

Colombia (Tunja), September – December 2016

VISA:

The VISA process was super-confusing, because I did not get correct information. Every document I got from IAESTE Colombia had different information and the embassy in Frankfurt was also no help at all. So here the procedure from 2016:

- You send your application documents. Here you have to choose an embassy in Germany. It's Frankfurt or Berlin. I strongly advice you to take Berlin, even if it's farer.
- You get the accenptance note. You book your flight/insurance/... and send it back as described in the documents you got.
- You should get an ICETEX courtesy letter per mail. Approx. 1 month before your trip to Colombia. You wait. Long. Don't worry, it takes like forever, but you don't need much time after you got it. I got this letter approx. 2 weeks before my flight.
- Then you can do the online procedure mentioned everywhere. You apply for a TP1 Visa. It's easy and the website is in english. If you don't have your address yet, just use the address of the university. In the last step you have to upload documents. You need:

Copy of the principal page from your current passport, where the holder's personal data appear.

Copy of the passport page where it has the last entry or exit stamp from Colombia (if applies).

Regarding previous Granted visas without the OCR, or QR code, attach a copy of the page That has the last Colombian visa. This requirement Shall Not be Necessary in the event That the visa was Granted With the OCR (if applies).

The passport presented must be issued by Authority or State acknowledged by the Government of Colombia with 180 days validity, in good state and with at least two blank pages.

Attached the documents described in the first four points plus a certificate issued by ICETEX, signed by the competent officer, evidencing the Granting of the "Mariano Ospina Pérez" scholarship, or e) a certificate from the Relevant entity evidencing the culture or academic exchange. = ICETEX Courtesy letter (you got per eMail)

I assume that you have never been here in Colombia, you only should add the first and the fifth ones from the list (including a photo).

You complete the online procedure. Then you get a number and an eMail with a link, just do what it says. I'm not sure at which point I got this number, but better save it and take it with you to the embassy. In the documents you get from FIAESTE Colombia some visa payment is mentioned. This information is wrong, TP1 Visa are free.

- Then you can go to the embassy you had chosen. You need your passport and the ICETEX Courtesy letter.

Why choose Berlin instead of Frankfurt?

- The people in Berlin are super-friendly and try to help you as much as they can. You can call them via phone and make an appointment.
- You cannot call the embassy in Frankfurt. Theoretically, you can. Practically not. They will never pick up the phone or it is buisy. I tried for weeks. They also do not respond

to eMails. If you by chance know sb. living in Frankfurt and send this person to the embassy, he will find a fully crowded waiting room and will not get information unless he decides to wait for hours till it's his turn. When you go the embassy you either be there 10 min before they open and just wait 1h or you be there later and wait forever. I was there super-early. The ambassador did NOT know about the ICETEX courtesy letter he should have also gotten, but I had it with me. His secretary needed to find my online process documents in the system. She mixed up my Passport number (the Y looked like a V to her), so she did not find my documents and suspected me for doing it wrong. Luckily I had this number I got at the end of the process with me so she could finally find it. The good thing was I got a Visa for 1 year, although my internship was just for 3 months.

- In Colombia you need to go within 15 days (not working days) to an international office and get an CEDULA. It's about 170.000 COP and mandatory. If you are too late you need to pay a surcharge (high) and if you leave colombia without having the CEDULA ther will also be a surcharge. Every city has such an office. The advantage of the CEDULA is that after that you do not need your passport anymore, a passport copy and the cedula is sufficient, even for flights within Colombia. You are also an official "Colombian" and not a tourist, so you pay the student/colombian-citizen prices at tourist attractions (national parcs, salt church...)

Preparation:

Autumn and hot summer cloths as Tunja is cold (Autumn-like) and the rest of Colombia is tropical. Mosquito spray you buy here does not work. I bought some there for my trip to the amazon (Malaria region).

Vaccinations: I wanted to travel a lot, so I got yellow fever, raving madness (Tollwut), Hepatitis, Typhus, As this was an official internship for which I got credits form university my insurance companie completely covered for it. Although the sheet from university for DAAD-Fahrtkostenzuschuss was sufficient.

I booked a flight where 2 baggages were allowed.

I got a second credit card in case I get robbed. I did not get robbed but it was a good feeling to still have access to money even if you get robbed and lose everything.

I tried to learn some Spanish but was not that successful. This was a mistake. Learn Spanish! As much as you can! You will need it.

Work:

I think I got accepted because I'm from Germany and 2 professors involved in my acceptance were in Germny one and spoke some German. One professor spoke English. All the people I worked with did barely speak English or no English at all. I'm not sure why my application (in English) was accepted or why the internship wa offered as "good Spanish OR exellent English" required.

I should have done a project, but it never started. I was asking about it for the first month, then I stopped asking about it as I did not need the credits for university. So 99.9% of the time I was chilling somewhere and watching people work. It was mostly boring, but nobody cared when I came and left. So I was always super-late and went home early.

What I should have done: Preparation of an Mo-film and analyzing it using XRD and SEM.

What I did: Analysing minerals I collected aroud the university using XRD and re-analyzing already analzed samples using XRD (1st month). Then I should have started with the project but instead just

did SEM/ watched the SEM-person doing her work. She was a student of my age and spoke barely English, but was a good company. From time to time I was allowed to do the SEM imaging. I was not allowed to do it alone as I did not have the specific training course required for it.

Accommodation:

I was offered living with a family or with students. I decided for a student accommodation but non was free, so I was living with a ~40 year old woman working in my institute and her 2 stupid dogs. I flat was great, the dogs super-annoying.

City:

Tunja is small and cold and extremely boring. Without proper Spanish it's not a lot of fun. I wanted to to a Spanish-course and take Salsa-classes but both was not possible. I was chilling during the week and went to other cities 10/12 weekends.

People:

Super-friendly. Everyone is so nice and helpful and tries to understand your shitty bits of Spanish.

Travelling:

The landscape is awesome, go to as many parks as you can. Villa de Leyva (Laguna Iguague) and Minca were especially great. Bogota is like Berlin - big, dirty and ugly. But interesting with awesome street-art. If you go to the Amazon take rubber boots with you. Couchsurfing is popular and I only had good experiences.

In my experience Colombia is way safer than 95% of the people think, including most Colombians. Don't be too scared but always be alert. There is the possibility that in some regions you can get robbed, but that's it. Expecially phones.

You need to ask lots of people to get information, there are no bus maps/stops in the cities except in Medellin and Bogota, so you need to ask to know which bus to take and where to get out. But if you tell the bus driver he will remember and let you out where you wanted to go. Feels strange, works fine.

Language:

As I already mentioned, English is not common in Colombia. Maybe at some universities, definetly not at all, and most people do not speak English at all. If you're in a big city this might be ok, but it's always nicer if you can talk to everyone.

If you have any questions, please let me know :)

All the best, Sophie (rhapsody.sophie@gmail.com)