

IAESTE Iran - Report of my Internship at the University of Tehran

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First Impression

This summer I got the chance to travel to Tehran, Iran for an IAESTE Internship. Already within the first hours I realized that these three months will be very different to a normal summer at home. Tehran felt like one giant maze with a thousand times the same white car racing through the streets and motorcycles whizzing over the boardwalks. The 40°C heat, the unfamiliar customs, the foreign language and the many new faces I met in the first few days were overwhelming. But with the incredible hospitality of the Iranian people and especially of the people from the local IAESTE committee the acclimatization to this new environment happened very quickly.



Mountains surrounding Tehran.

Working at the Nanobiosensorlab at the University of Tehran

As a Biotechnology student at ETH I was lucky enough to find an internship within my field in Iran. I got the chance to work in the Nanobiosensor Laboratory which focuses on the detection of pathogens and cancer biomarkers. From the first day on I was very warmly welcomed and everyone seemed honestly happy to have a visiting student from abroad. On my first day, the moment I arrived the rest of the work day was pretty much cancelled for one long welcome and get-to-know lunch. Since not everyone spoke English fluently in the lab the main language at work was Farsi so some discussion I could only wonder what they were about, however most of the time someone translated for me. All of my colleagues were very supportive and kind, and

I really enjoyed all the long tea and lunch breaks as well as the interesting discussions with them. Since my lab was not on the main campus and because it was not really by public transport I had to get used to go to work by Iran's Uber called Snapp. At first this was quite a weird change after always cycling to uni at home but I also learned to enjoy the comfort of getting driven to work. However I normally still preferred to walk the 45 minutes home after work so I could make my way through the lively Kargar street with its many shops and merchants before crossing into the beautiful and calm Lahle Park as my last stop on the way to the student dorm.



Typical extended lunch break at the lab.

Traveling Iran

Tehran itself is an incredibly fascinating city however it is a rather hectic than beautiful place. Therefore I really appreciated that I also got the chance to travel to other places in Iran. IAESTE organised countless events on the weekends as well as a one week trip to Kashan, Isfahan and Shiraz. So I got to see some of the most beautiful historic places as well as incredible landscapes that were unlike anything I have seen before. However, what I appreciated the most and what I will keep in mind the most was not the beauty of the dome in the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, nor vastness of the Maranjab desert but the people I got to meet along the way.

What I learned

What was the most striking difference compared to my life at home were surely the many rules that one must obey in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Wearing long pants in the unbearable heat of Tehran still felt wrong on the day I flew home, so did the fact that all women had to wear a hijab and long sleeves at all times or that men and women should

not touch each other in public. But the rules do obviously exceed the dress codes. They have an impact on almost every aspect of life. What was the most interesting part about all this for me, was not that these restrictions exist, but the fact that no one I talked to in these 3 months is in agreement with them. Since I spoke to many people before taking of to Iran it may have not have been that much of a surprise but it was still fascinating to see how the behaviour of the people changed as soon as a private place was entered and the government was no longer watching. This also made me realize a lot about the relationship of the Iranian people with their government as well as it made me more aware of the freedoms and opportunities that I have at home. All the experiences and all the discussions I had with the friends I met in Iran made me think that this situation almost inevitably needed to lead to the protests that just started to unravel shortly before I left back home. The connection I made to this country and especially its people leaves me here truly hoping that their actions may succeed and that their struggles will end.



Fins Garden, Kashan.



Pink Mosque, Shiraz.



Safran Valley, Hormuz Island.



Maranjab desert.