



**FGV**  
**EBAPE**



**Tel Aviv University**  
**TAU Recanati**  
The Leon Recanati Graduate School of Business Administration

The Sofaer international MBA program is anything but ordinary. It provides the opportunity to not only live in Ramat Aviv but also to travel abroad as part of its exchange program. In April 2013, I had received an email from the exchange coordinator informing me that I had been selected as the first Palestinian student at TAU to be hosted by Fundação Getulio Vargas, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Even though the mandatory Orientation day does not take place till August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 there is plenty to take care of beforehand.

First and foremost is the visa application. This is the key to guarantee all future travels and must be done in a certain window of time to satisfy both the home and host Universities (I began application more than a month in advance). The visa application process includes the following requirements, please note that this only applies to the Palestinian Passport:

- Original and signed valid Palestinian Passport
- Original photographs with neutral blue background
- An invite letter by the host University as proof of enrollment and time duration of program
- A letter of proof from home University that states me as the candidate selected to go abroad
- A copy of an itinerary that is a round trip ticket already booked with a travel agent
- A destination in Brazil/address is required for a 6 month Visa
- Recent bank income statement (3 months) to ensure financing for time spent in Brazil
- A document stating that I have lived in the West Bank for over a year
- A proof of a security check clearance with the Palestinian Authority

Once the Brazilian Visa is granted housing is a priority especially since FGV-Rio does not provide housing. I had been advised to find the apartment prior to arrival but this was difficult since communication, language, location, price and accommodation have to be considered first hand. Instead of trying to find an apartment, I joined the facebook group with all the exchange candidates at my host university. I managed to get in touch with 3 other students that were arriving at a hostel in Rio around the same time as I was. We had all agreed to stay at the same place and search for places together since it would be safe and more productive. Upon arrival and within a few days each one of us was able to find her proper accommodation. While some preferred to be in Copacabana living by the beach and strip, I preferred to be near the university and commute elsewhere.

I managed to find housing in Flamengo, 5 minutes walking from FGV. I was very lucky to have found a place that agreed to have me for 3-4 months because everywhere else had a minimum of 6 months. I lived in a beautiful penthouse with seven other people. I had been considered for the apartment because of my diverse background. There lived 3 Brazilians, 1 American, 2 French and 1 Colombian. They had never met a Palestinian before and were impressed with my English and Arabic

fluency. The rent was R\$1200<sup>1</sup>= \$600 and utilities reached up to R\$100= \$50. All bills were split amongst the house equally and if anyone bought anything for the house such as common kitchen or bathroom ware, it was deducted from their bills accordingly. We had created a facebook page and a Google document to keep track of all bills, shopping lists, chores and updates to avoid all types of miscommunication.

To further settle in the new city of Rio de Janeiro, much had to be done. First and most importantly is the appointment with the Federal Police Office. This appointment has to be completed before you reach 30 days of being in Brazil. This is a very serious legal matter that needs to be taken care of to avoid future penalties at the airport or the possibility of being deported if not taken care of. It basically entails a security check that proves you are legally allowed to stay in the country for a certain period of time (Up to R\$250). Second, is a CPF card (R\$10) that is needed for almost all services in Rio: a mobile phone, a gym membership, tickets for events, renting a bike, rewards at supermarkets, bank services, a bus pass...etc. Third, a mobile phone/ local Sim card (R\$140) that you can be reached at all the time. Since Wifi is not available everywhere, this is the easiest way to stay in contact locally with all whom you know. Forth, an ATM card that works. Whether charged at the bank or not, I paid \$5 U.S Dollars every time I had a withdrawal, cash is always handy in Rio. Though carrying large amounts of it is unsafe and considered naïve, up to R\$100 is a very good amount to have when out and about. This will be used for bus transportation (most common R\$1.25) or Taxis (R\$10-20: depends on destination), dining and going out. As Brazil moves forward, Credit Cards are becoming more popular and almost accepted everywhere but until 2013, cash and paying upfront is still the way of life.

One of the most beautiful things about Rio de Janeiro is its food. Fresh fruits, markets and grocery stores are all around and easy to find. Despite language barriers at first, I was able to find my way through the market and shop on a weekly basis for home cooking. The budget spent on this can vary for what your heart desires but I spent an average of (R\$150-200/week). Humidity and heat can cause products to expire faster despite refrigeration so buying fresh products on a regular basis is the key to keeping food fresh.

As for the exchange program that I was chosen for to attend at FGV, it is made up of 2 semesters (3 months each). Upon both Universities' approval I had decided to only attend one semester since I had completed the majority of my college units and only needed few credit units to be completed for graduation. Since I had completed all MBA core requirements in TAU, I had the option of selecting up to 4 elective courses. The courses included: Brazilian Business Environment, Brazilian History and Culture, Brazilian Macroeconomic Scenario and Brazilian Political Environment. In order to choose the appropriate courses a "Course Approval Form" had to be completed with my home University to ensure the proper transfer of credit units towards my MBA degree. Upon submission I took all classes except for the Brazilian Political Environment class therefore having classes 4 days a week. In addition, I had already signed up for a survival Portuguese class that is offered by FGV to help make life easier while abroad in Rio. Despite the hospitality and kindness of the Brazilian people, I must stress that learning the

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<sup>1</sup>R\$1=\$0.42 US Dollars=1.47NIS

language is a must while in Rio due to the difficulty in communication that may face anyone who is not knowledgeable of the Latin tongue. This is a 3 month course that takes place twice a week and completed my schedule to become a full time student 5 days a week on campus.

While in Rio, time is of the essence and there is much to be done and learned; University, volunteer, travel, beach, people, culture, history and events. Fortunately, FGV has a collaboration with "REI" that is a well known event coordinating company for exchange students in Rio. REI offers discounted trips, tickets and living arrangements and also connects the foreign students with the local Brazilian people. This provided the right opportunity to volunteer at the Santa Marta Favela project where all volunteers are required to help paint the houses selected in the favela to further beautify the place and make it more hospitable to the foreign eye.

Rio is a beautiful place to be and keeping an open mind to learn, meet and share experiences with diverse individuals from all parts of the world can be a fruitful experience if you allow it to be. I have had the pleasure of meeting Brazilian, Italian, French, Colombian, Danish, Norwegian, Moroccan, German and Portuguese students. There are plenty of places to meet people and socialize such as the University, the housing, the beach, the clubs, the events, the trips, the volunteer work and mutual friends. Rio for me is like a melting pot with people from all over who have come to share their experiences and stories that I know will carry on with me for a lifetime. Conversations are very diverse and you can almost find something in common with everyone you meet. The best part is listening to new friends, where they have been and why they chose Rio and what future plans they have ahead. The exchange program is very fast paced and time flies in paradise. It is the first time I had been on exchange and I know it has changed my life forever.

To travel alone, research, speak, study, blend in, socialize and live in a city as dynamic as Rio has allowed me to express my unique and amazing Tel Aviv University experience and my Palestinian culture and politics. At FGV I was able to broaden my networking abilities and learn so much about other countries, people, languages, and cultures. Most importantly, I became part of an international family that I can now constantly be in touch with, travel to, learn from and work with. To have friends and professional acquaintances in all parts of the world is truly priceless as it broadens the heights of connections and adds value in every aspect.

With all the beauty and culture experience Rio has to offer, there are plenty of things to be aware of and keep in mind for the whole duration one might spend there. Rio is considered to be one of the most dangerous places in the world considering it has one of the highest homicide rates worldwide. This can be explained by the level separation between the rich and the poor and the fact that the whole city is surrounded by favelas everywhere. As you walk the beaches of Leme, Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon many differences are noticed. Over short distances, crowds change, money levels rise as you head south and safety is still a concern regardless where you are. A few tips about living in Rio:

- Do not drink tap water anywhere
- Do not travel on buses after 22:00
- Avoid carrying large quantities of cash and valuable objects (expensive cameras etc).

- Brazilian law requires that everyone carries identification at all times. It is advisable not to carry your original passport, but rather have a copy of the main pages (passport number, identification and visa, if any). If possible, carry some form of photo ID, like a Driver's License.
- Beware of pickpockets, particularly on public transport and at the beaches. Never leave personal belongings unattended.
- Expensive watches and large wedding rings offer unnecessary temptation. Avoid wearing them.
- Hotels in which you may be staying should offer a safe-box facility. Wherever you are, you should use this.
- If you are threatened, hand over whatever you are carrying without demur. **DO NOT RESIST.**
- Always carry some money to hand over to a mugger, to avoid dangerous disappointment or disbelief.
- Avoid walking alone on dark streets or deserted areas.
- Do not venture into insalubrious areas "just to get the feel of the place".
- Drug trafficking and use is a growing problem, with severe penalties in Brazil. Don't get involved

Of course, always have a gut feeling of what feels right and wrong and simply be smart. As a foreigner in Brazil, you are immediately noticed and could be a victim of crime day or night. FGV provided all proper guidance, tips and advice before arriving to Rio and continued to guide its students once in Rio. Even though I lived there for 4 months and thank god never got mugged or attacked, I still was careful, I always paid attention to my cash, little satchel, transportation, friends and phone. No matter how much fun you are having, how safe you feel, you can never be too safe as 9 year old little boys may attack you with a knife anywhere. This is a good place to let people know where you are going and where you are coming from, have your phone within reach and always try to travel with someone.

Overall, Tel Aviv University and FGV have collaborated and provided me with an exceptional once in a lifetime experience that has motivated me to grow, learn and aim for higher goals and achievements. An MBA degree is no easy task but can be an amazing one if you live it to the fullest. Professionalism is key: listen to directions, meet deadlines, follow up, attend events, participate and volunteer, give feedback, offer support, clear communication, receive approvals and build a network. I can only be thankful for the support and guidance I have received from both Tel Aviv University and FGV and I wish it upon every future MBA student to have the rare opportunity of being part of an experience so grand, life changing and influential.