EXCHANGE REPORT	Name	Year and term for exchange
	Albert Sund Aillet	Spring 2022
Exchange university		
EPFL		
Degree programme		
MSc Machine Learning		

Beautiful views and challenging studies in Switzerland

Before departure

I applied for an exchange because I wanted to try studying abroad, get to know another university than KTH and discover a new country. I wanted my exchange university to be a relatively well-known school and for it to be in a French-speaking country as I am half French. As I had already been to France a lot but never to Switzerland, EPFL was a perfect choice. I also had a good idea of what to expect as I had talked to some students from EPFL doing an exchange at KTH and I also have a high school friend who is studying his Bachelor's there. My expectations were to study and learn a lot and to discover a really beautiful country.

As I already speak fluent French, was vaccinated against covid-19 with three doses and have EU citizenship, there were no special preparations that needed to be made before entry.

Upon arrival

To get to Switzerland, I took the night train from Malmö down to Austria and then a train via Zurich to Lausanne. I got a pretty bad night's sleep but fantastically scenic views as a first impression. The first weeks an introduction to ESN (Erasmus student network) took place, which I participated in. It consisted of multiple activities to get introduced to Switzerland and to get to know other exchange students. When the start of your studies approaches, you should receive an email about these, and then it is important to buy a ticket as soon as possible because they can often disappear quickly.

Financials

For my studies in Switzerland, I received Erasmus+ from KTH. The standard of living is about the same as in Sweden, and the food, based on my experience, almost as expensive. However, this is perhaps due to the fact that I don't eat meat, had a box with food for lunch and dinner almost every day and usually shopped at Lidl/Aldi Suisse. There were a lot of small expenses in connection with becoming a resident of Switzerland and I only got my ID card during the exam period. Something else to consider is that the grocery stores in Lausanne close much earlier than in Sweden and very few stores are open on Sunday. I arrived on a Saturday night and learned this quickly.

I would also recommend getting the ESN card and the SBB half-fare travelcard pass. ESN has many fun events that are worth going to and if you want to discover Switzerland they have a good train network. When I was on the exchange, SBB had a special offer called Day Pass for Friends, for 80 CHF, 4 friends could go around the whole of Switzerland (by train and some ferries) on a selected day until 5 in the morning the following day. As Switzerland is not part of the EU, it is often the case that Swedish mobile subscriptions have expensive roaming prices or do not work at all. I took a mobile subscription called Swype, which only cost 15CHF per month and which included unlimited internet within the country.

Accommodation

The easiest way to get accommodation at EPFL is through FMEL, that has accommodations on campus. However, there is high competition for spots at FMEL and you usually get a place quite late, so I looked elsewhere and got a hold of an apartment with two rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom that I shared with another from my programme at KTH. The rent was 1600 CHF per month for both of us and it took about 30 minutes to get school.

University and studies

EPFL is roughly the same size as KTH. From the EPFL campus, there is fantastic view of the French Alps on the other side of Lac Léman. The premises are nice and there are many places to study even though the Rolex library is often full (the BC building was my favorite option). Like KTH, it is also a very international university at master's level and students are from many different parts of the world.

Courses

I chose 6 courses covering 26 ECTS. To me, taking 1 ECTS at EPFL feels roughly like taking 1.5 ECTS at KTH because the courses are usually worth 4 or 5 ECTS instead of 6 or 7.5 ECTS. Another difference between KTH and EPFL is that they have two semesters instead of four. This means that you take more courses in parallel. I liked studying according to the EPFL system because you always have something to do in a course and if you are tired of one course you can study another one instead. Of the 6 courses I took, 3 were project courses without an exam, 1 had an exam during the normal study period and 2 had an exam during the exam period. This meant that I had a rather intense end of the study period when all the projects had to be handed in, but a rather calm exam period with only 2 exams. At EPFL the system is also such that during the first two weeks you can pick and choose between the different courses to see what you want to take and how to minimize schedule conflicts. I thought it was really fun to take the courses and to discover the school because everything was new and exciting. The following is a list of the courses I studied.

CS-330 Artificial Intelligence: Basic course in Artificial Intelligence that was given in French and replaced the KTH course DD2380. This was the course I liked the least because it was an overview course that didn't go into depth on any of the topics covered in the course. The test writing included memorizing Python code that you had to write on paper. The exam for this course was during the study period.

CS-442 Computer Vision: Course on traditional methods in image analysis. The course had fun programming exercises and an exam during the exam period.

COM-490 Large-scale data science for real-world data: Course on the use of large distributed databases for data analysis. Extremely applied course that had a smaller project every two weeks and a larger final project. I really enjoyed the course and it was fun to work on the projects in groups.

CS-456 Artificial neural networks: Theoretical course that involved calculating gradients and learning steps for neural networks with pen and paper. The course had an exam and a project. I liked the course even though it was quite difficult.

CS-413 Computational Photography: Practical course that was almost only a group project and a small exam that you didn't have to study for if you had attended the lectures.

COM-480 Data visualization: Practical course that was just a group project. The project was very free and you have to have motivated group members for it to be a fun course. We were a group of three people, and we were two motivated students, so the project still went well.

City and country

Lausanne is a very nice city with museums, lake views and nature always close by. You can ride the subway through the city and the old part of town is hilly and cosy. Walking along or swimming in Lac Léman is an appreciated pastime for many, especially at the beginning of summer. For its size, Lausanne offers a lot and as there are multiple universities there are many students out. Switzerland is a great country to discover with several UNESCO World Heritage Sites and attractions within easy reach.

Leisure and social activities

In my spare time I wanted to explore the country so I took quite a few train trips with friends to discover different cities and locations. I also participated in the various events organized by ESN which could be tourist trips, train journeys through the country or paintball with other exchange students. Another event that was really fun to be part of was [Balélec](#) where the whole campus turns into a festival and great French and Swiss artists performed. It was the first time that the event was organized after the covid-19 pandemic since 2020, but normally this is every spring. Otherwise, I went to the campus gym, which only cost CHF 45 per semester, much cheaper than anything you could find in Sweden.

Sustainability

I could travel by train all the way to Switzerland with Snälltåget, ÖBB and SBB. On my way home after the exchange, I took an Interrail ticket and travelled through Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark and Norway. When traveling around the country Switzerland has a great train network which I recommend making use of. On campus they have a system where all food that is sold should be distributed in a certain kind of container that is not thrown away but handed in after you are done against a deposit, so that no single-use plastic containers are thrown away. Every week there is a vegetarian day when all restaurants on campus sell only vegetarian dishes.

Other recommendations and observations

[Link](#) to EPFL's official info for exchange students.
[Link](#) to EPFL's tips for finding accommodation.