

IAESTE Internship at an E-Mobility Startup in Accra, Ghana (01.07. – 30.09.2024)

I'm Alex and I spent three months in Ghana shortly before finishing my Master's degree at TU Darmstadt. Enjoy my experience report.



Preparation

There were a lot of tasks to complete for the trip, which was very challenging at times. However, the pre-prepared to-do lists from IAESTE helped me a lot to keep track of the most important points. The biggest challenges were the travel vaccinations and the visa. The issuing of the visa was somewhat confusing, as it was not clear that it was only valid for 60 days and had to be extended regularly. In addition, the specified period only applies to entry. In addition to the vaccinations, malaria prophylaxis was also necessary, which not only made the stay more expensive, but also more time-consuming to plan. The communication with the local IAESTE team and with former interns helped me enormously to manage the preparations. Contacting IAESTE Ghana also went smoothly and I quickly had the necessary documents together. As far as insurance was concerned, I was covered by the DAAD - fortunately, I didn't have to make use of the insurance. I strongly recommend that you start planning early! The search for a room and rent were completely organised by IAESTE Ghana, which was a great relief, both financially and organisationally. Accommodation that can be booked from abroad is priced within the range of German student accommodation.

Work



The start-up I worked for was founded in 2018 and is active in the field of e-mobility. In addition to selling electric vehicles, the company also offers a wide range of services. In my department, we were responsible for maintaining the

vehicles and installing charging infrastructure. I was particularly fascinated by how e-mobility is being organised in Ghana. I was impressed by the problem-solving expertise of the team, which manages with significantly fewer resources than would be the case in Germany, for example. This creative and pragmatic approach was particularly instructive for me. The work was also very physical and comparable to working in a garage - but with much less equipment than is usual in German garages. The internship not only offered a

technical connection to my degree programme, but was primarily aimed at cultural exchange and a change of perspective.

Everyday life in Ghana

I spent most of my time in Accra as I was working there. My accommodation was not quite central, but still close to the city centre and, above all, close to my workplace. This shortened the journey to work despite the crowded streets. Cooking for yourself is possible, but often more expensive - especially if you shop in malls, depending on the neighbourhood. Street food was often the cheaper option for me, but you should bear in mind that the dishes are often very spicy and usually not vegetarian. In Accra at least, there are often stalls where you can put together a dish for the amount you want. For example, you can buy plantains for 15 GHC. If you get homesick, there are also restaurants in Accra that serve European cuisine, but their prices are similar to those in Germany.



It also made it much easier that almost everyone in Ghana speaks English. At the beginning, I only had some difficulties with the accent - but people also had problems understanding me. Nevertheless, people are really happy if you can say a few words in Twi, for example.

What I got on surprisingly well with was the weather - I hadn't expected that beforehand. Officially, I arrived in Ghana at the beginning of the dry season. However, due to climate change, there is no longer such a clear division and it rained more often, which was actually pleasant. The temperatures were always between 20 and 30 degrees. The high humidity, which can be quite stressful for some people, didn't cause me any major problems after a little familiarisation.

Free time and cultural experiences

Accra offers a wide range of cultural activities, and thanks to the many volunteers in the city, I was able to take part in various events and meet new people. IAESTE Ghana also helped me with this. Nevertheless, it was a little difficult to get started as I was the only IAESTE intern at the time. However, this made me approach people openly, with whom I might have been less likely to strike up a conversation in a group. Free time activities were mainly focussed on the weekends, as the day ended relatively early due to the onset of darkness from 6 pm.

Ghana is incredibly diverse. In addition to cultural sights, there is also plenty of nature to explore. Whether it's cultural sights in Kumasi, places such as the historic castles on the coast around Accra and Cape Coast or the impressive nature with high mountains and

waterfalls in the Volta region through to animals in the Mole National Park in the north or beautiful beaches - excursions are available here, ideally together with other volunteers or interns. These are best organised through personal enquiries and contacts. The bus system between the major cities is well developed, even if journeys often take a long time due to the road conditions. There is also rarely a timetable or fixed times at which the buses run. Often when all seats are occupied. Advice and experiences from former volunteers or interns are particularly helpful here.



Conclusion

Overall, I was impressed by the warm openness with which I was met in Ghana. Strangers were often happy to help me, and my work colleagues and the friendships I was able to make locally also enriched my stay. However, you have to be able to cope with standing out. Especially in Accra, you are often approached or looked at, which was unusual for me at the beginning. Even if you sometimes think that people want something from you, the majority of people are simply friendly. Nevertheless, it is advisable to exercise a healthy amount of caution, e.g. to carry your bag close to your body and not to give out personal details such as telephone numbers or addresses easily - something that my local friends also recommended.

The experience changed my perspective on many things and helped me personally. For example, I realised that things don't always have to be 100% planned in order to work, and that spontaneity sometimes even helps. Even though I didn't feel completely comfortable at the beginning, it got better really quickly. In the end, I didn't want to leave at all.

I would definitely recommend an internship like this and the experience, even if - like any challenge - it can be difficult at times.