

IAESTE internship report

LB-2022-004P in Zouk Mosbeh (Beirut), Lebanon (July 04th – August 15th)

Preparation/ organization

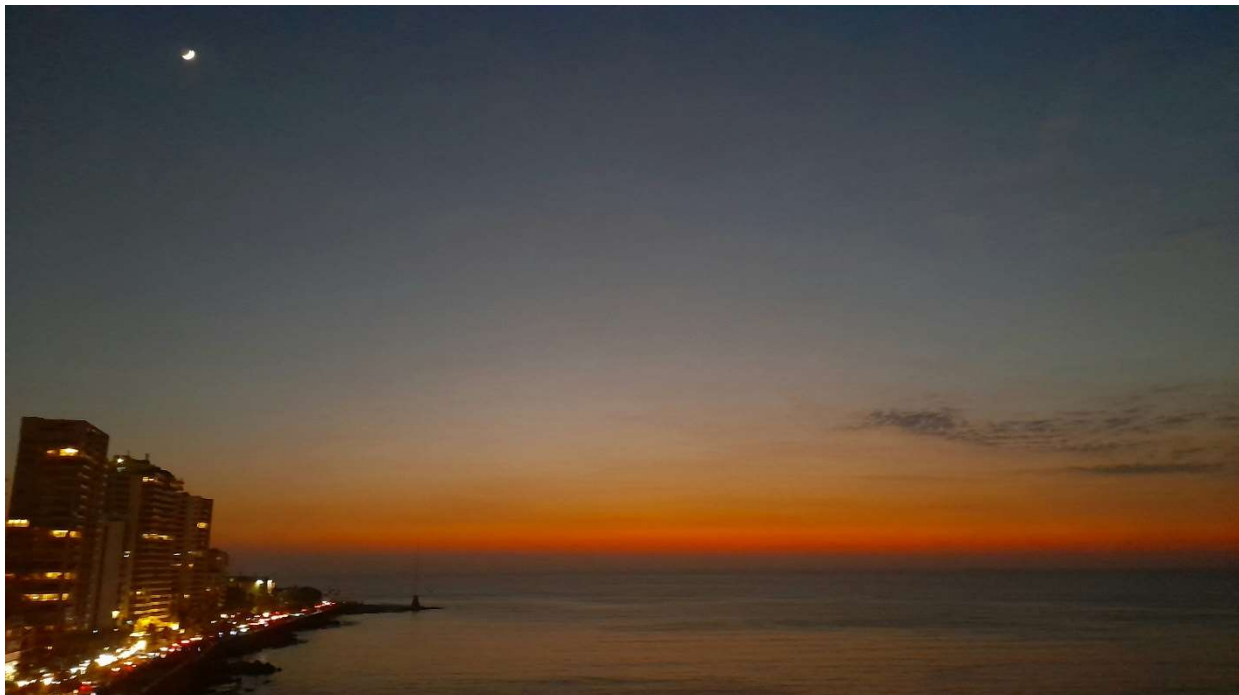
Before the internship started, everything was a big mess. Another internship, which lasted until the day before my plane to Lebanon left, was quite stressful and I did not have much time to prepare for Lebanon – mentally and the organization-wise. I was quite surprised that there were so much bureaucracy and stuff which had to be done (e.g. multiple letters of motivation, things connected to DAAD), especially in comparison to other stays abroad which I did before (ERASMUS semester, European voluntary service). The biggest issue was connected to the visa because I sent my documents quite late and got extremely anxious that I would not get my passport back before leaving. (Turns out it is much easier and even free if you get it on-arrival at the airport).

Another thing that was very stressful was that I did not really know what to expect from Lebanon. Everything I read was terrifying and there was no one who had ever been there. Before leaving, I basically thought that I would not stay for the planned 7 weeks because of all the insecurity, fear and stress I was feeling in that moment.

But at the end, obviously everything worked out and not only that. I had an amazing time in Lebanon.

Arriving

My first day in Lebanon was in many ways a bit of a shock. Amongst other things, this was the first (but not the last) time I got scammed when I was changing money, car drivers were honking when they saw me (they were taxis which I found out later), I was standing by the street for more than 5 minutes trying to cross, the humidity was as high as I have never experienced it before and many people came to me and asked if they can take a picture of me.



Accommodation

I was staying in shared room in the female dorm of the American University of Beirut which was great. In comparison to everything else, the AUB was very fancy. The campus of the university was more like a botanical garden and many cats lived there, it was located in a district with many bars and restaurant, we always had electricity in the dorm (which is currently no standard in Lebanon), the atmosphere in the dorm was amazing, everyone spoke English and my roommate was pretty much like all Lebanese – very welcoming, friendly and good-looking. They also had a cleaning service for kitchen, bathroom and the rooms which was super convenient.

A problem of the accommodation was that someone was stealing there who took (at least) 100 Dollars from me.

Work

My internship was at CCL Engineering Sal in Zouk Mosbeh which was outside of Beirut and it was a big struggle to get there without a car. I was very lucky that my colleague picked me up halfway to the office as the Lebanese public transport is very bad. It happened multiple times that a bus driver just decided to turn around halfway so all of the guests had to leave the bus. The company where I worked was specialized on providing engineered solutions for structures. I was working in the department of post-tensioning systems. My tasks included different stages of the design of post-tension slabs such as modeling, design, punching shear check and preparation for reinforcement drawing. My supervisor was very friendly and took a lot of time to explain the theory of post-tensioning and the different tasks I had to do. The topic and my tasks weren't super interesting but I had the chance to read and learn a lot, all of my questions were answered. I also had the chance to visit the company-owned factories. One problem at work was that my salary was very low (could be because of the hyper-inflation though). I only got 1.5 million Lebanese Lira in total (around 50 Dollars) in a comparably expensive country.

The time at work itself was great. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed and my colleagues were super welcoming. Everyone gave their best to make me feel comfortable. I got a lot of recommendations what to do and where to go and my colleagues told me a lot about the current situation in Lebanon. They even told me some simple Arabic words and I got invited a lot for coffee and ice cream. There were also other interns in the company, everyone was friends and treated each other with respect. I usually enjoyed going there but to be honest, the real experience was all the things that happened besides work.

Social life & free time

Meeting the other interns was awesome. Most of us arrived almost at the same time and all apart from one stayed on the same campus. We were five in total, there were two architects from Serbia and two industrial engineers from Jordan. As the local IAESTE volunteers did not organize any events or meetings (I did not even meet one of them), the five of us managed our own weekends and evenings. That was also great and through this experience, we became very close.

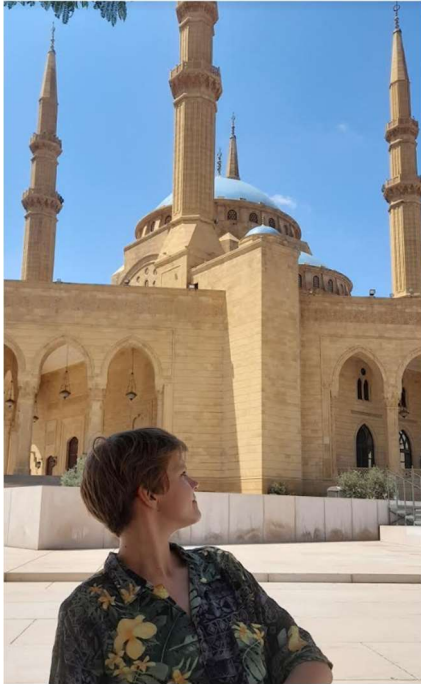
Lebanon is a small country so we usually used the weekends for day trips to different cities, beaches or to the mountains. Lebanon has beautiful nature, sunsets, beaches and cities. The lack of public transport was a problem though - as well as the warnings from the embassy to not go to some places in the country but at the end, we had lots of fun. Not only that Lebanon offers some breath-taking sights which you would usually expect in Rome or Athens but also

the lack of tourists and some unforgettable adventures made the stay an awesome experience.

I also made friends with Lebanese and did trips with them. That was incredibly simple as everyone was being super friendly anyway and wanted to talk with us, especially after they found out that I am from Germany. I surely will not forget all the warmth, friendliness and the many things people shared with me or invited me for.

My experience

Beirut has a unique energy which is not comparable to anything I have ever seen before. It has so many sides to it, so many new things to experience and opposites existing next to each other. Apart from the bad air, it was a great place to stay.



In contrast to what I expected, Lebanon is very open-minded in comparison to other countries of the Middle East so in Beirut, there were many clubs, pubs, parties and places to spend a night out. Another highlight for me was the Lebanese food and of course shisha which was offered in almost every bar or restaurant.

I honestly didn't have very good expectations of Lebanon but I can only say - it absolutely blew my mind. I had so much fun. Many things surprised me - the Lebanese multi-ethnicity, the insane traffic, cultural differences to Germany and how much shisha I can smoke.

However, seeing how a corrupt government, an explosion and the economic crisis takes everything from a whole nation and people living there was sometimes shocking. My time in Lebanon made me think about many things.

What stays is the hope that the situation will improve and my wish to return some day.