

Student report, ERASMUS+ 2017/18

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This report is written in cooperation by Louis Fisser and Alexander Sautier. Both of us had the opportunity to spend two semesters at the NOVA University of Lisbon and we lived the entire experience together (sharing classes and an apartment).

Therefore two separate reports would be redundant.

Let us begin on day 0. In order to be able to enjoy and really learn during our time in Portugal we had to learn the language. Over the course of one year we visited a weekly course at the Vest University in Timisoara to set a base. Once arrived in Lisbon (about two months before the semester started) we visited an intensive language course on site at the Faculdade Das Letras de Lisboa. During four and a half weeks we studied the language for over six hours a day and reached a just about sufficient level of proficiency to begin the academic year.

In mid-September of 2017 the experience finally began. Some organizational things had to be taken care of: Exchanging documents, collecting the necessary signatures and making sure that the learning agreement is in order were the first things. Health insurance and a local student card came next. Both international secretaries were very helpful in the process and all issues could be overcome with ease. Once the logistical base was set, the actual learning could begin.

The first thing that stood out was that all Erasmus students were distributed into different groups. Meaning that each exchange student was alone in a group of Portuguese students. This made learning the language and adapting to the Portuguese classes challenging at first, but very beneficial in the long run. The teaching system is very similar to ours in Timisoara. All subjects are divided into a theoretical lecture and a practical work part. The major difference is that several subjects are combined into larger blocks. Within such a block each subject is organized as follows: the attendance in lectures was not obligatory, whereas 80 percent of practical labs had to be attended. The practical labs took place in two week blocks of full time teaching directly in the corresponding medical wards. In those days there would usually be a morning session with presentations by the teaching staff to introduce the day's topic, later on students were distributed into small subgroups to tackle smaller practical tasks. For instance two to three students would go to the ward to see patients and take patient histories while others would join an assistant in external consultations or surgery rooms or other things, depending on the specialty we were in. At the end of each two week block, there was always some form of evaluation. This could be done in different ways. The most common was just a small oral exam and discussion on the topics learned during the block. Some departments decided to request patient history reports or case presentations, that were presented to the staff of the hospital and the fellow students by us. This was quite challenging, especially in the beginning, when beginner

language skills made holding a medical presentation in front of doctors, students and teaching staff exciting, but sometimes intimidating.

We chose to complete one of these blocks in the first semester and joined subparts of other blocks in the second semester. The big advantage of completing a full block is that a lot of subjects (and credits) can be collected in one exam. But don't be fooled! Not only do you need flawless attendance record and pass all practical exams in order to join this exam, but also you have to really study each subject as well as if it were for a full exam. The entire block (8+ subjects in our case) is tested by way of 100 MCQs and in only 2 hours. The exam is taken electronically on a computer, we found this especially difficult because even just reading the long (usually case related) questions alone takes a while when it is in a foreign language. And a machine can't give extra time. With determination and a lot of work both of us managed to pass the required exams. While the exams are difficult, the study materials fortunately were very easily available and helpful. Elected student committees record and write down the lectures held by professors and then combine the simplified text with pictures and powerpoint slides from the official lectures as well as tips and tricks for exams. So much to say about the academic part of the mobility.

Of course besides university there is a vast offer of things to learn and get to know when you are doing an ERASMUS+ placement in a different country.

Lisbon is saturated with cultural, culinary and social possibilities as well as the sea and other natural sights near by. Anyone with an open mind will find things to do and explore. Built on 7 hills, Lisbon's unique architecture and warm and diverse citizens really make it easy to feel at home and make the most out of this experience. The fact that Portugal used to have many colonies contributes to the cultural diversity in this country. One can feel the different influences ranging from Africa to South America in every corner. The typical Fado music or the delicious culinary offers you will have to experience for yourself! Having the Atlantic Ocean nearby gives you all the possibilities to enjoy the beach and all kinds of watersports on weekends or free afternoons. Some of the beaches are even reachable with the urban public transport system within 20 minutes.

What helped us feel at home and integrated in Lisbon was definitely learning the Portuguese language. Having Romanian as a base surely helped a lot. Nevertheless it was difficult in the beginning when the progress couldn't be felt. Only after intensively studying from Portuguese study material and surrounding ourselves with Portuguese speaking friends we step by step managed to overcome the language barrier.

Not only did this exchange experience allow us to make many good friends and learn a foreign language but it also extended our horizon by letting us look into another European culture and health system and teaching us how medicine is practiced there. After a very intense year we will be coming back to our home university in

Timisoara with new ideas and and fresh motivation.

Helpful information for students planning on participating in a mobility to Lisbon's NOVA university:

- Flights: Usually about 200-300 Euros round-trip, from Budapest or Bucharest
- Accommodation: Apartments can be found on olx.pt or in various Facebook groups. Look early to avoid student accommodation chaos just before the semester starts. Prices range from 300-600 Euros for a room in a central location.
- Public transport: At the Metro stop "Marques de Pombal" you can purchase a metro pass, which can be topped up with money or a monthly pass for about 36 Euros. This allows you to use metro, busses as well as city elevators. To cross the river Tejo use a Bus or the inexpensive ferries.
- Language Course: The faculdade das letras da universidade de lisboa offers intensive summer language courses for about 500 Euros. This is the course we took, but there are various alternatives.
- Hospital Locations: The Nova school is very organized and you will be given precise directions to the respective hospitals by the student commission via e-mail. (Apart from this the student commission is a good address for all university related matters)
- Bars and Nightlife: Lisbon offers anything you could wish for. The famous city district "Bairro Alto" impresses with the highest density of bars per square meter in Europe!
- If you get sick: Make sure you have your European health insurance card and make use of the "centros de saude". (Emergency rooms are overcrowded and you will be waiting a long time)
- If you have questions/problems: Ask your colleagues! The best way to solve problems (in our experience) is to get together with fellow ERASMUS+ students and see if they know what to do. Very often someone else will have had a similar issue and know what to do. If not, try the student commission.

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