

Student Experience Report: Charles Brigden

Institute Superio Technico: Lisbon, Portugal

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Rereading this letter, I think I will start by explaining some of the core lessons learnt from my time in Portugal. Lisbon is a beautiful city, it is culturally thriving, the residents, permanent and the temporary, seem happy, not often in a rush, unless driving and always willing to part with a smile. The relaxed atmosphere is almost infectious and makes for the kind of life style one would expect from a coastal holiday. If only life could be a coastal holiday forever, I come from Australia and had just finished a semester in Germany, the polar opposite to Portugal. When deciding to undertake a master's education, you generally want the technical knowledge gain as a priority, with the relaxed student lifestyle as an added bonus. Portugal has not quite got the right balance between the two and this is reflected in most aspects of life.



*Figure 1: Three wonderful Humans in front, IST behind*

Preparing for our trip to Lisbon was a relaxed and hassle free experience which was a good indicator of the experience ahead. The main contact for us at the host institute was a technical scholar, an expert in his field with administration issues not feeling like the top of his priorities. The papers were signed in due course and returned eventually, again within the time frame but with no urgency attached. We received an email telling us where to be and when to be there in regards to the first day of lectures, which is all the essentials and nothing more.

Travel to Lisbon is great, it relies heavily on tourism and is set up accordingly. The transport systems there are easy to follow and with the addition of Uber, cheap and convenient. I would not recommend the taxis as they are not regulated and can be hit or miss. Public transport is very acceptable but will take a little longer than an Uber without too much financial gain. The airport is centrally located within the city, 15min Uber to IST and within a few weeks, I was running to the airport to meet any arriving guests. One thing to note, the city is not made for runners nor cyclists. It is very hilly, road rules are rarely followed by the motorists, the foot paths are very often not there or if they are, very slippery in the wet.

Surfing and the beach is a staple of living in Lisbon, we unfortunately did not have the time to make the most of all the beaches have to offer but the few times we did were a delight. The water is cold, for Australian standards at least, with 3.2mm wetsuit an absolute minimum for any extended stay in the water. The breaks all have beginner friendly waves up to the something for the elite in Nazaré, just north of Lisbon. If you can find the time, go early and often as it is one of the golden opportunities that Lisbon provides all year round.



*Figure 2: Exploring the wonderful hilly and crooked alleyways Lisbon has to offer (Left); Surfs up at Carcavelos (Right)*

Our accommodation was actually pretty nice, newly reverberated, predominately fitted from Ikea but was aesthetically appealing. The city is made for summer and the first few months, February and March were actually very cold and the apartment did not handle it very well. The drafts through the rooms made heating almost impossible and the electrical system could not supply more than 2-3 appliances at the one time. With 6 people staying in the residence this meant the majority went cold during the day and nights. This is a minor inconvenience as you can always put on a few extra layers and when the summer comes, the rooms are a welcome respite from the heat. The real-estate agent was not to be trusted but this is not a problem confined to Lisbon nor Portugal, more a worldwide prerequisite for the industry it seems. Gaining his attention or any information was tough except when the rent and bills were due. Still awaiting the deposits return with small hopes of success.

The food in Lisbon was initially disappointing. However, when you start to leave the touristy areas or take locals recommendations you find the most exquisite cuisine. The food is bland but fresh and cooked in an open fire pit on the street to perfection. What they do with the bland and usually terrible sardine is very impressive, just bath it in salt and send it straight from the grill to the plate, making a delicious dish. The international food is also very impressive, finding fantastic Japanese Raman, Greek and Italian Mushrooms restaurants.



*Figure 3: Sardine Festival in June. Lisbon is alive every night, a true highlight*

IST seems to be full of very knowledgeable, friendly professors. Their ability to impart their knowledge is severely compromised by a very poor administrative support. The online teacher/student interface program "FENIX" only works sporadically and the teacher's willingness to work around it to ensure clear and continued communication with the students was not great. I understand they are busy but the system was not working, through no fault of either party and another form of communication was required to ensure essential information was received on time.

The balance of lectures/tutorials to practical/industry exposer was not well managed. The majority of the course was completed in a lecture hall with many double or even triple 1.5hr lectures in a row. This is not conducive to active learning in my opinion. There was the promise of a field trip to a wind float project that did not eventuate. The promise of a wave laboratory in the university impressive wave tank facilities was only forthcoming at the very end of the semester, when we were inundated with other commitments and deadlines and it was hastily rushed to fruition. Again, the professor was a fantastic person, very knowledgeable in the topic and always willing to help when available but the administrative side let him, us and the laboratory down badly.

I will look back very fondly on Lisbon, the people, the professors but most of all the three wonderful people I came down from Germany and spent four months living with. However, I will not miss it.