

An unexpected but great experience

General information

For my exchange I went to the university of Coimbra in Portugal. I didn't hear from Coimbra before I went to there and so it also wasn't my first choice. But looking back I never regretted going there and I would advise it to everybody. Coimbra is a small city 1 hour from Porto and 2 hours from Lisbon. The size of the city is comparable to Utrecht and it is also the same kind of city. It has a big student community because almost half of the inhabitants are students. This explains why the city is totally adapted to student and why they have one of the biggest student parties: Queima das Fitas. During this party the students of Coimbra drink more beer than the people at Octobre Fest in Germany.

Preparation

Before I left to Coimbra, I arranged a room in a university residence in the heart of Coimbra. This was quite easy because you only had to send an email to the universities social service and fill in some forms and it was arranged. I flew pretty late to Lisbon so I also had to book a small hotel room there because it was too late to take the train to Coimbra. When I was there I noticed that it is faster and cheaper to fly on Porto so the other times I did that. Beside these preparation I didn't do a lot in advance because I wanted to have the full experience of doing everything yourself.

Arrival

After a train ride of 2 hours from Lisbon I arrived in Coimbra and I immediately took the taxi to the social service of the university to get my room. When I got my room and took all my stuff out of my bags, I went for a quick look though the city. The first night I immediately went to an event of the ESN to meet some people and there was an instant click with the people there. Everybody was very open and friendly so it was very easy to get to know new people. 2 weeks after my arrival the university also arranged an introduction activity but at that time I already knew a lot of people through the activities of ESN.

Courses

During my exchange in Coimbra I followed 5 courses. My as a non-Portuguese speaker didn't have a lot of choice because there were only 7 English bachelor courses to choose from. All these courses were 6 ECTS so I did 6 ECTS more than was obligated. The reason for this was the fact that the university planned almost all the English courses on the same time so I

could only go to the lectures of 2 courses per week. So for the safety I took an extra course. The courses I chose were:

- Transport Economics: this was mainly about the transport possibilities in Europe. For this course you also had to give a presentation about the transport possibilities in your country.
- Globalisation and Corporate China: this was the best course I had during my exchange it was about the Chinese culture and how they evolved into what they are today. For this course you had to write an essay which wasn't that hard.
- International political economics: I couldn't go to the lectures of this course, so I can only talk about the things you had to learn. Therefore I found this course really boring because you had to read a lot of articles and books.
- Business ethics: this was given by a young teacher which was really passionate about the course so that was nice. Besides that the course was also really straightforward.
- Relationship Marketing: For this course you had to give big presentations working in a group. These presentations were about the books of the course.
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Daily life

Because I could only go to two courses per week, I only had six hours of classes per week. So I had a lot of free time. In this free time I met a lot of people, I did this by going out 3 times a week. Going out in Portugal is partying until 7 in the morning so this was a good way to kill the time. Another thing which also took a lot of time was the walking to your destinations. In Coimbra it is so hilly that it is impossible to ride a bike and the bus transportation is not so good. So walking is the only good alternative, luckily you can almost walk to everything in Coimbra within a half of an hour. The Portuguese culture is really relaxed, they always take their time for everything. So in the beginning you really have to get used to this but when you are used to it is really relaxing. The public transport in Portugal is good between the big cities like Porto, Lisbon, Coimbra and Braga. There are really fast trains connecting these cities the downside is that it is a little bit more expensive than in Holland.

Finances

When you want to go to a cheap city compared to Holland then you should go to Coimbra because the living costs are way lower than with us. The downside of this is that you also have to lower your standards when it comes to the quality because this is also really low here. When it comes to food also the prices are quite lower this is especially the case in the restaurant. Here you can have a nice dinner with some wine and water for around 13 euros per person. Maybe the best thing about Coimbra are the cheap bars where you can have a beer for 70 cents and shots for 80 cents. So you can go out and party a lot for really low prices.

I personally chose to go on a lot of trips all around Portugal so with my the costs for trips are quite high but this can differ between people. I went on a surfing trip to Peniche, the surfing paradise of Europe, this was only 80 euros for a weekend including surfing equipment, housing and transportation. I also went to the Algarve with ESN Coimbra this was also only 80 euros for the whole weekend including transportation and housing. I also did some trips on my own to Porto and Lisbon to go to some Champions League matches which were really cheap compared to Dutch Football matches (between 20 and 30 euros). And finally I also went to Braga and Guimarães with a trip of the ESN which only costs 40 euros. Below you can see a quick overview of my costs and incomes.

Things to pay for	Costs in euros
Housing	260 per month
Food	150 per month
Going out	100 per month
Trips	100 per month including plain tickets to and from Holland
Random costs	40 per month

Incoming money	In euros
Erasmus grant	200 per month
Dutch government study grant	270 per month
Public transport card money	100 per month
Own money	250 per month

If you want to know more about Coimbra or you have further question than you can always send me an email or message

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