

1. Preparation

Personally, I did not plan to make my mobility in such spontaneous way. Since I am Polish, living and studying in Germany, I did not see myself going further than this from my home country. Though Portugal seemed to me always very interesting, warm and rich in traditions. Therefore, I decided to give myself a try and explore it within the Erasmus + mobility.

The idea came already very late to my mind, namely during the orientation events at the beginning of the winter semester 2015/2016, after the first application deadline. From the head of Erasmus office I got to know, there are still some free places left for the students' mobilities Europe-wide. Without thinking much, I visited the office the day after. My language-skills allowed me making applications only in German and English. Fortunately in Porto, Portugal, there was a chance to have courses in English also. It is Porto or nothing, I thought, and applied only for this only one city, for architecture study at Escola Superior Artística do Porto.

From the beginning it was very clear, what I have to fulfill to be able to make my Erasmus + mobility. Thanks to the head of Erasmus office at the BTU I knew exactly what kind of documents I have to hand out. Within next couple of weeks I got accepted at the host university and I started to plan my stay in Porto.

The arrival from Berlin, Germany to Porto, Portugal was itself very easy and favorably priced. Since there is a direct flight connection (Ryanair) between these two cities, the arrival to the city of Porto was comfortable and without a need of change.

After my arrival at the Porto airport, big and modern airport station, which is very clear and signposted, I had no problem at all to find my way to the metro; the best way of transportation, bringing the passengers within barely half an hour to the city center.

Moreover, since Porto is a city with other distance-qualities than Berlin for instance, one usually can get really close to the final destination without need of change in between.

So did I, which implied the fact, that my way to the new flat from the airport took more or less twenty minutes. It was hence very stressless, which is definitely a big plus for the newcomers like me, without knowledge about the city yet.

The one way trip can cost even 40€ altogether, like mine for instance, which depends of course of the timing; the earlier we buy a ticket the less expensive it gets. Nevertheless, I have to admit, low-cost airline connection appeared to be just perfect for a student like me with a limited cost availability.

2. Accommodation

Since my host university did not offer any students dormitories I used internet websites to find one suitable accommodation. This was not a problem but, the variety of different platforms, like uniplaces.com, <http://www.easyquarto.com.pt> or Facebook group called: **Casas / Quartos para arrendar no Porto**, was huge and it did not take long until I found the satisfactory and payable room. In this matter the host university was also very helpful - after acceptance of my application I received some e-mails with important tips about my mobility, amongst them also about the students accommodation possibilities with a list of the most important platforms (see above).

The accommodation appeared to be clean, spacious and for relative reasonable rent price. For circa 25qm room I had to pay 200€. Although the facilities, like water, electricity and internet, were included, there was no central heating in the house, which despite the temperatures outside never below 10 degrees, was very noticeable (especially in the still-winter nights) and sometimes a bit unpleasant. It was not only my case though - speaking with other colleagues I got to know, that the other houses neither had central heating at their disposal.

Although one can somehow use to it, there is a huge difference between Portugal and Germany in this matter. One cannot forget about taking warm clothing while planning a stay in Portugal.

3. Studying at the host university

Somehow surprising to me were the very first days in Porto, as I got to know some facts about studying in my host university, Escola Superior Artística do Porto. As I came only for the summer semester I was not able to do any architectural projects. All the courses at the ESAP (Escola Superior Artística do Porto) in the field of architecture are annual, so the students have been working already for 4 months on their projects before I arrived. There were a very few courses I could have finally taken in my main study field. For the rest of my credits I had to work on art projects, like: Art and Multimedia Project, Printing Project, or Video Project.

As far as I actually did not need to make any compulsory courses I was not very upset about this fact. I found the art projects very interesting and enlarging my current architectural knowledge. I was enjoying the time of studying in different field than my initial one and trying to do my best out of it. Nonetheless, I can imagine, that it can be unsuitable in some cases. This is surely something to be taken into consideration.

Despite the fact above, I enjoyed very much the time spent on learning at the host university. All professors were very helpful and always showed their understanding for me, as a foreigner. Also the heads of Erasmus office were very friendly and always ready to help me with all my issues.

In fact I was very happy to spent some time doing something different, then I did to date, especially that it was temporary and on a short-time basis. I consider it as a very good learning experience.

4. Daily life and leisure time

Porto is a wonderful city. It is beautiful, rich in culture, architecture and full of friendly people. I have not lived in such a pleasant city in my life far and away. Therefore I can only recommend it to everyone, who considers this one as an Erasmus destination.

Porto has very much to offer. The city changed in the recent years, there are plenty of places to visit and see, the city itself is relatively secure also. There are some cliches about Porto, which I had personally in my mind before I came here, not every of them are real though.

First would be of course Portuguese weather, which I thought will reach 35 degrees in early March. This one appeared to be anonymously wrong. Because of cold water currents from North Atlantic, Porto, other than the South and the middle of the country featuring mostly Mediterranean climate, has longer the rainy period and shorter the dry one. The amount of rain can be harsh sometimes. The proper preparation should include taking a raincoat and some warm clothes.

Next one could be: Porto is the second biggest city in Portugal. Yes, but with its population counting circa 230 thousand people it can be compared rather with Magdeburg than with Hamburg. I guess this fact is not clear before one takes a public transportation and crosses the city within barely half an hour. This characteristic makes the city very pleasant and easily reachable on foot. Beyond that, going out equals (almost always) meeting some friends on the streets, so that even a walk to the university can appear as a very social activity.

Further one: the city is so small, that I can surely reach every place with a bicycle. I was never wrong so much. The topography of the city is impossible to use a bike, especially when it comes to the old city. Porto is located on a high slope - the try to cross some streets can be unforgettable struggle with our own forces. It is way more secure to plan a bit longer time and simply take a walk. Nevertheless, there are of course also positives about this. Thanks to the city's topography Porto has one of the most beautiful panoramas I have ever saw. Some of pictures I took from different view spots in the city are visible underneath. (Fig. 1. & 2.)

If this would not be already sufficient conviction, I have to add, that Porto is also a perfect destination for those, who like leisure activities. Portuguese people are well know for their party nature. There are countless events taking place in Porto, from the traditional, a week-long festivity of the students **Queima das Fitas**, to the biggest festival of the patron saint of the city **Festa de São João**. Not only the city though, but also the ocean is offering some attractions. For those, who likes sports - Porto is one of the biggest surfing spots in Portugal. Doing here the Erasmus mobility can also mean trying something new, like in my case. Anyway, there is no way, to feel bored in Porto.

Last but not least, even when coming alone, no-one will feel lonely in Porto. **ESN** (Porto Erasmus Student Network) organization is helping the newcomers in integration with both: other students and the city. They organize numerous events, where everyone can find something suitable and explore Porto and Portugal with other students. From student parties to hike trips in the mountains, to each his own event character.

5. Conclusion

Porto is unforgettable place; there is nothing one could do wrong about spending his Erasmus here. Therefore, I can only recommend the mobility to this city. Not only the affordability of living, nice university, good food, landscape and whether can be persuasive, but surely the most; friendly atmosphere and the people, who are ready to accept and help everyone without excuses and make them fell like home.

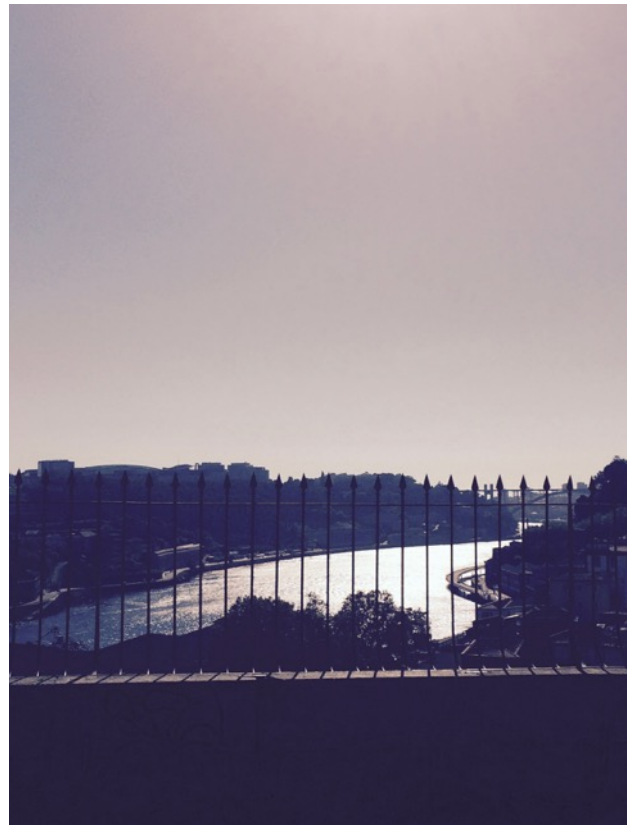


Fig. 1. & 2. Pictures of mine, showing some views from different spots in the city.