



Samba Beats and Lab Sheets – A Brazilian Field Study

Before arrival

I received this opportunity through one of my professors, who has contacts at a research lab in Florianópolis, Brazil, specializing in membrane technology. The topic aligned well with my studies, and since I've always been interested in South America, it felt like a valuable experience both academically and personally. The grant made the trip possible, and I'm very grateful for that support. Before traveling, I had a few meetings with professors at the host university, which gave me a good impression. It was important for me to feel that the project was feasible and that I would receive the necessary support to complete my degree. I had already received some vaccinations, but I decided to get the dengue vaccine as well, following recommendations. Although it was quite expensive, the grant helped cover the cost. Because I planned to stay for less than 90 days, I didn't apply for a visa and was able to enter Brazil as a tourist. Before departing, I completed a literature review on my thesis topic to be well-prepared.

Upon arrival

I arrived five days before the start of my work, which gave me time to settle into my new surroundings and visit the laboratory where I would be working. This helped me get a sense of the environment and feel more prepared for the weeks ahead. During my stay, I used an eSIM for mobile data, which worked well throughout. However, it was also possible to purchase a Brazilian SIM card as a foreigner at a reasonable price in one of the local Claro stores.

Financials

Some things were cheaper than in Sweden, while others weren't. Eating out and buying drinks was generally more affordable, but basic groceries like pasta weren't significantly cheaper. This contrast also gave me some perspective, considering that average salaries in Brazil are much lower than in Sweden. The scholarship covered my travel and accommodation costs, and I relied on my CSN for day-to-day living expenses. I didn't travel extensively during my stay, but I did take a short trip during the Easter break to Curitiba and Foz do Iguaçu, and after completing my work at the lab, I spent about a week in the north of Brazil. The long-distance buses were surprisingly comfortable and affordable, especially if you don't mind traveling overnight.

Accommodation

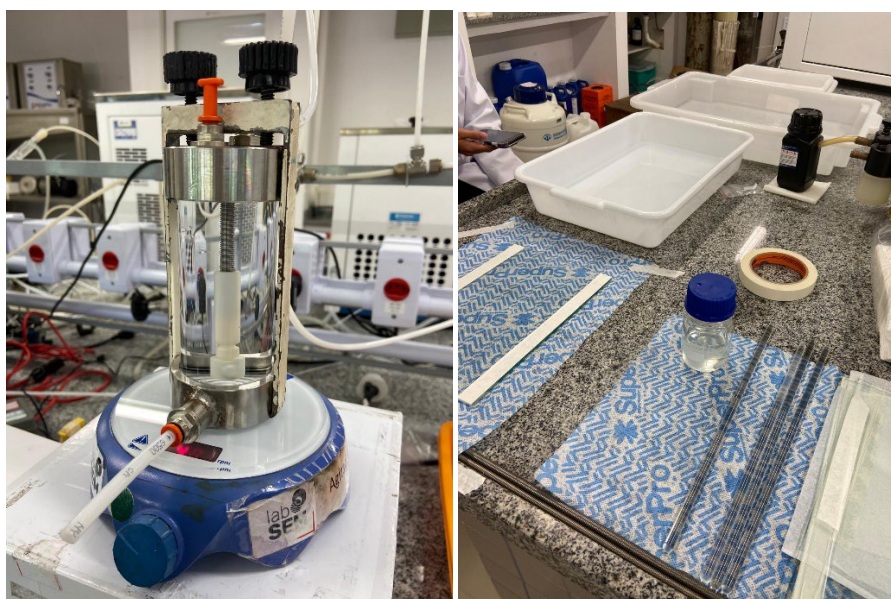
I was advised to book an Airbnb, so I did as soon as I had secured my plane tickets. However, there are also WhatsApp groups where you can find rooms at lower prices. Just be cautious of potential scams. I would recommend visiting the place in person upon arrival before making any pre-payment from Sweden. I ended up living in a lovely neighborhood called Trindade, within walking distance from the university. This was not only convenient for the pleasant walk to campus, but it also saved me money

and time on bus fares. The first Airbnb I chose had some issues. The WiFi was poor, there was no air conditioning, and insects would crawl in every night. After spending about half my time there, I decided to switch to another Airbnb, which turned out to be a great decision. Initially, I stayed alone, but I would recommend renting a room instead. This gives you the chance to interact with locals and get a more authentic experience.

Project

My initial project title was "Membranes for Emulsifying Biofertilisers" but my work plan changed during the course of the project. My work was very experimental in that sense, as it was quite a bit of trial and error when making these membranes. When I was about to apply them for emulsification, it turned out that they were not chemically stable enough for the essential oils I was using. After discussions with my supervisors, we decided to shift focus to water-oil separation, which still felt like a relevant and important topic. I had prepared myself for things not turning out as expected and often reminded myself that even bad results are still results. Many ideas were proposed for chemically modifying my membranes, but in the end, I had to stick with one approach and accept that you can't complete everything. It's easy to get lost in possibilities, but narrowing your focus and moving forward with one idea is essential.

I have to say I was moved by the support I received, not only from my supervisors but also from colleagues in other fields. They were willing to help and showed genuine interest in my work, despite the occasional language barriers. Although I didn't have much lab experience before and felt a bit nervous, I never felt out of place or inadequate. By the end of my stay I held a presentation about my work for the people at the laboratory.



Pic 1: Measuring the water permeance of a PLA membrane.

Pic 2: Preparing the membranes by casting the polymer solution on glass plates.

Country

What can I say? Brazil will always hold a special place in my heart - the vibrant music, stunning nature, delicious food, the warmth of the people and the climate itself, and of course the cute animals especially the capybaras!

Living in Brazil without knowing Portuguese had its challenges though, but I took a basic language course. I also met some incredible people along the way, which helped me settle in much faster. There were a few aspects of daily life that took some adjustment. For example, not being able to throw toilet paper in the toilet, the lack of warm water when doing dishes, and the fact that some places didn't have filtered water were things I had to get used to. One thing that was a bit tricky was the Brazilian CPF number, which is similar to a Swedish personnummer. As a foreigner, I didn't have one, and it caused some complications when I wanted to buy tickets online or fill in certain forms.

When it comes to safety, one stereotype often associated with Brazil is the level of risk. However, Florianópolis is considered one of the safest cities. I was able to walk around freely with my phone, and it didn't feel much different from strolling through the streets of Stockholm. Of course, like anywhere, you still need to be street-smart. In conversations with locals, I heard stories where, in certain situations, people tend to take the law into their own hands.

Brazil is a country that is both polarized and unified, where voting is mandatory. I also noticed a significant cultural divide between the south and the north of Brazil. During my travels, particularly when I visited Salvador in Bahia, I had the opportunity to learn more about Brazil's history and the ongoing challenges related to racism. Understanding the country's history added depth to my experience and helped me appreciate the complexities of Brazilian society.



Pic 1: City centre of Florianópolis

Pic 2: Beira Mar

Leisure and social activities

I worked in the lab from about 9 AM to 5 PM Monday to Friday, though some days I stayed later, and other days I could leave earlier. I had the flexibility to manage my own schedule, which was great. On the weekends, I made the most of my free time by going hiking and spending time at the beach. I was in Brazil during Carnival, which was a cool experience!

There was also something called Mundo Lingo, a sort of language café where I met many people, both locals and internationals, with whom I later hung out. Through this, I got added to several WhatsApp groups for various activities like game nights, volleyball, and meetups. Florianópolis has a thriving digital nomad community, and there's a strong social culture. The university (UFSC) also had a

WhatsApp group for incoming international students, where they shared information about events and activities.

I had no trouble integrating, but it did require some effort on my part to attend events and engage with people. I also made it a habit to go to pilates and yoga classes weekly at a local gym.



*Pic 1: Praia de Armação.
Pic 2: Sunrise at Praia Mole.*

Sustainability

Naturally, my journey to Brazil required a flight, which is something we all need to consider when thinking about sustainability. During my time there, I noticed several practices that highlighted environmental challenges. For instance, single-use plastics, like straws and free plastic bags in stores, were still widely available, leading to an absurd accumulation of plastic bags at home. Living in Brazil also made me more mindful of my water consumption. Clean drinking water isn't always accessible, and I experienced this firsthand when staying a couple of days with Brazilian friends where they ran out of water and only had their supply refilled once a week. It really made me reflect on how easily we take resources like water for granted, and how important it is to be conscious of our usage.

Other recommendations and observations

Learn some basic Portuguese, book a place with AC if you're there during summer, eat all the acai you can, and be careful on hikes. Oh, and take it easy with the cachaca. Saúde!