

Here's my Study Abroad Story

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SIT Brazil: Social Justice and Sustainability
Fortaleza, Brazil

Major: Environment, Economics and Politics dual with Spanish

Program: Although the thematic focus of my program was social justice and sustainability, it tended to focus more on the social justice side. Throughout the semester we had lectures from many professors in a variety of fields, such as history, government, economics, women's studies and urban planning. We also took many field trips to organizations both in the city of Fortaleza and in Salvador. During the last 3 weeks of the program we worked on an independent study project anywhere in northeastern Brazil. As a part of the project we compiled a field journal and final paper which we presented at the end of the semester.

Typical day: The first 45 days of the program, I was at the Institute from 9 am to 6 pm. In the mornings I took my intensive Portuguese class. Our Professor really emphasized studying Portuguese outside of the classroom, so we had several field activities and scavenger hunts to talk to Brazilians.



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We had a 2 hour lunch break when we would wander around the area surrounding the Institute and eat far too much food. After lunch we would have either a cultural anthropology or social justice and sustainability seminar or a free afternoon. The free afternoons were supposed to be for working on our homework or independent study project, although I spent some of them at the beach which was a 20 minute walk away. After my day at the Institute, I would take the bus home and spend time with my host family. After those 45 days we had a 2 week excursion in Bahia and then 3 weeks to work on our independent study projects.

Highlights: Our two week excursion to the state of Bahia! I was very happy to travel to the city of Salvador and the Chapada Diamantina forest. We spent one week in Salvador meeting with different non-profit organizations focused on social justice and learning about the rich culture and history of the area. Then we spent another week in the forest learning about different sustainable practices, such as community gardening and recycling projects. I greatly improved both my Portuguese and relationships with the other students on my program.

Challenges: Lack of free time during the weekdays! At CMC you often have down time during the day or night, but with the SIT schedule I was in class for most of the day, then I had to get home, eat, and spend time with my family, in addition to doing homework for the next day. I had very little downtime during the week, but I had more free time during the weekends. Learning how to get around by bus was difficult, especially because I had never taken a bus before. It took time to understand the system and it was pretty challenging to take the bus sometimes, but now it's something I can laugh about.

Advice: If you are lucky enough to be in northeastern Brazil, take advantage of the short trip travel opportunities. There are many beautiful beach towns where you can go for the weekend fairly cheaply. You will meet people of all nationalities in these towns and they are a great escape from the craziness of cities. Brazil can be unsafe if you aren't careful. Travel in groups, try not to speak English too loudly and be aware of your surroundings. If you avoid dangerous situations you should have a really fun time in Brazil!