

Carolins Erfahrungen in den USA: Long Beach, California - März - Mai 2010

Because I wanted to have more practical experience in the field of Human Resources, before I graduate from school, I decided to look for an internship. My boyfriend's admission to study abroad in California for one semester had already been confirmed, and for this reason I tried to get an internship also in the USA.

It didn't seem to be easy to succeed in this project, but in the end I got a positive answer! Being able to do an internship in my field of interest, and at the same time being able to be in the USA to improve my English skills, was a great opportunity. I applied to several companies, mostly without success. But finally, I was very lucky, because my internship would take place in the exact same city where my boyfriend was going to study.

It is not easy to finish all the paperwork and to get all the required forms for a J1-Visa, but once you have gone through everything, and you are finally in the USA you will not regret it!

I arrived in Long Beach on March the 1st. My boyfriend had arrived 6 weeks earlier, so it was pretty easy for my to get started. As the rooms in California are quite expensive, we had decided before, that we would share his room during my internship. We were living with two American students in a small house. The rent for a single room was about \$ 700 USD (gas, water, internet, etc. NOT included) I had to pay \$ 200 USD extra for using the bathroom, kitchen, etc. If we had to stay for a longer period, we definitely would have looked for other (cheaper!) housing options.

My internship began two weeks after my arrival. Thus, I had a lot of time to explore the city and above all the beach! It was the first time for me to live so close to the beach. I really enjoyed this and I will certainly miss surfing.

The first time for me being in the USA, I was surprised that everything is exactly as you imagine. I wouldn't have thought that everything looks like in the movies, but it is really like that! The trucks, the houses, the fast-food restaurants, ...

The first time I was standing in front of the city hall, my new workplace, I felt pretty small. I worked in the 13th floor with a great view over the city. The first day I met my supervisor, he took the time to show me some of the city's departments (every city in California is self-governed). Furthermore, he explained to me the organization's structure and the functions of the departments and introduced me to many of the employees of the Human Resource Department. My new co-workers welcomed me heartily and showed a lot of interest in my person. From the first moment on, I felt comfortable.

During the first day at City Hall, I also had to get fingerprinted and registered to get an employee card.

I noticed that the high level positions were evenly distributed between women and men. My supervisor mentioned that this positive development had taken place in the last years, and that the company is trying not to make differences between genders. Furthermore, I think that the organization's structure is not very hierarchical.

Very often it happened to me that also employees in high positions came up to me to ask some questions about my studies, my country and so on. The whole structure seemed pretty team-orientated to me. All in all I appreciated the atmosphere at my workplace.

My workplace was a 50-minutes-ride either by bike or by bus. Mostly I chose going by bike to do some sport and to resist the fast food. The city's Human Resource Department is there to coordinate the other departments of the city, and to take care of safety at work, insurance, retirement, formation and development of employees, etc.

My supervisor is the Manager of the Human Resource Department. His main task is to provide employee development, training, communications, recruitment, retention activities and organizational development services to current and future employees, so they can enhance their skills and prepare for leadership roles in the organization. As I was assisting him and as I had the opportunity to attend also some of the workshops, I was able to gain insight into many different fields.

I particularly appreciated, that my supervisor would let me work independently, and included me in some decisions. I am very happy about the positive feedback I got from my supervisor and from other co-workers I worked with. This encourages me to maintain in my positive attitude towards work and in my personality.

In general, the Americans are really open-minded and there was no day without getting to know someone new. Even at the grocery store anyone may start a conversation with you - interested in your country and your future plans.

After all, I must say that doing my internship in the USA was a really enriching experience. Until now, I have been in very nice places around Long Beach and I met a lot of really nice people through couch surfing and hospitality club. To enjoy the beach and to go surfing, I can just recommend Huntington Beach, Seal Beach, Laguna Beach, San Diego, and a lot of more beautiful places. Until now, I have also been for a few days in Las Vegas, in Los Angeles and in Palm Springs. Las Vegas is exactly what you are expecting. I had a lot of fun there, but after 3 days I had enough of the entire fake. The people there seem pretty superficial and overdressed, but if you like gambling and it doesn't bother you to leave a lot of money just to go out, you will still have a good time. At least it is worth a visit. Los Angeles is interesting, too. But the city is so huge that it is kind of difficult to get an overview. Everything is spread out; so better don't expect a cozy downtown. I really enjoyed the weekend in Palm Springs. Like Las Vegas, it is in the desert. I loved the climate and our trip to an oasis (Indian trails) in the middle of the desert and to the Joshua Tree National Park - it was great!

Now, I am looking forward to go traveling for the next months before I will fly back to good old Germany!

Come here and enjoy your time! California is awesome!