

## **IAESTE Sweden's essay competition**

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I am a second-year bachelor student currently studying Physical Geography and ecosystem science at the faculty of science, Lund university. My journey in physical geography and ecosystem science started before my entrance to Lund university, such as science summer camps, where I get to experiment and learn from researchers all over the world, this taught me about the environment from different perspectives and agendas.

My experience was not only confined to Lund university, which is probably why I stumbled upon this program and immediately knew that it was a perfect match for me. In many ways my program is all including, covering everything about the planet. From the atmosphere, to the biosphere, hydrosphere and so much more especially highlighting the importance of climate change research.

While studying it became more obvious to me the difference between sitting in a classroom studying and the experience one gets out from practically using the knowledge learned. I believe that one can learn much more outside of the classroom and should do so, as fieldwork itself is quite an important part of the educational process.

An internship experience for me is a very important aspect of my studies, it provides me with the practical skills and learning that is not part of the normal curriculum. I get to see how things are done in a real-world environment and learn how to handle situations on my own. It encourages me to grow independently and even gives me a competitive edge in my career.

This is the main reason I applied for an internship position as a research assistant in Colombia, Bogotá at the University of Applied and Environmental Sciences. My work was to put it lightly a unique experience, it was a massive change to everything I was used to. A totally different culture that also varies from region to region, everything from the language to the people and the food we ate was completely different.

The city of Bogotá in which the university was situated in had a population almost as the entire population of Sweden. People varied in colors, accents and manners. It was a huge city that lures the different people of Colombia. The food was certainly entertaining, fruits of rich taste and in all manner of sizes. The main dish was completely the same, and it became obvious to me that although I recognized most of the food, the taste was of a different origin. It was a mixture of things I had never tried or tasted before. I loved it.

I got the opportunity to work independently meaning I come up with the research and the process on my own but getting feedbacks and assistance from the professors. The first thing I noticed when I arrive was the lack of English, I didn't let this discourage me even when it was almost impossible to be without my google translate app, as someone who hadn't learned a single word of the Spanish language before. Instead it became a motivator and within two weeks, I could already have a meeting in Spanish with my professors. Although most of my help came from my host mother, this is someone the school assign you to live with and also

settle in and learn the ways of the city. She was more than a host mother; we formed a sisterhood despite our age differences and cultural background, she became my helping hand and comfort zone in every situation I encountered there.

The honor to decide what to research and how was an exciting buzz that put a smile on my face each day. I was working in my spare time, talking about my research to everyone that wanted to listen. It was a completely different feeling; it didn't feel like I was "working" or "studying" it was more like I was having fun doing the thing I know best and using the knowledge I went to school for.

Like every research out there, it was never straight forward, the first idea couldn't be developed due to lack of materials and economical finance which at first was quite shocking as back home I was used to the school having all materials to finance a project but this was not a setback but instead became a challenge in which we tried to make our own materials from what we had. I welcomed such challenge as it had been in my goal to realistically work as a researcher.

The idea I had was to work with climate change, because it was a subject, I was mostly familiar to and a relevant topic nonetheless to the entire world. I had the great Amazon's forest as my study area, and I wanted to make the best of it and fulfill that inside curiosity. It was a magnificent dream come true.

My project goal is to analyze the amount of carbon dioxide release from different land use types in the Amazonian forest. My internship work was divided into a theoretical part and a practical part in which the theory part was spent in the city of Bogotá at the university. Every two days I had a meeting with the professors and even some environmental science students, in which we sat at university that was situated amongst the beautiful mountains of Bogotá. We discuss the methodology, the strengths and weakness and any changes that could be applied. I welcomed every criticism I got, then I head home to work and come up with better drafts accounting for all the changes to be made. I wasn't required to come into the school office every day, which gave me the opportunity to tour the unique landscapes of Colombia, and time to think and research privately on my work. Colombia is an amazing country and due to the different elevations and its peculiar location by the equator, the climate varies in different regions which made it even more exciting to visit. I could go from cold climate of Bogotá to tropical warm within hours bus ride from the city. I used the opportunity to visit every part of the country, from the deserts of Tatacoa to the lushful beaches of Tayronna, to the Sierra Nevada mountains of Minca and the beautiful pueblo of Salento. It was a diverse experience filled with tropical fruits, fresh fish and friendly people.

For me the most magnificent part of this internship was the time spent doing the practical research, in which I spent 5 weeks living in an Amazonian community of Colombia. The opportunity to be welcomed amongst the people was one that I had by grace from the university, I also got the opportunity to be a volunteer at the local hostel in order to reduce any expenses such as living and food.

This is probably the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me, I learned a lot from the people, their ways of life, mannerism and their views. All this that now have an impact to the kind of person I am today and will be in the future. In all I grew a lot, I learned a lot from them such as their past traditions and history that has been passed down from generations to generations such as the natural medicine they used from the forest. The sustainable way of their lives, which was a welcome adjustment to the materialistic world we lived in. It forced me to appreciate a new way of living and to see just how unnecessary many things we have in life are to our lives. The use of the river as the shower and washing machine, and the fight against climate change. I learned about myself, what future career part I wanted to take for my masters and how to act in situations that I wasn't familiar with.

To be in a community, to speak a foreign language, to eat foreign food. It was an incredible experience, I fell in love with the people, the person I became and most importantly the fresh fruits and fish from the forest and river with names that I cannot pronounce. Colombia is a magnificent country with a vicious history, even in the face of diversity that threatens them apart I could see the hard work that everyone is putting in to be one, united.

It is a life changing experience that I never would have imagined, not even in my wildest dreams. I did so much more in these 12 weeks that I have done in my life, it was definitely an eye opener to a world I've never thought about. Thank you.





