only is SENAI an engineering consulting firm doing projects within lean manufacturing, 3D-modelling and much more. They also provide free of charge technical training for the local high school students. Even in small villages around the nation where the infrastructure isn't yet ready, SENAI is able to be present through mobile schools in large buses.

Interacting with SENAI students

On my first day at work I received a tour of the company grounds. Walking through the many classrooms where in each a different area of technical expertise was being taught, I wondered what exactly I would be doing during my time here. I quickly learned that my employers have had similar thoughts too, as I was their first international trainee ever. But it turned out that I was going to work with the engineers consultants, helping out as much as possible in their projects. And thank god two of them spoke english.

I received extensive training in different 3D-modelling softwares, and followed along in lean manufacturing projects. The first of which took place in a local mattress factory where our goal was to increase their production with at least fifty percent. These projects often required us to travel to other cities within the state of São Paulo, and for me who definitely had nothing against seeing more of this new land, this was quite an upside.

Eventually I was informed of a request from one of our partner companies, asking if we could provide them with a solution for keeping track of important tools around the factory. My colleagues and I started playing around with different solutions such as bluetooth trackers or near-field sensors. Regardless though, it soon became clear that all solutions would require some custom software to be me. The faculty I was operating from however was specialised solely within metal mechanics, and therefore were low on programmers in its workforce. I decided therefore to trust what I had learned during my bachelor at Chalmers University in Gothenburg, and coded it myself. My confidence in my programming abilities grew substantially by this opportunity, so much so that after returning to Sweden I decided to choose a master program completely focused on software development.

Besides work, I took every opportunity I got to explore my host nation. To name a few of these adventures, I jumped parachute in Foz do Iguaçu, where the world's largest chain of waterfalls lie. I took long walks along the Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, celebrated new years eve in Guarujá and partied for days during carnival in São Paulo. During these trips, the vast network of IAESTE truly showed its worth. Upon travelling to Foz do Iguaçu for example, I didn't have to worry about booking a hotel since a Brazilian member let me stay at his place for free. And during all trips, I was able to organise with other IAESTE trainees doing internships in Brazil to meet up and explore our destination together.

Skydiving in Foz do Iguaçu

And if there weren't any other trainees available, the friendships I had gained at work or at my student home made sure that I never had to feel lonely. One of my colleagues, Victor, who now has become a friend for life of mine even took me in to spend Christmas with his family. Invaluable friendships like this are what makes me sure that I will be returning to Brazil many more times in the future.

When it got clear that my university would allow me to write my bachelor thesis remotely, I decided to extend my internship. I also asked around at work to help set me up with a Portuguese teacher. Two times per week thereafter I had classes before work, and by each day my increased language abilities allowed me to be self-reliant. Even to this day I am continuing my Portuguese studies through material that I brought with me home. So besides all experiences and connections, I have also gained an additional language that opens up communication possibilities with another 300 million people around the world, not a bad side-effect of this internship.

If anyone reading this is planning to embark on a journey to Brazil themselves, it's would be good of me to also mention the parts that aren't all good. You can expect to encounter a lot of time-consuming bureaucracy, even when doing the most simple paper work. For example, I began applying for my Visa around two months before leaving Sweden, and the matter wasn't finished until only 1 month before my return. Many trips to the Brazilian police was needed to get this done, and they themselves might not always be very reliable. At one point the police themselves even advised me to stay in the country illegally instead of finishing my application, and just pay a fee to them for doing that afterwards.

It is also very important to always observe and learn from the Brazilians themselves about good habits to keep yourself safe. For example, using Uber to get around is a great option, and an absolute necessity at night.

All things considered though, It is hard for me to find the words needed to express what an amazing life experience this internship was, and a day doesn't go by where I don't miss Brazil. I got the work experience needed for me to find out that my carrier call lies within software development. I crafted bonds of friendship that will stay with me for life, and I added another language to help me navigate in this world that we live in.

Leaving Brazil wasn't easy. And just like on my first day the director was now there to wish me farewell. Along with him were all the great friends and colleagues that had helped me get settled in their nation and made sure I was always safe. But even now when I'm on the other side of the globe they still aren't really gone. To this day I'm in touch to many of them often, and can't wait for us to meet again.

Last day at work, director of SENAI Reginaldo Dias de Souza in the bottom left