

Interview with Ivo voor den Dag

Internship with ISS Facility Services at Acıbadem Hospital Kozyatağı

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Ivo voor den Dag, a 22 year old Facility Management student from the Hanze University in Groningen, the Netherlands, was in Istanbul from mid February to early July 2006. He says “I live in Groningen where one out of four citizens is a student. The population of Istanbul is about 75 to 100 larger as Groningen!”

Why and how did you decide to do an internship in Turkey?

Istanbul kind of crossed my path. I really wanted to go to a sunny place somewhere in the world, because I wanted to combine diving and doing my internship. However, I also wanted a high-quality internship placement. The combination of sun and a professional organisation seemed to be very rare, so I started to look for other options. At the international desk of my university they told me about Concordia. I started to look for information about Istanbul and I instantly fell in love with this city. I had only one thing on my mind: I am going to live in that huge city with great culture and history.

What were your expectations before coming to Istanbul?

Before I heard about Concordia I did not know too much about Istanbul. I went to Turkey twice for a holiday, but I never went to Istanbul. I knew something about the country's history. After I started to read about this city, I had high expectations. I read some stories written by other students, I talked to friends who had visited Istanbul for a city-trip. Everyone told me that Istanbul is a crowded but beautiful city with too many historical sights to see in a couple of days. I was going to live in this city for over five months, my expectations got even higher. And the city did not disappoint me, I think it was even better than I expected. Istanbul surprised me, the traffic was so crowded, the people so kind.

How did you first feel when you came to the Turkey? Did you know any people living there before you went?

I had already met one Turkish friend in Groningen, he visited Holland because he was taking part in an exchange program. He told me that I absolutely had to visit Istanbul and that he really wanted to guide me. At that time I didn't know yet that I was about to go to Turkey for my internship. But my friend, Vural, kept his promise, he guided me, not only in the first week, but during the whole period in Istanbul. The first day we bought an akbil (a kind of metal button with electronic money to get on busses, trams, metro and boats). The second day we went to Ali Baba Nargile (in Tophane) and to Taksim. I think that was the best introduction a foreigner could wish for.

Can you tell us a bit about what you did within the hosting company? And whether or not you faced any difficulties?

I am a facilities management student, so my core business is a secondary process for most companies. But in the company I worked for, ISS/Proser (a facility service provider), it is all about facilitating. I worked at a 5-star hospital in Istanbul, Acıbadem Hospital

Kozyatağı. The first day I arrived was very impressive for me. This hospital did absolutely not look like a hospital, to me it looked like a hotel. It was great.

During the 20 weeks in this project I worked in different departments: security, technical support and most of the time in cleaning.

For me it was difficult when the manager, Mr Esenler, sent me to some department to explore it. The majority of the Turkish employees were not able to speak or understand English. Especially in the first few weeks it was hard for me. I was not able to communicate and for me communication is very important. I would be rich very soon if they would pay me for every word I say. With body language and simple English I learned to communicate with employees of all levels. During my internship my Turkish dictionary was like a bible to me, without it I was helpless.

In the first six weeks of my internship I concentrated on quality management in the cleaning department, for me that was a good way to get to know the organisation, the people who work for ISS and Acıbadem Hospital, and the Turkish working ethics.

I had a difficult period in the first week, because the employees looked kind of strange at me, they thought I was the son of the CEO of ISS World (originally a Danish company) and whenever I entered a corridor or room the cleaning personnel started to work twice as hard and wanted to show me how they were performing. I didn't know why they did it, so I asked Mr. Esenler. He asked the cleaning department manager and soon he found out that they thought they might be able to get a promotion. As soon as they knew that I was just a normal guy it was easier for me to work with them. I was able to give them normal orders. They wanted to teach me something and I wanted to learn from them. I really appreciated their kindness.

Finally some of them, still at all levels of the organisation, were like friends to me. On my last day in this project they gave me a Nike shirt of the Turkish national team. When I'm playing football with my friends, I wear this shirt. Every time I put it on, I reminds me of the best time of my life.

In 20 weeks I learned a lot about the Turkish culture, about facilities management, especially about cleaning and managing a department.

How about your life outside work?

I had a good life outside work, my friend Vural and his friends took me to bars and clubs in Taksim. We smoked nargile almost every weekend, we watched the Turkcell Superlig matches in pubs and at Ali Baba Nargile. I had a great time with them. They taught me tavla (backgammon)!

After several weeks I started to meet some new people, I met a student in the park between the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque. We had a great time for a couple of weeks and we visited a lot of cultural sights.

In April four friends visited me, I gave them the best tour they could wish for because I got to know a big part of Istanbul.

Also I went to Troy, Gelibolu (Gallipoli) and Çanakkale. It was a nice trip. For me it was very impressive to be at a place with such a great history, not only Troy but also Çanakkale and it's Anzac history.

If I have to summarise my spare time in a few words, I would say:

tavla, nargile, Efes beer, Fenerbahçe (sorry Galatasaray and Beşiktaş fans), dürüm, Adana kebab.

What did you and didn't you like about living in Istanbul?

I really liked the kindness of the citizens of Istanbul, they were always willing to help me.

What I didn't like about Istanbul was the traffic. It took one hour from my house in Anadolu Hisarı to my internship in Kozyatağı. However, one day it took me over three hours (!!!) to get to my internship. For me the Istanbul traffic was a frustration.

What are your plans for the future?

Right now I'm busy with my specialisation in Purchasing Management. After this semester I will start an intensive course of the Spanish language. In January 2008 I will start working. I hope I will work in a Purchasing Consultancy Company.

Beside that I hope to visit Turkey, especially the south and central part of Turkey. I really like to travel, so I also hope to visit Thailand, Australia and New Zealand.

I really want to thank Ellen Derviş of Concordia, she was a great help for me during my stay in Turkey. I also want to thank Mrs. Ayşe Yarsuvat, without the help of her company it would not have been possible for me to go to Istanbul for my internship. Last but not least I want to thank all the other employees of Concordia and its sister companies who helped me during my stay.

I added a photo of myself and a statue of Atatürk. I understand what he did for modern Turkey, and I think I admire him as much as most of the Turkish people do. However, for Turkish people he is more important, he changed their lives. Because of that I think it is a great photo.
