



Exchange study experience in EPFL

Before departure

EPFL has 30 spots for semester exchange in EECS department. Since I am a first-year master's student, the nomination of exchange is determined by the grades of P1 and P2. Once I got nominated, I started to look at the course list of EPFL and also the housing of Lausanne. The formal application system of EPFL closes on April 15, and the offer will be sent in late May. Currently, exchange students from the Schengen area don't need to apply for a visa to enter Switzerland, so it is pretty convenient.

Upon arrival

The first thing when arriving in Switzerland is to register in your commune to obtain a residence permit in Switzerland. Once you have the attestation of registration in your commune, you can open the bank account. It would be useful to bring some photos to apply for the Swisspass and the residence permit.

Financials

The live spending in Lausanne is generally way more expensive than in Stockholm. The house rent varies from 500CHF to 1000CHF, and the average expense of a single dining out is from 20-40CHF, for the restaurants or food trucks on campus, the price would be 8-15CHF. Conclusively the monthly living cost is about 1500CHF-2500CHF. Exchange students can get the SEMP scholarship which is 1900CHF in total, and that can reduce a bit of the financial pressure. Normally I would prefer to eat in the restaurants on campus or cook myself, which could save a lot of money.

Accommodation

Getting a promising place to stay in Lausanne is pretty tricky and difficult. EPFL doesn't guarantee the housing of students, so it is essential to start finding a house even before officially admitted by EPFL. The biggest accommodation provider is FMEL, and getting a house from it pretty much depends on luck, so you need to refresh the page regularly and wait for the houses to be released. Luckily I got a single room in FMEL Rainbow, the rent is 630CHF. Rainbow is 500m from a bus stop, it takes about 20min to the campus.

University and studies

In EPFL, I selected courses of 29 ECTS, because it is demanded by KTH to select 30 ECTS during the exchange semester. However, the workload of EPFL will be much larger than KTH. For example, the course Model Predictive Control is 4 ECTS in EPFL, while it is 7.5 in KTH. The campus is not located in the city center, but there is a metro station on the campus, and I can take a bus directly to the campus, so it is not that inconvenient. EPFL campus is larger than KTH, near Lake Geneva, and shares a large sports center with its neighbour UNIL. Normally students go to the library which is Rolex Learning Center for studying, but it can be quite crowded on weekdays, so I would prefer studying in the lab where I conducted my semester projects. The good thing about this famous university is that it is really rich in research resources, you can easily check the websites of all the labs in the university through the main page, and most of them provide research opportunities like semester projects or master thesis. Thus I would recommend those who are willing to do some research to come here.

Courses

The course selection system opens in the first two weeks, you can enrol or withdraw any number of courses during this time. After that, you still have the chance to just drop courses, which means it won't appear on your transcripts. To reduce a bit of the pressure, I took the French summer intensive course, which is 3 ECTS. Actually it is really fun to take a french course where you can meet many exchange students and new master students from all over the world, and it is pretty beginner-friendly. The other courses I took are the CS-430 Intelligent Agents, which is 6 ECTS, EE-556 Mathematics of Data, which is 6 ECTS, and EPFL-301 specific projects for exchange students of 14 ECTS. CS-430 is mainly about multi-agent decisions, which give some introduction to reinforcement learning and game theory, it is combined with Java program exercises and mid and final exams. It is actually a pretty theoretical course, and the professor would connect many of the contents to its application in society, like auctions, negotiation, and voting. For EE-556, it is a pretty math-intense course, which teaches optimization in machine learning and data science. It can be hard but I think if you are interested in similar topic and would like to strengthen yourself in this aspect, I would really recommend it. The course consists of 3 labs by jupyter notebook, and one written exam, the labs occupy 5/6 of the total grades. For the semester project, I selected the special course for exchange students, which means you can discuss with your supervisor how many credits you want to get from this project, so it is quite flexible. I was doing a project in lab LTS4 with the topic of graph learning in epilepsy classification, and we got some quite nice results in the end. It is worth mentioning that in order to find a semester project, you must contact the lab in advance, for me I searched the labs and sent an application during the start of August, while the semester starts on Sept. 17. Besides, if you would like to do the master thesis in EPFL, I recommend finding a semester project that said to be able to extend to a thesis, so it can be easier to make a deal with the professor on this.

City and country

Lausanne is the fourth biggest city in Switzerland, and it is just near Lake Geneva while crossing it will be Evian, France. The city is not large but is famous for its scenery. I would recommend the half-fare card and the month pass for SBB traffic. The half-fare card would allow you to travel to any place in Switzerland at anyway with half price, which could save lots of money. For example, the nearest IKEA is not in Lausanne, you need to take the train for about 30 minutes. Lausanne is a city of knowledge and sports, for first it is renowned for EPFL and UNIL, for second it is also where the committee of the Olympics is located, as well as many other famous sports leagues. If you want to travel to other cities, even other European countries, it is a good choice to depart from Lausanne. It takes only 1 hour from Lausanne to Geneva Airport and 3 hours to Zurich. It is also pretty close to some French and Italian cities, like Lyon or Milan.



The mountains from the view of my room window



Lake side from Lausanne



Lake side from Geneva

Leisure and social activities

When I arrived in the summer, I attended the ESN welcome week for exchange students, it was really fun. There were many interesting sports games, and other activities like visiting the Grandvaux, a famous region that produces great wine. ESN will also provide activities every week, and there are discounts for exchange students. As I mentioned, Lausanne is convenient for travelling, so I travelled a lot during my stay here. I went to Montreux, it is close to Lausanne and it has a very famous spot called Le Château De Chillon. I also went to Zurich to make a visit to ETHZ for Einstein's locker. I once took the train for 7 hours to München in Germany and also flew two hours to Barcelona in Spain. Except for travelling, I registered for tennis at the sports center, so I often go there and play tennis with others.



A mountain near Montreux



Le Grandvaux

Sustainability

Just like Sweden, Switzerland also have regulations for recycling, they would even care about different kinds of plastic bottles. Another interesting thing is that the normal garbage bags are called tax bags, which you need to pay 1 CHF for each. It is quite expensive, but it can also prevent people from producing too much waste. Moreover, I would use some reusable bags for shopping instead of plastic bags, and try to go by bike instead of other transportation.