

EXCHANGE REPORT

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Year and semester for exchange: Autumn Semester 2024

Exchange university: UPC (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya)

Degree programme: Civil and Architectural Engineering

Before Departure

I wanted to do an exchange because I had already spent an exchange year in Argentina and absolutely loved it. I knew I had to do it again in my life. I wanted to go to a Spanish-speaking country to practice my Spanish, and I thought Spain would be a safer and easier option for me than South America.

Among the cities available in Spain, there was no question that Barcelona was my top choice. It's a stunning city with the perfect climate and is very popular among students and young people from all around the world, which really excited me.

The courses offered at UPC were highly relevant to my studies. The application process was quite straightforward, and the exchange office at KTH was very helpful throughout the process. I didn't have to apply for a visa, just complete the Digital Learning Agreement (DLA). Regarding health insurance, the host university notified me that the Blue European Health Insurance Card would not be enough, but KTH provides sufficient health insurance for exchange students, so I didn't have to pay for the insurance recommended by the host university.

Upon Arrival

I arrived one month before classes started, giving me plenty of time to make friends and explore the city. I attended as many Erasmus and Salsa'm events as I had energy for in the first month. The campus was nice, and it was quite easy to make friends in class, especially with other exchange students.

Financials

Living costs in Barcelona were quite manageable, though rent was very high, especially in central areas like L'Eixample or Gràcia. The price for a small to medium-sized room in these neighborhoods was generally around 550 euros per month. Grocery prices were very low, making it affordable to cook at home. The price for public transportation was also very low, with a student discount allowing unlimited travel for under 30 euros per month.

Accommodation

I found my room in an apartment in a great location in the L'Eixample neighborhood on Idealista. I definitely recommend Idealista because it's affordable, but there are many scammers who try to take advantage of incoming exchange students, so they must be avoided. It is very common for young people to share a big apartment in Barcelona to make

the rent more affordable, and the apartment I lived in was shared with three other wonderful girls from Italy, Spain, and Luxembourg.

University and Studies

The university had a good curriculum with a mix of theoretical and practical learning, but it was sometimes not as well-structured and clear as I was used to at KTH. The workload in some courses was very high, especially considering that these courses were only 5 credits each. Professors were very nice and most of them were very helpful.

Courses

I enrolled in six courses, half of them were very much related to my studies at home and half of them were more like elective courses that just sounded fun and interesting:

- **Structural Dynamics** – Very challenging, but the teachers were very nice and clearly experts in the field.
- **Inspection, Analysis, and Restoration of Historical Structures** – More mathematically challenging than I expected, with a strong focus on big group work and group projects, which was nice.
- **Airport Management** – The most fun and interesting course; the teachers were amazing, and the study material was different and exciting.
- **Building Structures** – Very heavy workload, much more than it should have been. I think most students spent at least twice the amount of expected hours for the workload. The material was interesting, but the teachers were not in sync enough to make it a well-structured course.
- **Entrepreneurship for Engineers** – A good course with a great teacher, mainly focused on one big group project over the semester, which was enjoyable.
- **Communication Skills 1** – A very fun course; the projects we did and presented were great, and everybody loved listening to each other's presentations.

City and Country

One of the things that makes Barcelona so special is how different and wonderful all the neighborhoods are. Each area has its own unique atmosphere, from the artistic and bohemian feel of Gràcia to the grand architecture of Eixample and the historic charm of El Born and the Gothic Quarter. One of the highlights of living in the city was experiencing the neighborhood festivals, which are not to be missed. I made it a goal to visit almost all the major landmarks of the city, and I also spent as much time at the beach as I could. It's easy to forget how privileged you are when living in a city with such easy access to a wonderful beach.

Leisure and Social Activities

I spent most of my weekends in the city, hanging out with friends. I loved how we could sit outside at bars, even in the winter when it was freezing cold. I also went on day trips to Granada and to Sitges which was wonderful, and I got to explore Costa Brava, which is, of

course, beautiful. Additionally, I had the opportunity to attend two Barça games, which was a very fun and memorable experience.

Sustainability

Barcelona is actively promoting sustainability, with extensive bike lanes and recycling initiatives.

Other Recommendations and Observations

For future exchange students, I highly recommend securing housing early, as demand is high and many students arrive in Barcelona at the same time, all searching for similar accommodations. Learning basic Spanish or Catalan can be helpful, though many locals do speak English. My best advice is to say yes to new experiences whenever possible and to make the most of your time—whether exploring the city, socializing, or even studying at the library with new friends.

Final Thoughts

My exchange semester in Barcelona was an incredible experience, both academically and personally. Being away from my usual university friend group pushed me to become more independent and build an international network. I highly recommend the exchange program to anyone considering studying abroad.

