

**Country for the project**

Argentina

**Degree programme**

Degree Programme in Industrial Engineering and Management

## Minor Field Study in Buenos Aires, Argentina

### Before departure

We both always knew that we wanted to travel as much as possible during our education to learn more about how to work as engineers in different countries, so when we heard about MFS (now FS) we felt it was perfect for us. Since Jonathan was an exchange student in Argentina in high school, we started by deciding to look for projects there. Since Jonathan was following the Swedish Embassy in Buenos Aires, I knew that they are actively working on promoting the UNDP goals, so we started by contacting them and asking if they knew of any companies or organizations working on something where we could contribute. The challenge for us who study Industrial Economics is that we need to include both the index perspective, data perspective and a UNDP perspective in the project and of the 3 organizations that we came into contact with via the embassy, it was one where we managed to make it work with all three perspectives.

A big advantage of going on MFS is that you get a large part of the work done already in the fall when you submit the application for the scholarship. This helps a lot during the rest of the year, we had several friends who had to find projects and do the feasibility study at the last minute, but we could submit almost the same thing as we had already done for the grant application.

### Upon arrival

With the help of our contact person at the embassy, we had booked a taxi in advance via whatsapp. Since we landed late in the evening, it was very nice to have it arranged and be able to step straight into the car.

We then went and met up with the Airbnb host who gave us access to the apartment. The first few days we didn't have much planned, but we were able to spend time getting to know the area we were staying in and exploring nearby areas. We had a start-up meeting with our contact person at the Swedish Embassy where we went through things to think about and also got to meet the ambassador. The following week we had a similar meeting at AySA and then we got started.

### Financials

When we were there, Argentina had an official (dólar official) and an unofficial (dólar blue) exchange rate where the official is almost half as bad as the blue. If you pay with a Swedish card in stores, it is always the official exchange rate that applies so it is good to check before traveling where and how you can change to the blue rate. When we were there, you either needed dollars in cash that you then take with you to an exchange office or you sent money to yourself at Western Union and picked it out in pesos. Bringing dollars and exchanging gave about 5% better exchange rate. In the end, we chose to both bring cash and send money via Western Union, but you have to make a balance in what feels reasonable.

The cost of visiting Argentina is very special because of this system, imported goods are very heavily taxed and cost as much as in Sweden if you shop at the blue rate (otherwise almost twice as much as at home!), while local goods are very cheap. For example, a locally produced beer costs 3 SEK while a

Heineken costs 14 SEK in our local grocery store. Food is generally cheap and a lunch near our office was around 20 SEK and a coffee cost about 3 SEK at a café.

### Accommodation

We booked accommodation via AirBnb in the Recoleta area of Buenos Aires. In the end it was quite a bit more expensive than contacting someone locally and booking that way but we chose to do so because we wanted to have everything ready before we left and not come down and have to arrange accommodation. It was also nice to be able to turn to a large international company if we had any problems.

Recoleta is a quiet and safe area located between Palermo, which is a bit trendier, and central Buenos Aires where our office was located. We spent most of our time in Palermo, Recoleta and central Buenos Aires during our trip, so Recoleta suited us particularly well.



Here is our cozy three-room apartment which we stayed in for the entire trip. The left picture is the view from our balcony and the right picture is our living room.

### Project

We conducted our MFS at the state-owned company Agua y Saneamiento Argentina (AySA). AySA works to provide water and sewage to all households and industries in the province of Buenos Aires. In their catchment area alone, 25% of households lack access to clean water and 39% of households lack sanitation. AySA is working hard to address these problems, but has trouble getting funding for everything they want to do. As a result, they have not invested in major computer systems to manage all the data and knowledge that exists in the company. This, combined with the company's silo structure, leads to increased administrative costs, missed opportunities and increased human error. Our project investigated how a Knowledge Management System should be designed to best solve these problems and what other benefits such a system could bring to AySA. This was done simply by first holding interviews to understand the problem, then developing a prototype with continuous testing and then a final round of interviews + testing. For more details you can read our bachelor thesis work Developing a User Interface Knowledge Management System to Support Provision of Clean Water and Sewers in the Buenos Aires Province on Diva.

In addition to this, we also had the opportunity to visit some of AySA's facilities and projects which was cool and good for the overall understanding. Here are two pictures from a water treatment plant we visited:



And here is a picture from an infrastructure project we also visited:



We also got to visit two of AySA's offices. The one we spent the most time in (right) and the famous Water Palace where AySA's archives are located, in addition to office space and a nice library (right):



AySA has a program for foreign students and we were placed with the international group that works with contact with other countries and foreign contacts. It was very gratifying to work at AySA as a student, we had a person in our team who acted as a mixture of assistant and mentor to us and spent about 20 hours of his work week, every week, helping and supporting us. Everywhere we went within the company we were met by people who wanted to help us and understand why we were there, which made it much easier as a large part of our work was to interview employees. When we left, our contact persons said that they would be happy to receive more students from Sweden and KTH, and we can really recommend it!



This picture is from our final meeting with the international group.

## **Country**

Buenos Aires is sometimes called the Paris of South America and it's easy to see why, the architecture feels European and the culture is always present. There's plenty to do, provided one of you speaks Spanish! Argentines are open people who are easy to talk to and have a great interest in the world and Europe. It was easy to get around the city even though it is very large in size. We usually took a bus (very cheap) or taxi (cheap) but there was also a metro. Public transport was very easy to use as you could travel everything on the same transportation card (SUBE) which only needed to be filled with money. There are also many nice bars, restaurants and other destinations to visit. Especially if you ask around and don't settle for the first, best place.

It's generally a pretty safe city as long as you stick to the right areas at the right times and pay attention. What can happen is mainly pickpockets and robberies, which unfortunately can happen throughout the city, so it is recommended that you do not use your cell phone in crowds, do not wear expensive jewelry or watches and carry your backpack on your stomach. During our stay nothing happened and we felt very safe at all times, but were careful about how we handled our valuables.

Argentina is a great country to visit, people are friendly and helpful, there is good food and wine at cheap prices. As a student from another country you are also appreciated.

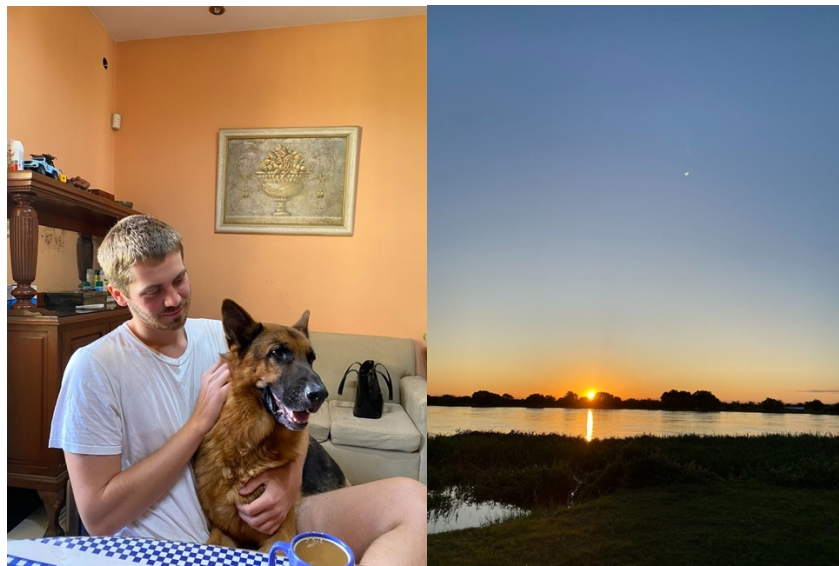
However, they have had major economic problems for several years and inflation is very high. Only during the 8 weeks we were there, the exchange rate increased from 360 peso for a dollar (blue rate) to 430 peso. This leads to increased poverty and marginalization of already vulnerable groups, and this is something you really feel when you are in the country. It helps a lot if any of you who go speak Spanish, as many people do not speak English very well.

## **Leisure and social activities**

We tried to see as much as we could of Buenos Aires and Argentina when we were there and had 3 weekend trips to different parts of the country.



One of our friends in Buenos Aires had a summer house in the coastal town of Carilo, 4 hours southeast of Buenos Aires, and she invited us to spend three days there at the beginning of our exchange. It was a very beautiful place in the middle of a planted deciduous forest right by the sea. We socialized with friends, enjoyed the last heat, sunbathed, swam and tried lots of food and drinks.

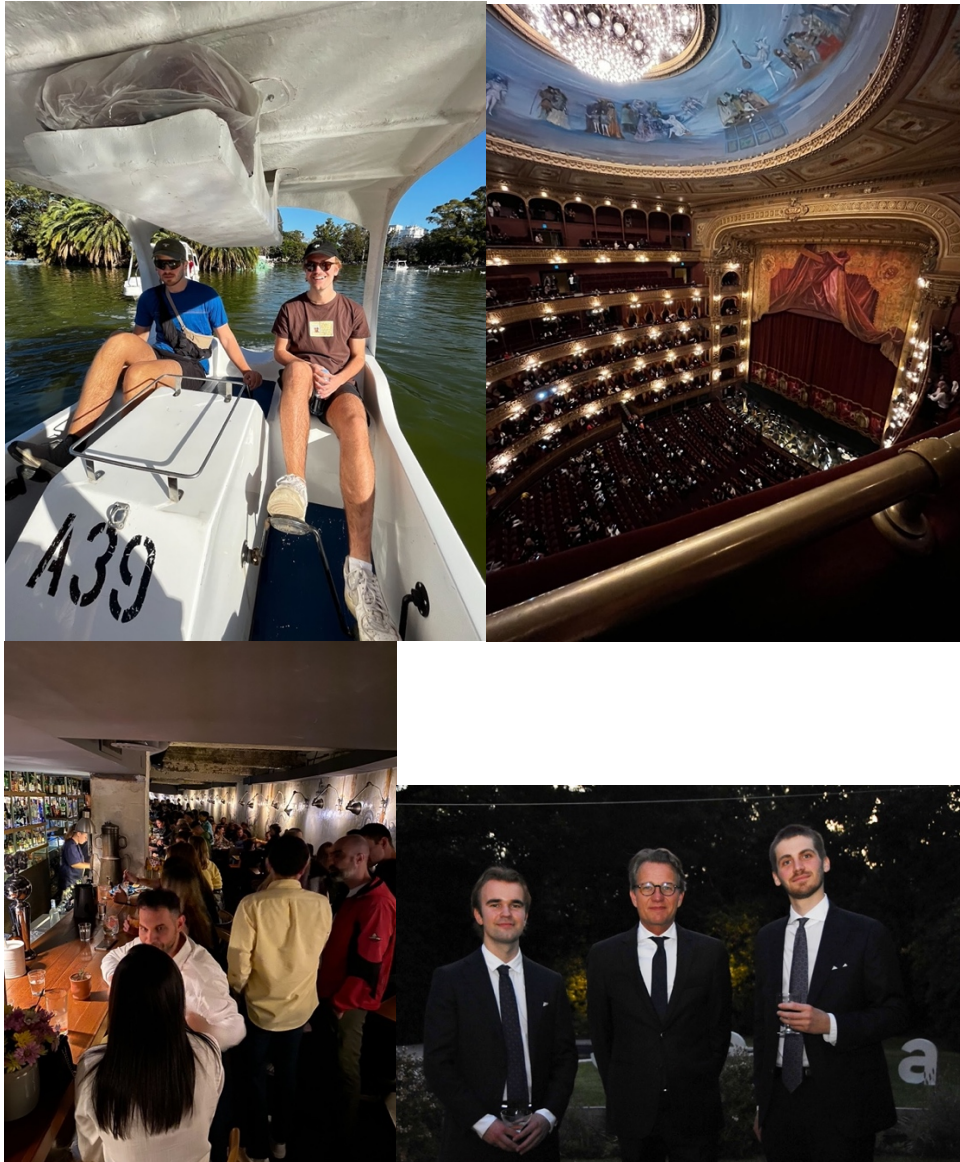


We also made a trip to Goya where Jonathan was an exchange student to visit his family. In Buenos Aires they talk a lot about the differences between smaller cities and the capital and it became very clear when we arrived in Goya that life is very different depending on where you live in Argentina. Goya has about 80,000 inhabitants and the pace is much slower than in Buenos Aires, for example, most shops are closed during siesta.



Last but certainly not least, we also went for a weekend to Mendoza which is a city in western Argentina with about 100,000 inhabitants and visited various wineries. This was one of the absolute highlights of our trip and is highly recommended! At the various farms we visited, we got to see how wine is made and hear about how the industry has affected the region and Argentina. In addition, there were many wonderful restaurants in the city and we had one of our clearly best restaurant experiences here.

Apart from traveling, we spent the rest of our time in Buenos Aires. We did a lot of things there. Everything from hanging out with friends, visiting parks, restaurants and attractions, and going to some events with the company we were at and the Swedish Embassy.



### **Sustainability**

While it is difficult to justify a flight to the other side of the world from a sustainability perspective, we hope that this experience and our work will help us and others to make more sustainable choices.

### **Other recommendations and observations**

We have heard from other MFS students who contacted embassies in the countries they looked at and did not get much help, but since we got such good help from the embassy in Buenos Aires, we would still recommend contacting them, perhaps without too much hope, if they have any recommendations for companies/organizations.

That's all for us. We highly recommend going to Buenos Aires and Argentina! This is something we will take with us for the rest of our lives.

