
IAESTE Nigeria - Student Report for my Internship at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), Benin City, Nigeria

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I thought that nothing could surprise me anymore: After all, my trip to Nigeria was my third student exchange and my fifth time in Africa. Still, I was overwhelmed by the numerous sights and sounds when I got off the plane on my first day. The liveliness emanating from the crowds around me was a big contrast to somewhat reserved Switzerland, where just a few hours ago I had been drinking my morning coffee in total tranquillity. It was exactly this liveliness that I learned to appreciate over the next few weeks. Every day was a new adventure, through which I learned a lot about myself and life in general. Some of these learnings align well with Jordan Peterson's 12 rules for life, whose book accompanied me during my time in Nigeria. Let me explain why.

WORK

STAND UP STRAIGHT WITH YOUR SHOULDERS BACK

The first rule of life reminds me of the doctors I had the honour of working with. During my time in Benin City, Edo State, I completed a placement at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital. Originally, I expected to be involved in a research project for the three months of my stay. However, this was not possible due to some external incidents (e.g., an unexpected strike upon my arrival), so I ended up rotating between different departments, spending most of my time in the trauma emergency, neurosurgery, medical laboratory, and in-vitro fertilization clinic. During the rotations, I mainly got to observe the happenings in the departments and got limited opportunity to contribute actively to the team. While I would have loved to have had a more hands-on experience, this was a unique opportunity since I would not be able to get such an in-depth and diverse insight into a hospital at home. Working at the hospital in a developing nation involved many technical, financial and cultural challenges. Seeing how the doctors did a great job each day despite these challenges deeply impressed me. Whether there was a power outage, the necessary resources were not available or traditional medicine and beliefs interfered with the treatment, the staff trusted in their abilities to achieve the best possible results. The doctors truly mastered the above rule and I hope to take a piece of this confidence home with me to stand up straight like them when facing the next challenge.

EXPERIENCE

PURSUE WHAT IS MEANINGFUL, NOT WHAT IS EXPEDIENT

Besides work, I spent a lot of time on campus with the other IAESTE interns and the local students. Compared to what I was used to from home, the infrastructure was relatively basic: I had to share my room with another IAESTE student, power or water outages were common and at volleyball practice we only had three balls for a large group. However, these things enabled some great experiences, such as fun pancake dinners with head torches, late talks in our shared room and countless attempts to wash my long hair with a bucket. If I had questions about the infrastructure in the accommodation or needed some tutoring in "new" household chores, my local housemates were always of great help. I had the opportunity to learn many new skills from them, such as cooking traditional dishes, properly hand washing my clothes and photography. Most of all, I really appreciated the opportunity to have honest discussions with my local housemates about the challenges in Nigeria and other parts of the world, as well as listening to their opinions about several personal topics. Thus, the accommodation was a good refuge from the quite overwhelming and rather superficial attention that I got elsewhere. So even though things such as power outages might seem inconvenient at first, I believe that they certainly do not stop you from having a good time, but rather help you to be more creative and open. I don't want to say here that Nigerians should be happy about their power cuts or the like, especially because I am now aware of my privileges. Nevertheless, this experience has enabled me to take a certain looseness home with me and to concentrate on the essentials. For this I am very grateful.

DISCOVER

SET YOUR HOUSE IN PERFECT ORDER BEFORE YOU CRITICIZE THE WORLD

Although I wanted to start my internship with a neutral view of Nigeria, I was influenced by the many articles about the security situation I read before leaving. Even though I still believe that the country faces some challenges security-wise, Nigeria is much more than what the Western media reveals about it. The country has one of the most famous cuisines in Africa, a unique culture, countless different languages and stunning landscapes. I was able to experience much of this thanks to the efforts of the local committee, which organized several excursions



Work at UBTH: My supervisor, a hallway in the hospital and the team at the emergency unit on my last day.



Experience: From visiting traditional weddings to day trips with local students and volleyball training sessions on campus.



Discover: Strolling through different cities, including Lagos, Abuja, Benin City and many more.

to other corners of the country for us, including two multi-day trips to Lagos and Abuja. From a cultural perspective, I was able to take away much more from Nigeria than from my other exchange experiences. Nigeria feels like a completely different world and, consequently, offers the opportunity for a cultural exchange on both sides. Talking to Nigerians, it quickly became clear that many have a wrong image of Europe with many stereotypical prejudices (as do many Europeans of Africa). I hope our presence and interaction with them could contribute something to rethink these stereotypes, as it helped me to rethink mine. It motivated me to trust my own intuition more and not blindly believe critical reports in the media in the future.

When I was back in Lagos to catch my flight home, I could look back on three very adventurous months in a country that is pretty much the opposite of everything that I knew from home. Although I was surrounded by the same incredibly chaotic traffic than on my first day, it did not seem overwhelming anymore and I could navigate through the crowds with a smile. Living in Nigeria has taught me a lot more about life than any book could do (sorry Jordan Peterson) and I am very grateful to have done this exchange despite the pandemic and other difficulties. At this point, I want to say a big thank you to IAESTE and the local committee member for making this work!