



Exchange Semester at EPFL

Innan avresa

I applied for the exchange semester in order to exploit the opportunity that KTH brings you to get to know a different country and different culture, while experiencing other universities and teaching methodologies. I personally focused my exchange semester on my studies and on improving my CV, so my motivation was to go to a better university (at least in the rankings) in order to do that. Swiss universities are top 5 in Europe and I chose the EPFL in Lausanne instead of the ETH Zürich because the subjects at EPFL were more appealing to me during that fall semester. I expected a high workload and a challenging experience regarding my studies, since everyone told me that Swiss universities have a very high standard, so in my opinion you need to know clearly your objectives and be highly motivated before undergoing a semester at EPFL. I did a French intensive course during August, both for integrating better in the culture and meeting new people and for getting those 3 extra ECTS that can save you in case you fail some subject in the future. I highly recommend it. No visas are required if you are European, although you need to go to the population office as soon as possible to notify your arrival.

Ankomst

Switzerland lifestyle and culture are not that different from the Swedish one, so within a couple weeks you will already feel comfortable in the country. There are plenty of ESN events like dinners, parties or ski trips where you can sign up for, which are really useful to meet new friends and get to know the country a bit more. You can also sign up for the 3 week French intensive course right before starting the semester in order to meet people, since all of them will be international students and those 3 weeks will help you to get used to the city, public transport, making a bank account and a SIM card...

Ekonomi

You will get the Movetia Scholarship (the equivalent to Erasmus in Switzerland) with about 1900 CHF. Switzerland is the most expensive country in Europe, so you need to have in mind that you'll need around 1000-1500 CHF/month depending on how much you pay for accommodation, which will range between 550 and 1000 CHF/month. The most expensive things are the meat and having beers or food in the city, although there are some bars where you can find beer around 4-5 CHF during the happy hour. Public transport is around 55 CHF/month if you live near the city centre (area 1 and 2). Regarding tips, the Denner supermarket at the EPFL campus is one of the cheapest ones, and there are plenty of restaurants inside the campus where you can have lunch with the Camipro card (the EPFL one) for 8 CHF. There are no compulsory fees in the university.

Boende

Accommodation is one of the biggest problems in Switzerland. You have to sign up in the FMEL website when the registration for accommodation opens. Be aware that when I signed up it was opened for 24h and they closed it because they had too many applications. When we opened the website, the server collapsed and we had to check every hour if it was working until we were able to sign up, do not forget

the deadline. In case you do, you can also find rooms through Facebook or other websites but it's even more expensive. Despite signing up successfully to the accommodation list, they don't guarantee that you'll get a room, so you may find yourself without any place to stay within 20 days to start the semester, as it happened to me. If you are in that situation, I highly recommend to go to Lausanne 1 week or 10 days before you need to start and go to the FMEL office to ask if they have spare rooms. I did that and I got a studio for 930 CHF/month (a bit expensive but you don't have many alternatives, so if they offer you a room, get it). There are some people that called to the FMEL office and they offered them a room (that didn't happen to me despite I called several times), there is people that got a room within a week and people that didn't get a room, the process is random and you need to be lucky.

Universitetet och studierna

The university campus is pretty big with a lot of different buildings interconnected, it will take a bit of time to know where each classroom is (download the app). They do have most of the engineering and if they don't have yours (in my case they didn't have Medical Engineering per se) you can choose subjects from similar engineering if your programme allows it. Most of the teachers are top researchers within the field, best teaching level I've seen so far. If you have 30 ECTS, your day will have around 6 hours of lectures per day more or less, plus the extra time you'll have to stay in the university with your classmates doing group projects. They offer language courses in many different languages, but at least at a master level, the teaching is done mostly in English.

Kurser

Since they don't have Medical Engineering, I chose courses from Bioengineering and Materials Sciences, which could perfectly be in the study plan of Biomedical Engineering (Biomaterials, Sensorimotor Neurprothetics, Stem Cell Technology, Flexible Bioelectronics...), so you are free to choose courses from other engineering. Most of the courses are between 2 and 4 ECTS so doing 30 ECTS will mean to handle around 8 courses at the same time. Some of them have a reasonable workload but others have group projects apart of the exams that take an insanely amount of time during the semester, so try to not have many of those (Flexible Bioelectronics is one of those). I recommend to do some extra credits at KTH or to do some language courses prior the semester, in order to reduce the workload and to make sure you have some spare credits in case you fail something at EPFL (you don't have re-exams and you need a 4 out of 6 to pass). Doing between 20 and 25 ECTS would be ideal.

Staden och landet

Apart from the language you won't experience any cultural clash if you come from Europe. Swiss people are friendly and respectful. EPFL has a lot of international students so you will meet tons of people in the same situation as you.

Fritid och sociala aktiviteter

EPFL has a sports centre with a lot of different sports you can sign in, for a very low price. You can also swim in the lake in summer, which is awesome, and the winter is not as cold and dark as in Sweden. There are ski trips organized by the ESN but you can also take a train and go on your own since the slopes are close. Lausanne is a small city compared to Stockholm but nevertheless it has all that you need. Unfortunately, once the semester starts you won't have much free time to do extra activities.

Rekommendationer och övriga reflektioner

Switzerland is a beautiful country, you have tons of places to travel to and hikes to do during summer and spring, and you can ski and do lots of winter activities the rest of the year. However, you need to know that Swiss universities means hard work, so my advice is to have well defined objectives for the semester if you consider to go to EPFL or ETH. Despite that, I personally learnt way more than I expected within 6 months and it was a really valuable experience as engineer.