Participant Newsletter
February 2011

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE CENTER
AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL

This newsletter is sent to all active participants in the American Immigration Council J-1 Training Program. Please review the information below and remember to always contact the Council if you have questions or concerns about your training program or non-immigrant status. If you are no longer participating in our program, please notify us. If you have a question for the Council, please do not reply to this message, but instead send your question to J1program@immcouncil.org.

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facebook

The International Exchange Center is on Facebook!

If you are already on Facebook, look up our page "**International Exchange Center**" and Like it.

The IEC page is updated frequently with interesting information including a city spotlight every other week and video tips and information. You can also use this space to connect with other trainees and interns in your area!

The IEC is launching a new video series called the "Monthly Minute" where we'll explore cultural oddities of each month in just about one minute! Is there a strange piece of American culture you'd like us to explore?? Let us know and we'll feature it next month!

Keeping Warm in Winter

As we are deep in winter's grip, it is important to remember to dress appropriately for the weather. This may seem obvious to some, but those from a warmer climate may be unfamiliar with how best to combat the cold weather.

The most important thing is to have a good winter coat. A heavy wool coat or a puffy down or microfiber coat will serve you well. It is also important to dress in layers. The more layers of clothing, the warmer you will be.

If you are in a snowy area, a pair of thick soled fleece lined boots will keep your feet nice and toasty!

EXCHANGE VISITOR OF THE MONTH

Q & A with Ricardo Ishida

Ricardo at Busch Stadium in St. Louis, MO.

Q. Were you excited to come to Illinois from Peru? What did you expect and how have your expectations been met?

A. Yes, as a Komatsu-Mitsui Maquinarias Peru executive distributor of Komatsu equipment in Peru, I was very excited to come to Komatsu America Mining Division Headquarter in Peoria, Illinois. From the beginning I expected to learn the Komatsu mining application tools and improve my field and sales experience.

Q. I would imagine that Illinois would be very different from Peru. What is the biggest difference to you? Are there any similarities?

A. At this moment the biggest difference is the winter weather because in my country and specifically in Lima, where I live, we don't have snow. Peoria definitely is colder than Lima.

Q. What is your favorite thing to do outside of your training?

A. Travel and assist to some events like Rock Concerts, I had the opportunity to go to some cities like Chicago.

Q. How do you find your experience so far?

A. Since my arrival in the United States I [have] had good hospitality from everybody I met. They helped me and [taught] me when I needed. Also my host company [...] is taking care of me in the best way during my stay in the country, for example giving me good accommodations.

Q. What has been your biggest surprise about the United States so far?

A. I've been in the United States before but this time I came here during the winter season. [...] How good the prevention system against the snow on roads surprised me a lot. This is an important issue during this season to prevent accidents.

Q. What do you think makes a successful J-1 Exchange Visitor?

A. Always try to do the best you can during the training!

Would you like to be featured as our next Exchange Visitor of the Month? Let us know what you are doing -- send us an email with your story and a picture to J1Program@immcouncil.org.

Where are our Trainees and Interns?

Ever wonder if there are other trainees or interns in your area? This map shows which states have exchange visitors. If you would like to go one step further and actually contact the other participants in your state just go to our Facebook page and start a discussion thread!

What to do with your Taxes

If you receive payment from your US host company as part of your J-1 internship or training, you will pay tax on all your earnings – just like you would in your home country. There are four types of tax - Federal Tax, State Tax, Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) Tax, and Local Tax. Federal Tax varies according to the level of your US income, while State Tax varies from 1% to 13% depending on where you're located. Forty-two US States have State Tax and ten of those also have Local Tax: a city or county tax that is deducted from your earnings.

FICA (Social Security and Medicare) taxes are 5.65% during 2011, but as a J-1 Visa holder you may not have to pay this tax. Many J-1 participants are incorrectly charged FICA taxes. At the end of the tax year, you are entitled to a refund of any taxes you've overpaid – including FICA, Federal, State and Local Tax. Depending on your nationality, you may also be able to claim a tax refund under international tax treaties, which are agreements between the US and other countries that allow you to claim tax you paid while working abroad.

Most J-1 Visa holders are considered non-residents for tax purposes. You would only be considered as a resident for tax purposes if you had been in the US for a certain amount of days during the last three years.

As a non-resident receiving compensation in the US, if you earn more than $3,650 in the US during 2010 US tax law requires you to file a tax return. If you don't file a tax return it can affect future visa applications to the US.

To file your US non-resident income tax return you need to use a 1040NR-EZ form. The form is not available in the US e-filing tax system so please be careful of tax companies that promise to speed up your tax return by filing it online – J-1 non-resident taxpayers cannot use this system. You can download the instructions at http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1040nre.pdf and the actual form at http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f1040nre.pdf. You may also want to refer to the IRS publication Tax Information for Visitors to the United States at http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p513.pdf.

The other document you need to apply for your US tax refund is your W-2 Form, This is the document you receive from your US host company at the end of the tax year. The W-2 outlines earnings and tax paid for the entire year.

If you want to claim your US tax refund but find the US tax system complicated, it's a good idea to use a tax professional who understands the system and can claim any money you're owed. Make sure to use a tax professional who understands non-resident income tax laws, such as Taxback.com or other companies that you may find by doing an internet search. Be sure to also look for independent reviews of the company you choose before registering with their service.

Contact Information

The best way to contact us with address changes, questions or suggestions is via email. Please send your message to J1program@immcouncil.org. We welcome any and all newsletter suggestions or comments.

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