

## **Flying High**

### **Interview with Dietrich Varaklis, Winner of the SIS Best Essay Award 2017**

*SIS Swiss International School awards an annual prize to the three best final assignments from graduating students who passed the Matura, Abitur or the International Baccalaureate (IB) exam.*

*In 2017, Dietrich Varaklis, who studied at the SIS Basel, won the SIS Best Essay Award and got offered a journey to Rio de Janeiro to explore the city and to visit the Escola Suíço-Brasileira (ESB). In his essay, Dietrich examined the development of the Erlenmattpark next to the SIS Basel and the impact that it had on the surrounding residents and nature. In Rio de Janeiro he was hosted by the family of Laura and Leticia Seeling de Brito, who did student exchanges at the SIS Basel some years ago.*

*Before his departure, he gave an interview to Walter Stooss, the principal of ESB Rio de Janeiro, sharing his experiences of his first visit to Brazil.*

WALTER STOOSS: Dietrich, the planning of the trip was a challenge, tell us about your adventure.

DIETRICH VARAKLIS: Planning a trip like this was a huge deal for me. This was the first time I would be travelling alone, without family or friends with me for the journey. After finally finding a possible set of days that I could go, and booking the tickets, it was time to wait and plan the rest of the trip. Little did I, my family, or anyone at ESB Rio de Janeiro know, that as a Canadian-American citizen, I needed a visa to enter the country. Luckily, I became aware of it five days before my departure and promptly made an application online, followed by multiple trips to the consulate in Zürich who could provide no help. After many sleepless nights, a thousand phone calls, and a whole lot of stress, I finally got my travel visa granted the day before departure.

STOOSS: You had an interesting week in Rio de Janeiro. What places and events did you like the most?

VARAKLIS: On the first day, I went with the Seeling de Brito family to the Sugarloaf Mountains and took the cable cars up to the top of both mountains; the view was incredible and it was an amazing first impression of what my trip would be like. Visiting the ESB Rio de Janeiro was super interesting and the people were unbelievably welcoming and friendly. I was amazed at the opulence of a Brazilian mall I visited, and had a lot of fun trying body surfing and fresco ball for the first time.

On Thursday, I hiked up to the top of Pedra Bonita on a perfect, cloudless day - we could not have asked for better weather for that hike. From the top, the view was outstanding, and the hike up was a lot of fun.

On Friday, I hiked all the way up to Corcovado to see the Christ the Redeemer statue. The hike up took about three hours, deep in the forest. Surrounded by nature, we sometimes got a peek at the beautiful views as we got higher and higher up the mountain. When we finally got to the top, the statue and the outlook over the city and the region around was breath-taking. Later that night, Leticia and her friends took me to the centre of town to hear the local artist, Rubel, perform in concert – it was great!

STOOSS: What are the main differences between Canada, your home country, Switzerland and Brazil?

VARAKLIS: The biggest difference for me was the nature and the beauty of the landscape. Everywhere you look, there are tropical trees and flowers with amazing colours, not to mention that the whole city is almost entirely surrounded by rainforest and beautiful beaches, a clear contrast to the landscape and foliage in both Canada or Switzerland. The impoverished areas of the city were also a distinct difference for me, something that one never sees in Switzerland or Canada.

STOOSS: What would you recommend for future visitors not to miss?

VARAKLIS: I would definitely go and hike up Corcovado; it is an amazing walk and the views from the top are really worth seeing. I would also recommend trying their very unique dining style. Go to an all you can eat barbeque where you have a red card and green card; the waiters come around and give you portions of exquisite grilled meats as long as you display the green card – what a concept!

STOOSS: As a passionate drone pilot you discovered a lot of places from the sky. How do you bring your hobby and your future job together?

VARAKLIS: I have enjoyed flying remote controlled planes, helicopters and even drones since I was ten years old. I enjoy flying because it gives a new perspective of the world that would be otherwise very difficult to experience. I brought a small drone to Brazil to fly with me wherever I went. The shots and videos I created with my drone while in Brazil were stunningly beautiful. They not only provided me with a great perspective, they also amazed all of my newfound Brazilian friends and other locals with perspectives that they had never before seen. I have always been fascinated by lift and flight, and flying drones both appeals to my love of nature photography, as well as provides me with ideas about designing an optimal flying machine.

STOOSS: Is there something else you would like to share?

VARAKLIS: I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Walter, very much for your help organising my trip and for the kindness and fun companionship you showed me while in Brazil. I would also like to thank SIS for awarding me with this amazing week in Brazil, and to Bernardo and Mariana for taking care of me on Tuesday. Most of all though, I would like to thank the Seeling de Brito family for hosting me for the week; they always made me feel welcome and went above and beyond to make my week with them amazing. They allowed me to feel at home and their hospitality and friendship made my stay so much better. I can't wait to go back.



*Dietrich's breath-taking aerial view of Rio de Janeiro*



*Brazilian culture night out with new friends*