



EXCHANGE REPORT

Name

Year and semester for
exchange

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Winter 2023/24

Exchange university

Czech Technical University in Prague

Degree programme

MSc Sustainable Urban Planning and Design

Magical Prague: diverse cultural exposure and great social life.

Before departure

I applied for exchange studies because I wanted to experience a new city with a different student life to explore, learn, and develop personally and academically. I chose the Czech Republic because it is centrally located in Europe and the fact that the living expenses are relatively cheaper than in Stockholm. Furthermore, I have heard great things about Prague as a magical and beautiful city. I chose Czech Technical University in Prague (CTU) because of its engineering focus, the large range of courses, and its great Erasmus Student Network. Before departure, I expected to jump straight in and immerse myself in a new culture, make new friends, receive a different body of knowledge, and have fun. The preparations before departure were not a lot as the international coordinators at KTH and CTU made the transition an easy administrative process.

Upon arrival

I arrived two weeks before the orientation week. Orientation is one week, followed by the start of classes. Arriving early was good to ease into the new city and environment. You miss the rush of signing into the dormitories and you can attend various Erasmus events that are planned from the start of the month. There were a few cards that I had to get upon arrival. Firstly, the student card also known as the ISIC card. Which is like a physical Mecenat card, that provides various student discounts in Prague and across various EU countries. Furthermore, it serves as your access card to campus buildings, and student housing and can be used to purchase food at the campus cafeterias. Secondly, you can get an ESN card that allows free access to Erasmus events and discounts for paid events. The one-week orientation hosts a variety of events for new exchange students at CTU. These included day trips, parties, introduction presentations, and walking tours. At the introduction presentation, all exchange students gather in a lecture room and are informed about the various facets of exchange from rules and regulations, how to register for courses, who to contact, list of student unions and clubs. The university and dormitory provide various events to ease you into the new environment, create social connections as well as prepares you for the academic semester ahead.

Financials

I received the Erasmus scholarship during the exchange period. This was very helpful to cover the cost involved in moving to a new city, however, note that it most likely won't be enough to support the entire exchange semester. Fortunately, I also received a monthly stipend from the Swedish Institute Scholarship which helped cover all my monthly expenses. CTU also provided a small accommodation scholarship which is also helpful. In general, Prague is relatively much cheaper than Stockholm. In conjunction with the multiple student discounts, your money can go a long way. In Prague, I experienced that student accommodation rent, food, public transport, and leisure activities are 40%

cheaper than in Stockholm. This is however based on one's lifestyle and needs, so I urge you to do the necessary research. There were some fees that I did not expect, such as the international student union, Erasmus network, and accommodation deposit fees. Prague uses a mixture of cash and cards so it's always handy to keep cash on you. I continued to use my Swedish bank account, however, I heard it was easy to set up a Czech bank account if you wish.

Accommodation

I received accommodation in a student dormitory provided by the university. The university provided guidance and assistance during the application process. Bear in mind there is an application fee, and you will have to pay a deposit before your arrival to secure your accommodation. The university provided various types of dormitory housing at various locations. I stayed 5 minutes' walking distance from campus which was great. I stayed in Sinkuleho Kolej (dormitory). Most of the university accommodations are in a dormitory setup, which means you will share a room with at least one person, sometimes more. In my case I shared a room with one roommate, the room was simple with a bed, a small cupboard, and a desk with a chair. There is a common kitchen, washrooms, and showers provided on each floor. In the beginning, I was not keen to stay in a dormitory as it was very different from the room, privacy, and privileges that I had in Stockholm. However, after some time I got used to the conditions and my roommate was cool, so I managed just fine. I guess being adaptable to a new situation is always good for building character. The accommodation was half the price that I was paying in Stockholm. The dormitory also had common areas for hanging out, table tennis, a gym, laundry facilities, and a multimedia room. The social life at the dorm was very good as they hosted various parties and events throughout the semester.

University and studies

My chosen university provided a comprehensive selection of exchange course options for my field of study. The exchange agreement for my KTH department with CTU was within the Faculty of Civil Engineering. This meant that I had to take a certain percentage of credits from the Faculty of Civil Engineering and had the option to choose courses from other faculties. In total, I took 30 credits. All my courses were offered in English, and you had the option to choose a language course as part of your credits. There were a few differences between the academic and learning styles between KTH and CTU. The academic calendar is different. The delivery of course content is more of a traditional lecture approach with slides being present and time for questions afterwards. There are no breaks every 45mins nor were there any seminar readings, discussions, or peer review formats of learning for the theory course. However, there was a similar studio environment for design courses. There are no periods it is one continuous semester. Another big difference was the number of courses I took, unlike KTH which has big credit courses where you take a few courses per semester, at CTU I took a fair number of small credit courses. Which can be overwhelming with the diversity of knowledge, scheduling, and submissions. Although a relatively different learning style to KTH I felt that it was a manageable and a fruitful learning experience.

Courses

During the semester I took 6 courses with a total of 30 credits. All my courses were from the Civil Engineering Faculty. My criteria for choosing courses were to continue my design studio focus from SUPD and supplement this with more technical knowledge. Thus, I took the following courses.

Experimental Studio of Urban Design (127ESUD) – 7 credits

This was a studio course. For the project, we worked as a group of 6 students to develop an overall vision to revitalize an existing quarry site. From which we each individually developed a smaller part. The studio was great to work together and have open discussions about the design and the process. Most of the students in the class have different backgrounds so you are allowed the opportunity to develop a design in that respect. The course was completed with an A3 design booklet submission.

Spatial Planning and Public Infrastructure (127SPPI) – 4 credits

The primary focus was on Prague's planning system, regulations and policy. This was great to understand the planning landscape from high-level policies to applicable design and implemented projects. The course was delivered through content-heavy lecture slides which were very informative and detailed. For the course assessment, we had to do 3 presentations and a poster. The first presentation was a personal introduction to your home city. The second and third presentations and the poster were for the project. The project was to revitalise an existing urban space in Prague using the tools methods and components taught throughout the semester.

Sewer Systems (144SESY) – 3 credits

A technical theory course about the underlying water infrastructure in our cities. You will receive a good introduction to the different processes and elements of water management- from sewer systems, blue-green infrastructure, sustainable sanitation, and ecologies of water streams. The content is primarily delivered through lectures as well as supplemented with various interesting site visits. The final assessment for the course was an examination – which was on general questions from the lecture slides.

Geographic Information Systems (155GISE) – 6 credits

This was a good course for a beginner to ArcGIS. The course had a theory component and a practical component. Thus, you receive a good understanding of the body of knowledge behind cartography and GIS elements. The practical tutorials teach you how to navigate the software and run various analysis and processing tools. The course is evaluated with an exam on the theoretical components.

Sustainable Landscape and Water Management (143SLWM) – 6 credits

This was a unique course in terms of its methodology. It consisted of both a theory and a practical component. The course was structured around your chosen project area, which was done in pairs. The task was to understand how land use change over time affects the landscape and water of your chosen region. To do this analysis we used ArcGIS. Thus, the theory and the practical were constantly well integrated and tested throughout the course. One does require some ArcGIS knowledge to do the tasks, which you are taught throughout the practical tutorials. The final assessment was a presentation about how, why, and when the land use changes occurred- this was supported by maps and research.

Civil Engineering in Developing Countries (124EDC) – 4 credits

The course is structured around creating change in developing countries. There was a lecture series about working in the context, field, and implementing built projects in developing countries. In parallel to this we had a group project to design a school. In my group, we were 4 students tasked to design a school in Madagascar. The course is more demanding than the credits provided. As a group, we needed to think of multiple facets that would make a school possible. This included understanding the traditional building materials and construction techniques, local customs, transport logistics, designing of the school, program that responds to the community needs. Furthermore, we had to consider the necessary infrastructure, potential funding, and construction management to bring the school to fruition. The final assessment was a presentation, a poster, and an A3 booklet.

City and country

Prague is a magical city. The scale, accessibility, mixed public transport infrastructure, and diverse cultures make it a unique experience. There were always events happening on campus or in the city so there was a continuous good charm and vibe. In winter it snowed for a few days and was not too cold, it does rain often and there are strong winds. I would say I experienced small accents of Czech culture from observing people in public to meeting people in my residence. The Czech people I engaged with are very open and eager to get to know you and invite you over for food and a drink.

Leisure and social activities

In my spare time, I socialised with friends at various types of gatherings from residence parties, to campus coffee, and visited pubs and clubs. Prague has a great nightlife culture. I also tried to travel as much as I could on the weekends so that was great. Prague is well located in Europe to travel to the surrounding countries. CTU offers a wide variety of sports and culture opportunities that can be completed for credits. The CTU International Student Council holds various events throughout the semester which is great to meet other exchange students. There is also a strong and active Erasmus network across the various universities in Prague. The Sinkuleho residence also had a student community that held various types of events. Thus, it's fair to say there are many and a variety of leisure and social opportunities during the exchange semester.

Sustainability

In the beginning, I looked for travel routes to Prague via train, however, it was not practical, so I chose to fly. In general, "sustainability practices" are not as evident and practiced in Prague as it is in Stockholm. For example, there is hardly any solid waste separation or the pant system.

Other recommendations and observations

I would recommend staying on campus as it makes life so much easier. There are many student dormitories within walking distance from the campus so you have a few options that can meet your criteria. Some courses have the option to be completed before Christmas, I chose to finish all my courses at this time, however, bear in mind that you will most likely have 2 full weeks of submissions and deadlines. This can be intense, but it is manageable. I would take a few essential kitchen items as the common kitchen does not have anything for common use. I would make sure you have a good starting capital as there are a lot of payments needed at the beginning such as the dormitory deposit and the various student union registrations and cards needed. Prague was a unique experience that pushed me outside of my comfort zone which is very rewarding when I managed to adapt, gain new knowledge, and build good relationships.