

Travel Report

My exchange experience at Università della Svizzera italiana

Kaixuan Xie

KTH Royal Institute of Technology Architecture



Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio, the Academy of Architecture of Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI), is my first choice for my exchange semester due to the variety of courses they offer and their reputation in architecture education. I chose AAM because it is one of the top architecture schools in Switzerland. I believe I will benefit significantly from this exchange experience and would be able to apply this to my future career. The architecture courses offered in this programme are specifically in line with my professional goals. The mandatory study abroad semester provides a great grounding in which to further experience divergent cultures and exchange knowledge. I find Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio a suitable place for this exchange opportunity. Additionally, USI has offered language course for every student from which I benefited a lot.

The Mendrisio Campus is closed to the heart of the old town in Mendrisio, which is well-equipped with library and model rooms. I found that the library of the academy is almost the biggest library in terms of architecture and art books which is of great help when you need to write an essay. And you

can request the book from the library that is not in stock. I lived in Casa dell'Accademia during my exchange which is better than I expected. The building itself is designed by Ticino architect and is located on a sloping site which at walking distance to the academy. The shared space in the apartment was intended for more communication opportunities for the students live here and we did get to know each other better during the dinners and discussions.

The teaching methods at AAM-USI is more controlled compared to my previous study in KTH. Students here would get more specific directions and the tutors has a certain expectation for the quality of the work. In my opinion this is essential for students to grasp the subject in a higher level. I also took the A1 Italian Course before the semester and get a certificate but didn't really finish my A2 Course during the semester due to the workload of other courses. Still, I think no matter you are a full-time student or exchange student, you will always get to know better the Italian culture and basic language from the Italian courses. Also, considering the location of Mendrisio is very close to Italy, it is also helpful if you are planning to travel in Italy especially the southern areas that barely speak English.

As for free time and social activities in the region, during my stay in Mendrisio, I paid several visits to Italy since it only takes an hour train from Mendrisio to Milan. Also, it was very convenient for architectural study travel and sightseeing in Switzerland, like the castle in Bellinzona, the mountain area in Chur.

Before the semester actually started, I already got the opportunity to meet and get to know the other students who was studying or would study in Mendrisio in the Italian course and the other welcome activities organised by the academy, for example the short trip to Lugano LAC. These welcoming activities made me familiar with the academy and Mendrisio in very short time. The staff of International relations and Study abroad Service are always very responsive and happy to help. I always get the response I needed and I truly appreciate their effort to help the incoming students to accommodate the life in Mendrisio.

I believe the study in Mendrisio is a big advantage because almost all the faculty here are all experienced architects in Switzerland from whom you can always learn from as well as the Ticino architecture traditions. The studios here are more specifically guided in a certain direction and it is also kind of challenging to get used to the study pace here. But it is worthwhile overall and a great experience both for academic and personal aspects.