

Experience report about exchange semester at Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra

1. Arrival

Coimbra, the third biggest city of the country, is situated in central Portugal around 40 km away from the Atlantic Ocean. The easiest and cheapest way from Germany to Coimbra is either a flight to Lisbon which is located 200 km South of Coimbra or over Porto, situated around 105 km to the North. From Lisbon you can either take the train which costs around 20 Euros or by bus which costs around 15 Euros, it will take you about 2 hours to arrive in Coimbra. From Porto the train and the bus costs around 10 Euros and in one hour and a half you are in Coimbra. Both trains and buses depart regularly from both cities to Coimbra, however at the beginning I would recommend to take the train as it is much easier to find the train station than the bus station in both cities. In Coimbra you have two options when to get off the train, first Coimbra B and second Coimbra A. The train station you will first get to on your way, will be Coimbra B as it is a little bit further away from the city center than Coimbra A. However even though not all trains end at Coimbra A it is worth to leave the train there as more buses depart from it and it is much closer to the city center. Finally in Coimbra it is very easy to find a cheap and good hostel around town for the first days. Besides staying in a hostel the first days it is also possible for the people who got accepted for a previous language course, which I can only recommend to at least apply for, to stay for up to three weeks in the student residence.

2. Accommodation

For me it was not very difficult to find a place to stay for my exchange semester in Coimbra as there are a lot of notices all around the city from people with available rooms and apartments. Also a good advice is to contact the Erasmus Student Network office (ESN office) which not only can help by trying to find accommodation but also in almost all other important issues for international students. Overall there is not a shortage in available rooms in Coimbra as it is the most important student city in Portugal and they usually range between 150 – 200 Euros. However it should be said that there are equipped after the Portuguese standard of living and a heating system is mostly not installed in the houses. Therefore even though during winter the temperatures do not go under 0° Celsius it gets quite cold in the rooms which makes it necessary to have a little heater for the winter months.

3. University life

The “Universidade de Coimbra” which is the third oldest university in Europe can look back on a long and proud history which today can be seen all over the university. With this being said tradition is very important part of the university life, most prominent to see at the black traditional university clothing a lot of students wear but also throughout the year by multiple festivities. In this context the University is one of the top addresses of higher education in Portugal especially in the more traditional study areas of law and medicine. During the first weeks a lot of paper work has to be dealt with which can be quite stressful. However everybody is very helpful if there are any questions and this gives you a first good impression of the Portuguese working mentality. When all the paper work is done the real fun can start with the beginning of the lecture period.

4. Leisure time

With around 23 000 students of the Universidade de Coimbra only, the city is very much influenced by students. Hence it offers a rich set of leisure activities and night life in comparison to the overall size of the town. For example you can participate in a wide range of sport activities ranging from the classical sports as football, basketball to more special sports like canoeing. When then a break is needed from all the studying or sports Portuguese people love to just sit in a café and enjoy the sun and nice atmosphere of the people. As most Portuguese students return back home to their families during the weekend the main days for night life in Coimbra are Wednesday and Thursday. At the beginning of the night some of the cafes especially around the “Praça da Republica” are the first meeting points. After that Depending on the preferences Coimbra can offer a wide range of bars and clubs which most of them are closing very late. In addition to the things in Coimbra the Atlantic Ocean is easily accessible by train going to Figueira da Foz which is only 40 km away from Coimbra.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion Coimbra is a wonderful place to spend your Erasmus exchange semester. Not only does it include a highly accredited university coupled with a great range of extracurricular activities under the Portuguese sun but more so it is a time where you will meet incredible people to make this experience a onetime event you will not forget. Besides the Portuguese culture has so much more to offer which can not fit in one single report and it is best to experience it yourself. So come and live the European dream in this unique city of Coimbra.