

A Serene Swiss Experience

Before departure

During my first year at KTH, I realized my affinity for Plasma Physics and Nuclear Fusion. Thus, I was eager to expand my knowledge and explore the subjects a bit more. Upon researching a bit, I found that EPFL has the Swiss Plasma Center, which is well-reputed for fusion studies. Besides, I had always admired the natural beauty of Switzerland and hoped to travel there some day. With all these factors, I did not have to think twice before applying to EPFL. I had to do the requisite visa procedures and the exchange study dept. at KTH helped immensely with other formalities.

Upon arrival

Actually, I also was selected for a summer internship at EPFL. So, I reached Switzerland much before the fall semester started. I got some time to settle and familiarize myself with the city and the culture. There was an introduction event from EPFL and also an introductory session from the Physics section. The ESN and irrotationels (Physics club) there were also active in organising meet and greet events.



Financials

I received the Swiss mobility scholarship. That quantity alone would only be sufficient to survive about 2 months in Switzerland. It is an expensive place; everything is about 1.5 times the prices in Stockholm. You can try to save some money by managing the accommodation and travelling, e.g. buy a bike. Among all grocery outlets, LIDL is the one to look for if you want to save on groceries. Also, if you are a person who loves to eat outside, good luck :P

If you like travelling, make sure to check out some amazing offers from SBB (their SL).

Accommodation

Accommodation would take up the largest chunk of your finances, and it is difficult to find one. The best option is to start looking as soon as you can, and you must look on your own. There is an organization called FMEL, that is the best bet to find cheap housing, but there is a lot of competition there. Heads up to whoever is applying!



University and studies

EPFL is beautiful to say the least. It is simple and well-equipped, not so easy to find classrooms in the beginning. It has a wide range of subjects, and somehow manages to excel internationally in almost all of them. The studies in EPFL are quite rigorous. It is very different from KTH in the sense that it follows a semester pattern. And focussing on 7-8 subjects at a time becomes hectic if one is comfortable with the 2-3 courses per period pattern at KTH. I personally liked KTH's pattern better. I also took a French course, which was very interesting, It also helped me ease some load by earning credits from a non-technical subject.

Courses

As decided, I took up courses around Plasma physics. All the courses were very interesting, and the concept of oral examinations did ease some pressure. One other course I took related to particle accelerators provided me with an opportunity to visit CERN, which was very exciting. In the end, transferring the credits to KTH was straightforward. Beware of the fact that all the courses at EPFL are on an average about 3-4 credits. So, one ends up taking a lot of courses to complete the required criteria of at least 20 credits.

City and country

I really liked the Swiss culture. All the people are very friendly and helpful. They love their cheese, chocolate, and wine, what else does one want. With so many exchange students coming over to EPFL, it is a very lively and international place. Still, I would suggest learning some French because not everyone is good at English in general.

Leisure and social activities

There are innumerable things to do in Switzerland, no matter what genre. I loved hiking and Switzerland is a heaven for hikers. One just needs to incur the traveling costs. The best option is to find a group and stick to them. Also, I enjoyed the sports facilities at UNIL. They are paid but the cost is nominal. I preferred football, the ground is right beside the beautiful lake Geneva. The ESN is as expected, very enthusiastic and comes up with interesting events more often than not.

Other recommendations and observations

The medical insurance can be tricky for international students. Make sure to keep in touch with KTH for that. Overall, it was a great experience, academically and personally. Do take time out to visit the Swiss Alps and numerous other places, it is worth it!