

**UNIVERSIDAD DE LOS ANDES
FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES Y EDUCACIÓN
ESCUELA DE IDIOMAS MODERNOS**

MI EXPERIENCIA LABORAL EN VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO

Germán A. Peña.

MÉRIDA, JULIO 2010

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Informe final de Pasantías presentado por el Br. Germán Antulio Peña como requisito parcial para optar al título de Licenciado en Idiomas Modernos.

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Título del informe: My Work Experience at VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO.

Identificación de la institución sede: VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO

Responsable institucional: Iris Castillo.

Cargo: Gerente de departamento de Reservas.

Duración de las pasantías: 3 meses.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern Languages School offers to enhance knowledge in several foreign languages and cultures to those students who are interested in this undergraduate degree. Students can use the abilities they acquired and improve them, in organizations, institutes and enterprises being in touch with foreign languages and native speakers.

In relation to the hospitality industry, **VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO** is one of the biggest and most famous hotels in Mérida city which offers to their guests (tourists and business clientele) several services. Customers can plan how and when to spend their holidays participating in any of the programs, activities or events of the Hotel. It provides not only accommodation to its customers but also services such as tours around the city, shows, food and drinks, conferences and cultural activities for any kind of organization.

As Hotel Prado Río offers this kind of opportunities to their customers, this organization gave me the possibility to do my internship in the Reservations Department as a Front-Office Clerk. I decided to be part of this organization and do my internship in Mérida because I thought this was a chance to prove my skills. Also, I could use the knowledge I had learnt at the University in an organisation by meeting interesting people and offering several services at the same time.

In this report I will explain and reflect upon my work, my activities and my experiences. To do so, I divide this report into five sections: The first one “The Host Institution”, describes Venetur Hotel Prado Río’s organizational structure, functions, and the Departments where I carried out my internship. The second, about the “Nature of the internship”, explains all tasks I had to perform at the Hotel. The third section, “Reflection Essay”, reveals my thoughts and analyses my experiences during the internship. In the fourth, “Conclusion and Recommendations” I present some suggestions I consider essential for students, Modern Languages School and Venetur Hotel Prado Río. As a final point, Appendices illustrate some aspects of all the activities I participated in.

PROFILE OF THE HOST INSTITUTION

At the beginning, HOTEL PRADO RIO was firstly a summer camp for the Public Works National Department in 1955. It was finally opened on December 15th in 1956 by Marcos Pérez Jimenez, who was a dictator of Venezuela.

By that time, the hotel only had two cabins which belonged to Public Works National Department. During several months, cabins were required to be sold because of their bad conditions. But after several years the Public Works National Department decided to refurbish those cabins and buy new lands around cabins in order to build new facilities. During the refurbishing, the main building, the pool, the restaurant and Albarregas and Chama Halls (Halls for events and conferences) were built.

The first chairman of HOTEL PRADO RIO was Don Ildemaro Araujo, who converted HOTEL PRADO RIO into an institution for Social, Cultural, Economical and Religious activities in Mérida for the following years. Besides, the first guests at HOTEL PRADO RIO were North-American Navy officers who arrived in Mérida city as special agents for the Venezuelan government.

In 1975, during Carlos Andrés Perez's presidential period, Corporación de Turismo de Venezuela (Corpoturismo) under-rented Hotel Prado Río to K.L.M Company and K.L.M Company undertook to refurbish all facilities. Due to the fact that the contract did not work, Corpoturismo needed to own Hotel Prado Río again.

Defining Departments & Responsibilities

The six departments that are listed in this hotel organizational structure flowchart are Hotel Operations, Accounting, Human Resources, Sales & Marketing, Reservations and Food and Beverage (F&B).

The Hotel Operations is the main department which oversees and coordinates every department of the Hotel and combines staff functions with operating results. The Accounting Department is in charge of recording financial transactions, preparing and interpreting financial statements and reports the operation results of the Hotel to Hotel Operations Department.

The Human Resources Department is in charge of handling employee recruitment, training and benefits. Sales and Marketing is given the responsibility of the selling of the hotel facilities and services and running promotions. The Reservations Department handles customer service including laundry, PBX (*Private Branch Exchange*), maintenance, housekeeping and reservations. The Food and Beverage Department provides food and drinks to Hotel's guests. Also, it is responsible for running room service, bar and restaurant operations, convention and catering.

ORGANIZATIONAL FLOWCHART

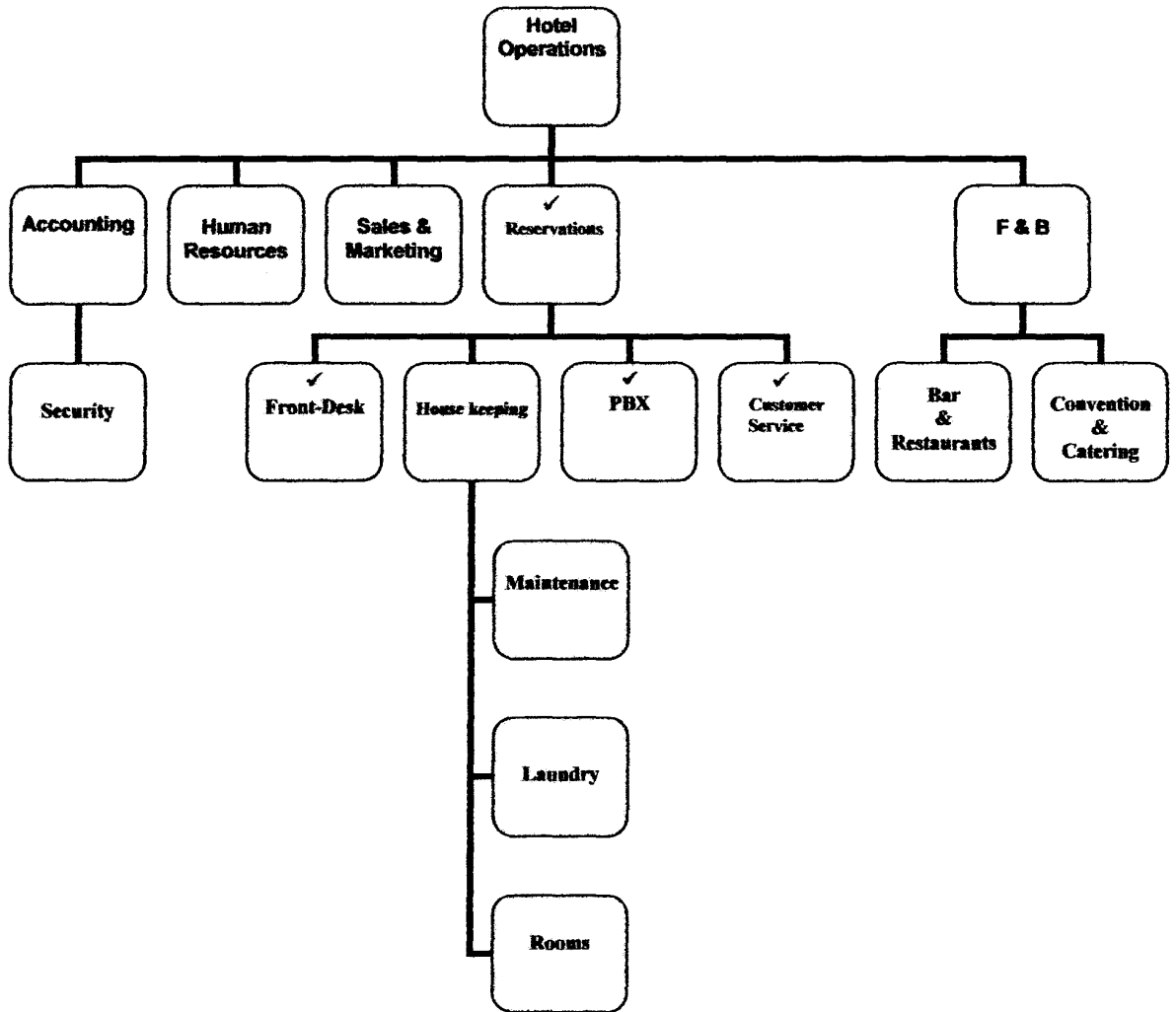


Figure No 1. Organizational Flowchart.

- ✓ This tick represents the different areas where I worked and the activities I did during my internship.

NATURE OF MY INTERNSHIP

In this part of the report, I am going to outline all the activities I carried out and the extra responsibilities that were assigned to me as an intern of Hotel Prado Río, the host institution. Besides, I am going to elucidate the purpose of the internship through the activities I carried out.

My internship lasted 3 months, beginning on October 27th and ending on January 4th. During this period of time and under the supervision of Mrs. Iris Castillo, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Reservations Department, I was appointed by Zaira de Simancas, Chief of the Human Resources Department, to be part of Hotel Prado Río's staff as a Front-Office Clerk.

At the beginning, Mrs. Zaira de Simancas introduced me to the Hotel Prado Río staff, and showed me the different tasks I had to perform effectively at Hotel Prado Río during this period of time. In order to be thorough, Mrs. Castillo told me how I should prepare myself for my tasks, and to create the syllabus of my activities.

According to the directions I received at the beginning of my internship, my tasks as a Front-Office Clerk were being in charge of reservations, registration, occupancy services, check in and check out, establishment of credits, posting charges and settlement of accounts.

My daily schedule started everyday at 4 pm and finished at 10 pm. From 4 pm to 6 pm I mostly started working doing simple tasks such as checking guests'

folio and doing booking and registrations at the Front-Office. After that, from 6 pm to 8 pm I established credits and posted charges. Afterwards, from 8 pm to 10 pm I had to check and clean the room rack in Hospes System. In contrast, it was assumed that with all recommendations I received I would be ready to start working at Reservations Dept.

Besides, Mrs. Castillo also assigned me other extra activities I had to carry out as part of the staff in other areas of the Reservations Department. She mentioned that some extra activities were required during my schedule such as being bell-boy, operator (answering the telephone and receiving faxes) interpreter and translation assistant.

In conclusion, my main goal was to go beyond expectations, to be a good Front-Office Clerk who offers services, solves problems, helps in other areas and deal with travellers speaking English and French and some times Portuguese. Also, I should say I carried out my internship in different areas which meant that every activity and schedule of these offices were very different according to my supervisor's instructions. I did everything I was asked to, because I like working and wanted to prove to myself I was ready for anything. Whether I had the knowledge or not, I saw these tasks as a huge opportunity for learning new skills and procedures.

In the next section, I will explain how I lived throughout my experiences and my reflections on the process of adaptation I experienced during my internship at Hotel Prado Río. Based on my professional growth, I will illustrate a critical analysis about the work I completed at the Host Institution.

REFLECTION ESSAY

In this section of the report I am going to reflect upon the way I felt while I was working at Hotel Prado Río as a Front-Office Clerk, Operator, Bell-boy, Spanish Interpreter and Translation Assistant at the Reservations Department and the other areas. I analyse all experiences which were important to me as an intern and as a professional.

Also, I will go through my initial expectations of my studies and the tasks at Hotel Prado Río as well. Besides, I will elucidate my first impressions of working in Hotel Prado Río with my colleagues and other interns from Colegio Universitario Hotel Escuela de los Andes Venezolanos. Later, I will move through the meaning of the experiences. Finally, I will conclude with some remarks doing a deep retrospection on an academic and personal level about what I've learned and experienced through my internship.

Six years ago, I thought the gates of the School of Modern Languages degree were opened to me in order to show me the way I could be introduced to the society as a professional. During my studies, I learned how people grow professionally, intellectually and personally. Since I first entered the University of Los Andes and while studying here, I have been participating and working with some national and international organizations in direct and indirect ways, such as Campus Crusades for Christ, AJNULA and Amway among others. I always felt that being constantly in touch with foreign people would improve some academic skills.

I took the opportunity of doing my internship at VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO as a chance to get involved with foreign people and cultures, at least in Venezuela. The environment I was expecting to find was interesting and surrounded by the mixture of different cultures, all connected by the most internationally spoken language in the world, English. Moreover, my initial expectations were also regarding new experiences I could learn, practice and perform new techniques, which could be useful for me in the hospitality industry.

A few days before my work in Hotel Prado Río, Mrs Castillo, Chief Executive Officer of the Reservations Department, was in a hurry, she needed a new staff for Christmas season at the Hotel as soon as possible. Fortunately, the fact of working with colleagues who spoke English also made my work suitable for the beginning of my internship.

During these days I felt courageous and confident because I was waiting for new challenges I would like to handle and because of the environment I expected. Mrs. Simancas, Chief of the Human Resources Department, introduced me to the staff and explained me about the benefits, rules and all instructions I needed. Also, in an emphatically way, she told me I had to prepare myself for the next days, in order to be ready for the hard days in Christmas. Besides, I always received advices such as keep in mind politeness, patience, responsibility, always being in a good mood and treating guests in a respectful way.

According to the schedule, during the first month I had to be related to all Hotels' Departments. First, I had to gather all written information about Hotel history, services, guests and staff and set it up. Second, I had to learn how to book guests in Hospes System, a program which saves all information related to guests in Front-Office's computer. Third, during the third week I had to learn everything about posting charges, establishments of credits and settlement of accounts. Finally, I had to put into practice all I had learned in order to perform my internship in an effective way.

Ms. Irlanda, an girl who speaks English very well, had been in touch with many foreigners at the Hotel for 4 years. Usually, she works at PBX office as operator but on weekends she works in the Reservation and Front-Desk offices. I am very thankful to her because she was the first person I met and she taught me many things such as how to book, check reservations, receive faxes, send e-mails and make phone calls at the PBX office.

Even though I had worked in a call-centre before, the experience of working with Ms. Irlanda at PBX office helped me to improve my skills as operator by using spoken English by telephone. I learned very much about new terms and how to deal with customers in a foreign language by telephone. Also, she taught me how to give instructions in taxi driver's code over the radio to taxi drivers.

At the beginning, I should admit I was nervous and I was confused because of the feeling of being doing many tasks in different offices during the same week or day. Fortunately, by learning and practicing everyday I could get accustomed to all

tasks I had to perform even if I had the experience or not. According to Ms. Irlanda, she could have the opportunity of meeting interesting people by speaking English and working in many places even when she didn't have any experience in her labour.

Another person who helped me in my internship was Mrs. Yelipsa. She taught me everything that is related to money such as ledgers, how to post charges, establish credits and settle accounts, handle money and save data in Hospes system. Once I learned these procedures I had to be ready for any trouble related to money. I did know how to do charges either in Spanish or English. Even though, River and Jackson, the Front-Office Clerks, also taught me how to make charges and I finally could learn and follow all procedures by being focused and watching all they did. Besides, I think what helped me more to learn faster was the fact that I could see Irlanda making charges and other procedures with English speakers.

Working with money was one the most interesting, difficult and delicate situations I could experience during my internship. I never thought this could be hard for me; in other words, I think that the process of posting charges while speaking Spanish is easy because I could learn and understand Spanish terms in few minutes. But by speaking in English the process is totally different. For me it was difficult to remind the new vocabulary I had learned in English and put in into practice while I was dealing with a customer at the Front-Office.

During my internship, Mr. Erin, an English native speaker who works at Hotel Prado Rio as a Bell-Boy, helped me with the translations and how to deal with customer service. Also, I could have the opportunity of spending few minutes talking with him in English about his “labour-life” at the Hotel during coffee breaks. Besides, I really enjoyed the fact I could be speaking English with them, I felt I could improve my English faster while speaking English with Erin and Irlanda everyday.

At the beginning it was difficult to get accustomed to the hospitality vocabulary I was learning, I felt I needed to know the main characteristics of each department first, and then I could be able to understand all main procedures the Hotel has. My supervisor, Mrs. Castillo gave me some advices about the procedures and my colleagues explained to me how the Hotel was operating.

Finally, I consider what made me deeply reflect in my internship was the fact of being working with Ms. Marié (an intern of Colegio Universitario Hotel Escuela de los Andes Venezolanos). Marié worked with me at the PBX office and she taught me the importance of handling all the information of Hotel Prado Río. She told me that, if I wanted to achieve my goals or some working status at the hospitality industry, I would need to know my colleagues, employees and customer’s needs and the procedures the Hotel has. And that would be the only way I will be an excellent manager who would be respected in his labour environment.

In the next section, I am going to elucidate my ideas of my internship in a nutshell, summarizing and giving examples of what I learned about this great experience at VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO by working with foreigners in the hospitality industry mainly as Front-Office Clerk and also as Operator, Bell-Boy, Interpreter and Translation Assistant.

CONCLUSIONS

The experience of being a Front-Office Clerk in a useful way in the hospitality industry was an unforgettable experience for me. Working at VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO as a member of the staff, has helped me to grow personally and professionally, and provide institutions or organizations with a high quality of work, not only in one area but in many, putting into practice my skills in foreign languages.

This internship gave me the opportunity to adapt to different tasks in an organization. From my point of view, I have learned that a combination of skills in different departments can be productive. My daily improvement of Hotel vocabulary allowed me to achieve my competence in the construction of new meanings, making the process of progress faster, mainly with groups of tourists at Front-Office. But, from my point of view, progress of the intern could be as quick or slow as the student or intern desires. I think it depends on the motivation the student has based on his personal goals and the motivation he can acquire in his professional environment. Consequently, this could help interns to progress faster in the organization.

Also, I think, close communication between CEO's and employees allows employees to give the confidence they need in the different fields they work. Not only by asking questions when they do not fully understand a particular topic or idea but when necessary. Perfect communication is what makes suitable and sensible

performances in every department when employees work. Besides, this experience has also helped me to increase my knowledge and understanding in the hospitality field.

Professionally, I have learned the purpose of my internship was to do an outstanding job and to be successful at it. The troubles I faced did not discourage me because I had felt people who surrounded me, helped me to become more self confident and focused on the details I was not. All this made me learn how to make customers to respond positively to my requests.

Consequently, the tasks I had to carry out at the host institution enabled me to learn and improve my skills in a foreign language and management. In addition, I cannot finish this section of the report without expressing my gratitude to my tutor, Mrs. Castillo, my colleagues and the whole of the staff at VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO for giving me all the support I needed in every circumstance. Those people made me keep a positive and optimistic attitude at work even during bad moments.

In contrast, the only aspect which bothered me was the fact every society has its own accent. Thus, when I tried to understand what people from different countries were saying, it was really confusing and difficult to get accustomed to new accents such as German, Irish, Polish, Swedish, Swiss and Welsh. At the beginning of my internship, I spent some minutes talking to tourists then, after some weeks, I could

finally understand, recognize and distinguish almost every accent and the country they were coming from.

Finally, I would like to say that I enjoyed the fact of being in touch with foreign people for three months. I never expected to work with foreign people in the same department speaking English. Even though, during this period of time, I got accustomed to their culture by talking with them, mostly everyday. Also, I liked the fact that English language can break down culture barriers which allowed me to be able to express and share my ideas with many tourists.

The personal and professional expectations I now have are based on the knowledge I got through the University of Los Andes and the jobs I have had. Universities can provide tools to students, but everything one can learn by working hard can not be answered in a test or in a quiz. The tools students really need in the professional field are found in the professional wild world. It is good to know that the useful experience or knowledge undergraduates can get is not only in books but outside them. The abilities or skills people can get in life can be enhanced through our studies and experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the host institution:

- a) Improve staff working operations. The director of hotel operations department should hire more employees in order to delegate all tasks the manager can not carry out, such as reception and administration at the same time. Thus, coordination and customer service could be more effective and improved.
- b) Improve security system. VENETUR HOTEL PRADO RIO security system does not provide enough confidence to customers and employees. HOTEL has not a place that guarantees safety and security when customers leave their luggage at Front-Office. Furthermore, this situation tends to get involved employees in disputes and troubles.
- c) Improve skills of staff. More employees should be trained in a basic mastery of English at least. It is really difficult to give the correct information and solve the problems of tourists when there are few people who speak English at the Hotel.

Recommendations to the School of Modern Languages:

- a) Promote seminars for International Organizations option. Most students feel discouraged when they see there is not any seminar where they can participate at the University. As a member of an international organization I recommend to promote at School of Modern Languages every year Gerenglob¹ and AJNULA² seminars at least.
- b) Revise the student organization profile for international organization option. Most of the time students feel that they spend their studies hearing from teachers that international organization option does not really provide students the appropriate skills for their professional profile. Consequently, this makes students not to be interested or have a certain position in the professional market and complete their studies with other degrees or specializations.
- c) Promote seminars where students can clarify and discuss their doubts, places and options for their internships. This could be done as a means to clarify where students can do their internship in an appropriate institution, place and field.

¹ Gerenglob is an organization specialized in coordination and promotion of seminars events related to technology, education, management, marketing and advertising.

² AJNULA (in Spanish: Asociación Juvenil de Naciones Unidas ULA) is an organization which promotes students from different degrees to participate in the model of United Nations.

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