

Experience Report universidad de Coimbra-WiSe22-SoSe23 Portugal psychology

I did two semesters abroad (10 months) in Coimbra, Portugal. I arrived by airplane to the airport of Porto and took a bus from there to Coimbra, which took 1,5 hours. Thanks to the locals, I found the necessary gates and buslines right away. Even though the application process was a bit bumpy at the beginning on the part of the University of Coimbra, this was forgotten the moment I arrived in Coimbra in person. From then on, I was always helped immediately by the Academic Service.

I had the privilege of studying at the University of Coimbra, an esteemed institution with a rich history as the third oldest university in Europe. The campus itself was a remarkable sight, featuring beautiful rooms and halls where classes were held, adding an undeniable charm to the academic environment. No wonder, that J.K. Rowling got a lot of her inspirations for Hogwarts and Harry Potter from Porto and Coimbra University.

Coimbra proved to be a hidden gem in Portugal, and despite not being located on the coast, it offered excellent connectivity to various attractive destinations within the country. This allowed me to explore numerous places and make the most of my time in Portugal. I visited Lisbon and Porto, made trips to the Algarve and Alentejo and even managed to fulfil my dream of a short trip to Madeira and the Azores.

Being a student city, Coimbra provided ample opportunities to make friends from diverse backgrounds. The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) played a crucial role in facilitating social interactions and involvement in various activities right from the early weeks of my stay.

I was incredibly lucky to live in the middle of the old town in my first semester. Everyone knew the so-called Pink House where I lived, not only because of its excellent location, but also, as the name suggests, because of its striking appearance. I also didn't mind that I had to climb up to the fifth floor every time to my room via narrow and steep stairs. The view from my balcony was worth every step. I found this accommodation on Facebook, after a colleague of mine suggested the Yellow House to me.

Speaking of stairs, this is an aspect of Coimbra that added a humorous touch to my experience was its hilly terrain. The city is situated on a hill, making every walk, while scenic, a bit of an

exhausting adventure. However, it did keep me fit and provided plenty of funny anecdotes during my time there.

While Portugal boasts a rich culinary tradition, being a vegetarian required some adjustment. Finding suitable dining options in restaurants wasn't always easy, and I often had limited choices. To tackle this, I learned to be prepared and always carried a spare nut bar with me.

Another amusing cultural aspect I encountered in Portugal was the concept of time, particularly when it came to punctuality. As an Erasmus student, I initially struggled to adjust to the laid-back approach to schedules. Arriving on time, or even a few minutes early, was a norm in my home country. However, in Portugal, I soon discovered that being fashionably late was not only acceptable but almost expected. I finally became socially accepted for being late, as I realized that the Portuguese themselves often managed to be even later! This lighthearted cultural difference brought smiles and laughter to many social gatherings.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my Erasmus experience was the opportunity to discover new hobbies that I never knew I had a passion for before. The scenic and hilly landscape of Coimbra inspired me to take up hiking, a pursuit I hadn't explored much back home. Exploring the breathtaking trails and picturesque nature around Coimbra became a regular weekend activity. After exploring the area around Coimbra, I even ventured on more challenging hikes, such as the last 100km of the Portuguese Way of St James or the famous Fishermen's Trail along Portugal's southern coast. Hiking not only kept me physically active but also provided a meditative escape from the daily hustle and bustle of student life.

Moreover, I stumbled upon the world of "do-it-yourself" crafting during my time in Portugal. My friend Karla had started an Arts & Crafts workshop in one of the fraternities. We met there regularly and did handicrafts, chatted and spent many nice evenings together. I learned to create handmade decorations, gifts, and even some functional items. The process of crafting became a therapeutic outlet, allowing me to unwind and express my creativity in unique ways.

In retrospect, my year in Coimbra was a valuable and eye-opening experience. The blend of academic opportunities, the chance to explore the country's wonders, the vibrant student community, and even the "scenic but exhausting" walks made it a truly unforgettable journey. Even if it sounds very cheesy, the best experience I had in Coimbra were the friendships and acquaintances I made there. I met friends for life. I am still in contact with many of them today and the first reunions have already taken place. I am grateful for the different ways of life and

perspectives that I was able to get to know through my friends, but also for this cohesion, which is not a matter of course for a group that has only known each other for such a short time. I will always cherish the memories and the personal growth I gained during this time abroad.