

IAESTE Internship at ULSA in Nicaragua

After I finished my Bachelor's degree in Environmental and Energy engineering in summer of 2023, I took an internship with IAESTE at the "Universidad Tecnológica La Salle (ULSA) in León, Nicaragua.

My work experience:

My internship lasted for two months (8 weeks), during which my main project was to develop a way to produce hydrogen using electrolysis and quantify the performance of different methods. It was a rather different and therefore interesting work experience compared to a university project back in Switzerland, since their material means are rather limited. So, you end up having to improvise a lot and just working with what you have. It is remarkable what you can do with some scrap metal and plastic bottles. In the end, I compiled my findings in a scientific report. The university staff and students I was working with were all very nice and accommodating, trying their best to work around my very limited Spanish.

Preparing for the trip:

After I accepted the internship offer, I got in contact with the IAESTE representative of ULSA. He is the one who is organizing your stay. Even though he gave me a lot of information I was still unsure about how a lot of things would work once I got to Nicaragua, so I will give you a quick rundown here of things I would have wanted to know or was unsure about:

- **Visa:**
Coming from Switzerland (and probably most places in Europe) you don't need a Visa to enter Nicaragua and work at the University. You can stay Visa free for 90 days, just tell them you come for tourism.
- **Vaccinations:**
Make sure you have the required vaccination to enter Nicaragua. If you are coming from a different Central American country, (eg. Panama) you will need a yellow fever vaccination, and they will check.
- **Getting to León:**
Someone from the University staff will pick you up from the airport in Managua and drive you to your accommodation in León. Just tell them when your plane will arrive.

- **Accommodation:**
The University will organize the accommodation for you. As far as I know all interns will always be in the same Hostel (Hostal casa Belinda), where you have your own room and the opportunity to cook and wash your laundry. They don't have a washing machine however, so you will have to do it by hand. The Hostel is Family owned, and they are incredibly welcoming. During your stay there may also be other people doing an exchange in Nicaragua staying at the hostel, but this is not guaranteed. While my stay, there were also two girls from Austria staying there that did an exchange working in a Kindergarten.
- **Getting around town and to the university:**
León has a rather good bus system with a stop pretty much right outside the Hostel. A bus ride costs 6 Cordobas (~15 cents) that you just pay the conductor in cash usually when you enter the bus. I recommend you to take the Bus to the university, which takes about 10 minutes.
- **Safety:**
Nicaragua doesn't have a great reputation when it comes to safety. But this is in my opinion completely unwarranted. It's absolutely no problem just walk through the city or taking the busses. I would even walk home alone after a night out.

Learning Spanish:

As preparation for my Internship, I took a Spanish course at my home university in my last semester. However, despite the course, I was barely able to communicate in Spanish when I first arrived in León. This made it in the beginning especially difficult to communicate with the hostess of the hostel I was staying at since she can only speak Spanish. But she was very patient, and we made it work somehow. By the end of my stay however, I was able to communicate with her, or any other person, on a very basic level in Spanish. Since everything besides my work itself and some big tourist tours is only in Spanish I picked up a lot of this quite fast so that I could get by day to day without much trouble.

Free time:

Due to the fact that I had a 6-Day work week, you sadly don't have that much time to explore the country. But there is still quite a few things to do in one day. A good place to start is Las Peñitas, the beach close to León. There are busses going there about every hour. I've spent quite a few of my Sundays there. Since León is a popular backpacking destination there are also quite a few tours offered by different hostels, such as hikes to some of the Volcans in the country, mangrove tours and volcano boarding, where you can slide down the volcano Cerro Negro on a sled or with a snowboard. For longer trips I

was able to get some extra time off from the university, which allowed me to visit Somoto canyon and the City of Granada, as well as going to the famous “Treehouse Party” there. León itself also has a few things to offer with a lot of restaurants and bars, making for a great nightlife. I would often meet up with exchange and local students I got to know in the city in the evening.