

**Exchange university**

KU Leuven

Degree programme

Master of Molecular Science and Engineering

Leuven, the perfect student city

Before departure

I applied for exchange for a few different reasons. I have previously in my life lived abroad (in Thailand for 9 years) and really enjoy being in an international environment. I was also curious of how things work at another University in another country. Lastly, after quite some time at KTH I felt I was looking for a change of environment and needed a break from the walk up from Tekniska Högskolan's subway.

During the process of choosing my exchange university, I looked at universities all over the world. I was most interested in Asia and Europe. After some time, I decided that Europe was best for me. KU Leuven first caught my attention when I realized that several other countries in Europe had language-requirements (France, Spain, Germany). When looking into it, I found several advantages with KU Leuven.

Leuven is a student city, with over 50000, this was something that I found exciting. It is also situated just 20 minutes by train from Brussels, a large European city in a very good location to explore other places close by in Europe. Another advantage with KU Leuven was it's great reputation. It is seen as one of the best Universities in Europe and has awarded the most innovative University in Europe.

My expectations were mixed. I was expecting a pretty similar system to Sweden but with modifications. I was expecting a smaller student city that is close to Brussels, making it possible to often travel into the capital. Since Leuven is situated in the Flemish part of Belgium, they speak Dutch. I didn't prepare for this since all the courses were in English. They were all very good at English as well.

Upon arrival

I arrived on a Wednesday, and the semester started the following Monday. The whole week before the semester started there were introductory activities for exchange students organized by the University and the student unions. Most of the events were a towards the end of the week, however. A lot of them included all the essential information for living and studying in Leuven. There were also a lot of fun events organized by the student organizations. This included LOKO, the University-wide student organisation (similar to THS) which has an International part. It also included the Faculty-specific organisations that also host international events and have their own pubs and parties. Further, ESN (Erasmus Student Network) organize a lot of events throughout the year which are usually tailored for Erasmus students.

Financials

I did not apply for any additional scholarships or funding for the exchange (apart from the Erasmus-grant). In general, the prices are quite similar to Sweden. The groceries are almost as expensive, as well as eating out. Fast food can be a bit cheaper. Accommodation is also quite expensive. A recommendation is to get a bike. You can rent them for 6 months for a pretty reasonable price. The student bus tickets are really cheap as well (like 30 euros for 6 months). You can pay a membership fee for ESN which gives you some discounts and also cheaper tickets to their events.

Accommodation

I applied for my accommodation through KU Leuven's website. I lived in one of the student apartment buildings owned by the University. It was on the other side of town from my campus (still quite close)

and a very new building. They have a number of University-owned accommodations. Apart from that, there are also a bunch of student apartments that are privately owned. There is however a portal where you can find available accommodations through KU Leuven's website. The building I lived in was called Studax. It was a big building with a nice common room at the bottom and a roof top on the top floor. The rooms had their own showers and bathrooms but the kitchen was shared. It was really new and clean. However, the room was expensive. 480 euros/month.

University and studies

Like I mentioned, the University is really big and has a wide range of Faculties. The Engineering and Sciences faculties are really large as well and you can choose from all the courses available at your faculty. Apart from Chemistry courses, I also took a course in Engineering & Entrepreneurship, Philosophy of AI, and a short Dutch course made for Erasmus students.

Courses

The courses are all quite small. Usually between 3-6 ECTS. They are also all stretched over a whole semester, with all the exams at the end. This differs quite a bit from KTH. I had 7 courses in parallel. Some only had one lecture per week while others had 2-3. The courses, similar to KTH, usually contained both a lecture-based part and a lab/assignment/exercises part. The courses were often well-structured. It was however quite different to have so many courses in parallel.

City and country

Belgium is a really unique country. It consists of both a Dutch and a French-speaking part. They are very different from each other and their local governments control almost everything. Brussels is in the middle of Flanders, but more French-speaking. It is however a really international city, being the center of EU. There are several nice cities in Belgium. I recommend Gent, Brugge, Oostende and Brussels.

Leisure and social activities

There are a bunch of things to do in Leuven. Every evening there is a new sports or cultural event. If you want to drink a beer at a student pub, they are open almost every day. Check out the sporting offer via KU Leuven's website. Also, when you arrive you will learn more about your faculty union and all that they do.

Other recommendations and observations

Take advantage of the student life! Leuven has so much to offer in that category. Also try their fries, chocolate, and beer!