

SERBIA – Advice from Fulbright Alumni

Useful new site: www.setimes.com

Here is the link to the webpage listing the American Corners in various cities:

<http://www.americancorners.rs>

I have been in frequent contact with EducationUSA and the International Academic Center in Belgrade, and have been working with the director there - Elizabeth Chung.

They frequently hold webinars and seminars regarding the application process to American Universities, and we have coordinated on various other projects. I would highly recommend getting involved with them. Elizabeth Chung email: elizabeth@iacbg.org

Other resources: I found B92 to be a good news source: <http://www.b92.net/eng/>

Working in country

Based on the attitudes towards Americans: I personally have had a very warm reception, and in general have not experienced any animosity or negativity. However, I am in Nis, so things may be different elsewhere in the country. In my experience in Nis, I have found that the younger generation have a very strong desire to go to the US to study, and they seem to feel they are somewhat inferior. I am frequently asked why I have come to Serbia and most are astonished to learn that I chose it. They follow this by asking, WHY did I choose to come to Serbia. In Nis, they do not get as many Americans, or foreigners in general compared to Belgrade, so most people are excited to learn that I am from America, and most want to use the opportunity to practice their English. They enjoy just being able to hear a native speaker speak English. Again, these behaviors and perceptions are based on my experience in Nis.

Arrival and Schedule

While I had been in frequent contact with my host institution over the summer, my duties upon arrival were very much undefined and they were not entirely sure what they should do with me once I arrived at my host institution. Contact and details with the Embassy on the other hand were very organized. In the beginning at my host institution, there was not much of a schedule, and it lacked structure. I had to create the structure, and seek tasks to complete. Networking is very important. Be very proactive and look for different ways to get involved. I had to keep pressing the professors for work and tasks. If you don't constantly put yourself in front of them and in contact with them, they will become busy with their own tasks and not necessarily seek you out. You have to be the one to seek them out for jobs to do. Also, don't feel like you are restricted only to your host institution. For example, my official placement was at the English Department, however, because of my background in Criminology and Political Science, I spent considerable time lecturing at the law school. Obviously priority must be given to your host institution, but it is possible to branch out and expand your activities.

Meeting people and making connections

Try to be in contact with your host institution/professor(s) as much as possible prior to your arrival. This was most beneficial for me in having my apartment arranged and I had an early start on preparing the documents needed for the residency visa. I supplied the ones on my end, and they worked to get those

from the embassy and host institution itself. So it was really a team effort, and when I arrived everything was prepared and all that was needed was to go and drop off the paperwork. It is also helpful to be in frequent contact because it allows you to become connected and get referred to other individuals in the area prior to your arrival. I already knew several people at my host institution upon my arrival and had already set up meetings with them. On a side note, I did not need all of the documents that were listed on the information sheet from the Embassy, however, I would strongly recommend having them just in case.

Language

I have some language background and while I could not speak fluently, I was able to understand quite a lot and communicate on a basic level. However, you will find that most people can speak some English. I did not take any formal classes, but I picked up the language pretty quickly based on my background, and now can have pretty fluent conversations with people. But, for someone that does not have any language background, I would recommend some basic training prior to departing, and perhaps a private tutor in country or a class. I would definitely recommend learning the Cyrillic alphabet and becoming familiar with that. It makes reading signs and things much easier.

Travel, money, and housing

I would recommend starting early on arranging an apartment. Be sure to be in contact with the host institution and with the Embassy, as it becomes slightly more difficult to find places in the smaller cities as it gets closer to the start of the semester. In Nis, apartments are between 200-400 Euros per month. I had a very nice place (1 bed/1/bath, kitchen and living room for 200 Euros per month). The utilities are slightly higher in the winter when you need to run the heat. Normally, I paid about equal to \$70 per month, but in the winter it was between \$100-120 per month. Major cell providers are Vip and m:ts, along with a couple of others. Coverage for the most part is fairly good. You can have either a post-paid or pre-paid plan. I found it more economical to have a post-paid plan for internet and calling/messaging purposes. I went through pre-paid credit pretty quickly, so having a monthly plan was much cheaper. I paid about \$30 a month for internet, messaging, and calls.