

**Exchange university**

Instituto Superior Técnico

Degree programme

Civil Engineering

'A fun, adventurous, and interesting semester abroad'

Before departure

After moving to Sweden for my masters, going on exchange wasn't immediately something I was thinking about. However when there was a lecture particular for international people to go abroad I choose to attend this lecture. After hearing some stories from people who went abroad I started to think about it. A short escape from the Swedish winter sounded quite nice. I did some research and choose to apply for Instituto Superior Técnico in Lisbon. I have never been to Lisbon before and I thought it would be nice to experience the culture and live there for a while. Furthermore, the university had an exchange program with Civil Engineering so I needed to choose 51% of the courses related to this program. I was a bit afraid that they might be too difficult for me but I was also excited to broaden my horizon. To prepare for the exchange I tried to learn Portuguese with Duolingo and I applied for housing.

Upon arrival

I arrived one week before the introduction weekend of the university to explore the city and move in to my new room. The introduction weekend was something you could sign up for and included several activities to get to know other students and the city. I really enjoyed this weekend and got to know many people. First, there was an introduction from the master programme and after that everyone was divided into groups, consisting of around 10 students and a mentor. The mentor was an older student who gave a tour around campus and helped the whole semester with all the questions you had. Through this group I met the first people and we stayed in touch during the semester. In the campus tour we were also introduced to different sport teams you could join. The introduction weekend consisted of a welcome dinner, day trip, beverage tour and city walk. Furthermore, there were a lot of activities and parties organized by the organizations ESN (Erasmus Student Network) and ELL (Erasmus Life Lisboa) to get to know people. I met almost all of my friends in this weekend.

Financials

I received the Erasmus scholarship (70% before the semester started and 30% after), which was a total of around €2400. This scholarship is meant for student that study abroad and is something you need to apply for. Compared to Sweden, the living costs were much cheaper. However, since I also wanted to explore the country I spend almost the same as I would spent in Sweden. During the campus tour I bought an AEIST membership, with which you could have several discounts. During the campus tour there was a good offer where you got the membership and a goodie bag with a sweater, t-shirt, mug and more for 25 euros. Since eating out was quite cheap, I ate a lot outdoors. To save costs you could also eat at the university, which was very cheap (€3 for dinner including soup, dessert and drink). I did this several times and they had often quite good food. They also offered lunch but I never had that since I often ate lunch at home. For transportation, I bought a monthly subscription for €30 with which I could travel with all the public transportations in the area of Lisbon (including Cascais and Sintra). This was very convenient, however, it took some time to apply for it due to the long waiting queues (you needed to fill in a form at certain metro stops). If you were below 23, the monthly card was only €20 and I think from this year on even free. Furthermore I often used the Bolt/Uber which was also a very cheap way of transportation.

Accommodation

I needed to find accommodation by myself, there was no help provided by the university. Since the housing market in Lisbon is tight and expensive, this was quite hard. However, I knew someone who went on Erasmus in Lisbon before and she recommended me the organization Houze. This is an organization that has several student houses in Lisbon, close to every University. Since I was studying at the campus on Alameda, I choose one of the houses close by. I lived in a corridor with 10 students with which I shared the kitchen, living room and bathrooms. My room was completely furnished and I paid €575 per month. I thought this was quite expensive, but when asking around I think this was about the average that (international) students pay. The service of the housing organisation was very good and once a week there was a cleaning lady cleaning the common areas. When something was wrong they answered quickly and fixed it.

University and studies

Técnico is a technical university and therefore they primarily offered technical studies. Since I had an exchange within the civil engineering program, I followed some civil engineering courses. The courses were quite different from what I was used to in my master Sustainable Urban Planning and Design, however they weren't too difficult. I had almost every day lectures, however only a few hours so I had much spare time. All my courses were offered in English, which I checked before. I also followed the Portuguese language course provided by the University.

Courses

I choose my courses according to the once offered on the website of the University. I followed the courses Planning and Management of Urban Mobility (PGMU), Construction and Real Estate Economics (EClmo) and Environmental and Land Use Planning (PBOT) from the master Civil Engineering. Every course was valued for 6 ECTS, resulting in 18 ECTS. This was more than 51% of my credits needed, namely 30 ECTS, and therefore approved by Técnico. Besides these courses I choose beforehand two courses from the master Territorial Management and Urban Studies which was very linked to my master at KTH. However, when arriving at the University, I found out that this master didn't exist anymore. This was quite stressful for me since I needed to look for other courses which didn't overlap with my other courses and weren't too technical. Luckily I met someone who was in the integrated master's programme of Architecture and introduced me to some of those courses. In the end I choose to follow one course from the architecture master, Architecture in Informal Cities (ACInf), and the Portuguese language course provided by the University. These courses were also valued for 6 ECTS each and were an interesting contribution to the other courses. I choose the courses due to my interests and I enjoyed every course. The architecture course included a large project work throughout the semester which was interesting but, due to the lacking of much strict deadlines, to doing most of the work last minute. Since I didn't follow courses in architecture before I wasn't used to working with certain concepts and programs. However, due to working with other students I learned to work with them. The Planning and Management of Urban Mobility course I followed in the first period and it included one individual report and exam. The report consisted of the study of two streets in Lisbon. I needed to visit the streets and make drawings in AutoCad. I liked this course since my teacher knew much about the topic and I learned to look at streets differently, including the drainage systems and the level of services of the streets. I was very excited about the Construction and Real Estate Economics course since I always wanted to know more about this. I followed this course in the second period and the course consisted of two projects, an analysis of the current housing market in an area in Lisbon and a cost and benefit analysis of the construction of a new metro line. Besides the projects, there was also a final exam. I learned a lot in this course and really liked the teachers. The course Environmental and Land Use Planning I also followed in the second period. The course was only on Friday and due to all the Portuguese holidays, I didn't have many lectures. Part of the course consisted of field trips throughout Lisbon showing the green infrastructure of the city. I enjoyed this very much since I went to places I would otherwise never visit. Besides these trips, we had a group work where we needed to look into one Ecosystem service in a specific green space in the city. The process of the group work was evaluated by weekly feedback provided on Miro and in the end we had a

final presentation. The Portuguese language course was a nice variety from my other courses. I received an email in the beginning of the Semester that I could apply for it for €75 and, with approval of my home university, receive 6 ECTS. After contacting KTH, I got the approval to do it for credits and I choose to follow it. I had this course twice a week until the Christmas break in the evening and learned the basics of the language. Due to the small classes these classes were very informal and fun. I tried to practice in my spare time and it was nice to understand more and more throughout the semester. I will receive a certificate from the University of Lisboa, which can be transferred to 6 ECTS at KTH.

City and country

Lisbon is a very interesting city to live in. It has a rich history which is visible all over the city. What I really liked was the live music on every street corner, in bars and restaurants, ranging from the traditional fado to pop music. Furthermore, Portugal has a culture of eating out and has therefore plenty affordable good restaurants, which often serve fresh fish. However, what was quite a shock for me was the amount of homeless people. In every street you walked there was almost someone laying on the street or sleeping in a tent. I thought this was quite hard to see since I am not used to seeing that in such an amount. Furthermore, there were also some areas (e.g. Martin Monez) were I didn't wanted to walk alone because it felt unsafe. After going to a bar I almost always choose to go home by Bolt/Uber, which was very cheap but also necessary because I didn't feel comfortable walking.

Leisure and social activities

I played once a week padel with people from my mentor group. This was due to the AEIST membership very cheap. The courts were next to the University and therefore also close to my place. The university offers a variety of sports, however I had a hard time finding out when these activities take place. When I didn't receive the emails about the trainings that they said I would I gave up on joining one of the sport teams. In the beginning of the semester I spent most of my spare time going to one of the beaches. I tried to learn surfing, which was offered by plenty of organizations with many good deals for students. However, after the first time I realized this was not something for me and I preferred to watch. This is also something I did at Nazaré which was one of the many day trips I have made. Close to Lisbon there are many towns/places you can visit and I choose to do this as much as possible in the weekends. When the raining season started I visited some of the museums in Lisbon. Lisbon has various good museums and cultural heritage that you can visit.

Sustainability

Since Lisbon is quite far away, I needed to travel by plane which was not the most sustainable option. In the beginning of the semester when it was warm, I lived quite sustainable since I was living on the shadow side and I didn't need to have a ventilator to realize a comfortable indoor climate. However, when it got colder, I needed a heater in my room due to the poorly isolated building. This was also an issue in the university. Since I was living close to the university I walked and didn't needed to use the metro. However, if I wanted to go to the city or visit a friend I needed to take the metro or the bus. In my experience, the university didn't encourage sustainability very much and one of my teachers didn't even believe in climate change. Especially in comparison to Sweden, I think the focus on sustainability is lacking in the everyday life in Lisbon.

Other recommendations and observations

I would recommend to apply early for housing, since this is quite hard to find. There are several organizations and I would recommend, for example Houze or Shelter10. Since you often need to pay high deposits and there are many scams, I would recommend to read the reviews before and get in touch with someone who stayed there. I wouldn't recommend to live close to Martin Monez. However, you should definitely go there to enjoy some good and affordable food! I would recommend to go to the oriental market, where you can eat very good Asian food or the hidden Chinese. One of my favourite

places to go was one of the viewpoints which was not so known by tourists and where you could enjoy a coffee or a beer, this place is called Simos and they sometimes have live music.