

I was excited when I found out that my internship with the Oasis Wildlife Park in Fuerteventura was part of the Erasmus + programme. After finishing my A levels in 2009 I decided to go abroad and dedicate my time to volunteering. A dog shelter in Fuerteventura caught my eye and the day I stepped foot on the island it had me under its spell. As you can tell I am quite familiar with Fuerteventura, and I was always intrigued doing some of my practical work in the Oasis Wildlife Park. After my receiving institution informed me that I need to apply to the Erasmus additionally the application process got rolling. The application process on the receiving site was not easy and when the pandemic hit and the Park had to close its doors everything was put on hold. The uncertainty made planning my internships nearly impossible and unfortunately when the zoo reopened and contact got reestablished, they cancelled my previously confirmed two months for October and November 2020. I obviously had arranged all my other internships around this one. Luckily I was able to postpone the internship for February and March 2021 and found an internship very short-noticed with a veterinary in Germany, what turned out to be exceptional. A blessing in disguise. What definitely helped me in this difficult time was being able to communicate in Spanish with the receiving institution and my relentlessness of staying in contact with them. I would like to take a brief moment to give a shout out to my sending institution who have been superb changing my trainee ships within hours and being attainable even on their holidays. The in advance preparation contained the following. First I had to book a flight and educate myself on the constantly changing rules to travelling. Second I took a couple of online language placement tests for the OSL language assignment instead of attending a language course. Overall my preparations were adequate for me.

On my first day, I arrived at the accommodation and decided not to make use of it, as it was in fact a ten minute car drive away from the zoo and I already had prearranged another housing option.

The tasks for interns included looking after the hospitalized animals - e.g. providing food and water, administering medication, handling the animal, cleaning installations – laboratory chores – for instance haematological examinations (hematocrit and total protein determination, total leucocyte count, operating blood analyzers) and coprology examinations (direct and flotation) as well as assisting the veterinary with surgeries, anesthesia and field anesthesia, x-rays and ultrasonic scans and performing necropsies. Within the minimum stay of eight weeks the intern is furthermore in charge of a project that will be assigned to by the veterinarian. Alongside the five working days in the clinic the sixth day is determined to

research your project. Depending on the subject basic questions like ‘What is the ideal?’ and ‘How is it done here’ help reveal some facts that do not function as they should. My project was on prevention medicine especially for newly incoming animals in particular on the pygmy marmosets on which I enjoyed studying. An average day at work would involve in arriving at the Park at 7:45 am and walking and feeding one of the guard dogs, which we had to amputate the third toe due to an osteolytic process. Following I would administer the medication for the hospitalized animals. For instance handling a wild Egyptian Vulture, who was committed to us after being captured by the environmental department unable to fly and suspected to be poisoned or injecting antibiotics into a monitor lizard after its castration. After all animals were attended to and installations been cleaned and disinfected, the vet and I would continue with tasks outside the clinic. Via golf buggy – the Park is 1.000.000 square meters big – our first stop would be the highest point of the park where we would release a grey heron, which was found emaciated by a keeper in the zoo three weeks ago and nearly doubled its weight in this time period with us. Next stop the lama enclosure, where we would administer a spot on against ectoparasites, especially ticks, and vitamins per os. Hereafter the sea lion installation, where we would for example inject the monthly Improvac vaccine into the male sea lion for a chemical castration, followed by the elephant installation, where the vet would take blood for a checkup from the saphenous vein. After my lunch break I would walk the remaining senior guard dogs and the rest of the work day would be spent like the mornings. I hope this gives some insight that I was fully occupied as an intern. I should point out that pre-pandemic times three vets were employed in the zoo rather than one post-pandemic. Thus it is not surprising that I came across an overworked vet, who is doing the work of three.

One of the things I have learned was handling all the different kind of animals. From Macaws to Nyalas over Bactrian camels and crocodiles. Drawing blood from the post occipital spinal venous sinus from a crocodile while taking instructions from the vet was definitely a highlight as well as a emergency colic treatment for a highly pregnant Bactrian camel, who delivered a perfectly healthy bull calf a couple of days later. This experience was a great example for team work between the veterinary team and the keepers. Preparing us while talking us through the procedures step by step before an on field anesthesia on an Oryx gazelle helped staying focused and ensured a positive outcome. Another must-see was a diagnostic endoscopy of a vulture and a bold eagle which was performed by a team of external veterinarians from Gran Canaria. While attentively monitoring the breathing and heart rate of the anesthetized animal it was fascinating to look over the shoulder of the experienced colleagues during their work.

On another occasion out of the box thinking was required to find the optimum solution when a Macaw got committed to us with a perforation on its beak. With the assistance of my fellow intern, who organized dental fillings, we covered the hole during a short inhalation anesthesia using Isoflurane. Additionally I was given the opportunity to observe and assist all necropsies of both captive and wild animals. This was a first for me since the necropsy course from my university will take place in several weeks. During my time in the Oasis Wildlife Park I participated in necropsies of various captive mammals, birds and reptiles. Zoo necropsies aim to uncover infectious or management related diseases and reveal measures to act accordingly. I was surprised to discover my devotion to laboratory work. In particular I was very passionate about coprology examinations and parasite determination. Overall I was less hands on than I would have preferred. But keeping in mind that working with wild and expensive animals brings great responsibility and considering the vet's overpacked schedule it allowed only little time to donate to my practical needs. I guess it was fair enough. Speaking Spanish all working day long has undoubtedly improved my language skills. Although I felt my language level was quite high I not only gained reassurance but also a higher level speaking in Spanish. Nevertheless it wasn't an issue speaking in English whenever I was stuck speaking in Spanish.

As stated above I used my connections on the island finding my accommodation which was located in the north of the island and I was fortunate enough to get a car for the total amount of my stay what I would recommend to prospective fellow interns. Beside the veterinarian and the veterinarian assistant, another intern joined our team for the second month, with whom I grew especially close and it was hard to say goodbye at the end. Outside the internship I spend my free time surfing, exercising in Tai Chi and Yoga classes, horse riding and coffee drinking with friends I made from all ethnic backgrounds. If I would give an advice to future trainees choosing Fuerteventura as their destination, I would highly recommend to rent a car, have a surf lesson in Pajara, hike up the Montana Roja volcano next to the sand dunes in Corralejo, have lunch in a small tapas bar in Betancuria, go horse riding along the stunning cliffs in Cotillo, have pizza in La Cancela in Lajares and "remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet" as the stars are incredible here.

The cost of living in comparison with Germany is more or less the same. As noted before my accommodation, which I thankfully didn't have to budget for, was situated in the north of the island and I spent approximately forty Euros a week just on petrol, therefore the Erasmus scholarship did not cover my monthly outgoings. But bearing in mind that this was my

personal choice and a closer accommodation is provided by the Oasis Wildlife Park Fuerteventura.

Sad to say that I couldn't participate in the intercultural seminar due to work schedules and on that account I cannot make any statements according to that matter.

I find handling and treating different animal species diversified and exhilarating thereby my experiences during this internship have absolutely encouraged me not to specialize in just one animal species. In my opinion it is quite easy to lose focus on studying while doing practical work. Not solely because of the perceived distance to academic assignments but also because of tight time management. What helped me staying focused was researching the homework the veterinarian gave me on relevant topics. For example differential diagnosis for alopecia in guinea pigs or viral infections that cause degenerative beak horn changes in parrots.

The expectations I had at the start of this internship such as handling and know-how of the zoological animals, language improvement (especially medical terms) and improved problem solving skills have been certainly met. I would've liked to go more into detail in reduction of husbandry-, diet- and hygiene- related diseases which are common welfare issues in zoos.

Without a doubt I can recommend this internship to future interns and depending on the availability of capacity and accommodation they are accepting students in their fifth academic year. What had most impact on me throughout my time in the Oasis Wildlife Park was seeing the serious consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Be it that staff had to be reduced, not only animal keepers but also as mentioned above the veterinary department, or that as a consequence of delayed shipments and lack of income due to closing of the Zoo, the provision for adequate diet for the animals in lockdown was a challenge. Things I have learned beyond the content of the practical training including social skills, value of being prepared before duties, the importance of separation of work and leisure time and getting creative when resources are limited and time is tight.

To sum up everything that has been stated for I would strongly recommend every student to take the opportunity to complete an internship through the Erasmus + programme. From my personal standpoint exploring foreign countries and leaping into the unknown are inevitable to find yourself and realize your full potential. So all that is left to say is expand your horizons in order to become a more tolerant, complete and empathetic human being. And don't be afraid of asking questions. Because the moment you stop asking is the moment you stop learning.