

Exchange university

Instituto Superior Tecnico Lisboa

Degree programme

Environmental Technology and Sustainable Infrastructure

Exchange semester in Lisbon, Portugal

Before departure

I wanted to apply to exchange studies because I really love the idea of slow travel, where you get to immerse yourself in the culture and feel like a local, but on the other hand, I didn't want to take a gap year to "travel the world". I wanted to travel the world at the same time as I was learning about my favourite subjects, so an exchange term abroad was perfect for that. When it came to choosing country, I had already gone to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean for my bachelor thesis which I wrote as a Minor Field Study in the Caribbean. Therefore, I knew I wanted to stay in the safety of Europe. I chose Portugal because I wanted a warmer country where the food is delicious and close to the ocean, but at the same time offer a high-quality education in English, and Instituto Superior Tecnico was perfect for that! Doing an exchange involves A LOT of admin work, so I had to do a lot of that in preparation for the exchange (sign papers, find courses, get the courses approved, find accommodation etc.)

Upon arrival

I arrived only a week before the official courses started. In retrospect, I would have needed more time to adjust and settle in. The weekend before the courses started, NAPE (welcome reception for new students) organized a weekend full of activities. It is a great way to meet new people that you will study with.

Financials

Doing exchange in EU means that you get an Erasmus grant which helped a lot. I also applied for extra money from Sveriges Ingenjörer which I got. In general, housing is very expensive in Lisbon because of the number of expats living here. Food and transportation are cheaper than Sweden, which meant I could spend more on restaurants and cafes. I also took the extra loan from CSN. All in all, Portugal is not an expensive country, but because of the low SEK to Euro rates, I had a big portion of my income reduced due to exchange rates. If you want to travel around and do activities such as surfing outside of school, I recommend saving some extra before the exchange.

Accommodation

I got accommodation from a Facebook group "Erasmus & Expats in Lisbon | Accommodation (rooms & apartments)". I heard about scammers, so I was very cautious not to pay anything in advance, but the landlord I met was sweet and seemed genuine, and she sent me videos and pictures of the place. There are other websites that the university recommends such as Uniplaces, but it had an unreasonably expensive down payment and "first month payment", which made me reluctant to book through them. I only advise you to do that as a last resort. The housing in general has lower quality than Sweden, and it was very normal for people to live in huge apartments with 13 rooms, and a shared kitchen. I knew I wanted it to feel cozier and homey, so I didn't opt for those. I lived in Graca, near Alfama, and paid 730 euros for a big room with a private bathroom. But the two other girls I lived with shared a bathroom and paid lower rent. I recommend living on the green line near the metro, because I had to rely on busses for transportation, and they are not the most reliable.

University and studies

The university was very big, and it had an innovation centre where one could study outside of the campus. IST is a very renowned university in Portugal with two campuses, one of them in Alameda

which is very central, and the other in Taguspark. I only went to the one in Alameda because that is where all my lectures were. I had very good courses in the civil engineering programme, because they have a very good civil department. But other people who studied for example aerospace engineering were not as happy with their courses, so it depends on what you study.

Courses

I took no elective courses, only programme courses belonging to the masters Environmental Technology and Sustainable Infrastructure, and all of them were related to water.

Urban Drainage and Pollution Control- was about planning flood drainage systems in cities and how to distinct between combined and separated urban drainage systems, as well as how to design one based on topography maps. It was an interesting course.

Water Resources Modelling and Planning- this was about how to model floods (peak flood discharges and floods hydrographs). I found it to very interesting and highly relevant for the upcoming need to model floods due to global warming. We learnt statistical methods, empirical formulas, regionalization models, unit hydrographs, and how to use HEC-HMS, as well as economic evaluation of water infrastructure. It was a rather difficult course, but I learnt so incredibly much.

Strategic Environmental Assessment SEA- This was a good course if you want one of those easier essay type of courses. I thought it was very valuable especially in how to evaluate projects and their sustainability. The teacher was very strict and one did not really feel welcome to challenge her ideas or ask dumb questions. But other than that, very good.

Water and Wastewater Treatment Plants- this was a very good course about how to diagnose water and then come up with treatment schemes that is suited for its treatment. I found the course itself very fun, interesting, and highly important. New legislation in EU demands stricter water treatment from now on, and this course is highly relevant in the future job market. The teacher was great and very knowledgeable, but the course material was not very organized, and a lot of it was in Portuguese.

Integrated River Basin Management- this was my favourite course. We visited a water dam and a mine where the ground water was polluted on a field trip. We learnt how to manage and operate any water infrastructure such as dams, water treatment plants, and reservoirs based on a given policy. We used those policies to formulate linear programming and dynamic programming problems to solve them. I had never approached water management from this perspective, and KTH does not have a specific course like that, so it was a delight to find it. Also rather difficult, but very rewarding!

City and country

I really liked the country, and especially the city of Lisbon. I made sure to live near the old town Alfama so I could take the charming yellow tram that Lisbon is so famous for as often as possible. I am a foodie, so I made sure to go to as many restaurants as I could. I also bought fresh fish from the deli every week which is something of a luxury as a student. I ate almost exclusively Portuguese grown food (fresh tomatoes, onions, mozzarella and olive oil). A lot of things grow here, so when the seasons changed, so did my diet. I went to a lot of view points “Miradouros” and saw impressive architecture. Lisbon is rich in history and beautiful buildings, and the Arabic castle of Sao Jorge is totally worth a visit!



Leisure and social activities

I travelled and surfed a lot in my spare time. In the beginning of the semester, I surfed almost every weekend when it was warm, but as it got colder, the waves got too high for me. I went on two Erasmus-organized trips and one on my own with a friend. Erasmus organized a trip to Porto which was a very charming city. I highly recommend Livraria Lello if you go there (it is straight out of a Harry Potter movie). The other Erasmus trip was to Sevilla, Spain. It was spectacular and I encourage you to go even if you don't know anyone as you meet people there on the way (which I did). The last trip was to Madeira which I did with my best friend who came to visit me. Madeira is a tropical island that belongs to Portugal, so there are domestic flights that take you there. It was one of the most beautiful places I have seen on earth. It is nicknamed the Hawaii of Europe for a reason.



Sustainability

I could not travel sustainably to Portugal, as there are barely any direct train connections. I know some people took the train to Spain as part of their summer vacation where they stopped across many countries in Europe along the way, and took the bus over to Portugal, but I did not have the capacity to do that. There is still poor solid waste management in the city, and it was hard to compost or recycle, especially in the older parts of town. However, public transport in Lisbon was surprisingly good and I was able to take it everywhere and every day.

Other recommendations and observations

Arrival: I recommend arriving at least two weeks before your actual courses start, because I really needed the time to settle in, learn how to navigate, and get a public transport card. It can get very hectic trying to adjust to so many new things in such a short amount of time, so I highly recommend getting there a bit earlier to get a smoother landing.

Transport: Get the Navigente card as soon as possible because you will need it if you commute to school everyday or to go to the beach. The process for getting it is a bit tedious, as you need to give them a printed photo-copy of yourself, and wait for an hour for your turn to get the physical card.

Study area: I highly recommend studying in Tecnico Innovation Centre. It is open 24 hours everyday and is one of the best study areas. If you're looking for a cosier environment, the libraries *Galveias palace library*, *Biblioteca Camões* and the *Municipal Library of St. Lazarus* are spectacular places with antique bookshelves and stunning architecture.