

Erasmus Exchange Review

My Erasmus semester in Sweden was part-positive and part-negative, but memorable in any case. I was an exchange student in physics at the Lund University, in Skåne region from August 2015 to January 2016. The region is beautiful, and the people are very nice and friendly, although some might say reserved. Most people, even from the older generations, speak good English, and it is not difficult to get by even with no prior knowledge of Swedish.

Lund University is one of the oldest in Europe, and has a strong natural sciences department. The student life is rich and there are many student-run associations and clubs. The curriculum, in particular for physics, was commendable, and is up-to-date with the latest developments. The class sizes are comfortable, never too big (except maybe in the first semester) and facilitates learning. The support for students is good, although in the case of accommodation, it is not enough and students often face problems in this area. In other matters, they were very helpful. Our student coordinator was approachable and worked with the students individually to help them with their choice of courses and planning the semester. He was also friendly and helpful with general matters and advice.

The semester in Lund is divided into two study-periods. Each period spans roughly two months, and has a recommended number of two subjects. After the study-period, the exams for these subjects take place, and the next period begin right after. There is no time to prepare for the re-exam, which will be some time during the next period, which can be problematic. In our case, the laboratory sessions for the subjects were all tightly packed within two-and-a-half weeks, which left little time to write the reports, and created unnecessary stress. This is one thing they could organise better. Otherwise, I found the teaching interesting, and neither too easy, nor too challenging. The faculty is strong, and mostly available to answer the students' questions. The laboratories and libraries are fair, and suitably equipped. I particularly liked the library system where students can use the rooms 24/7 with their access cards, and can self-scan the books they need to check out or return. Also, one doesn't have to leave bags and jackets outside the library, which saves time.

Lund has a thriving student life. The best part, for me, were the student nations, which are student-run organisations named after cities in Sweden, and organise activities, pubs, brunches, etc. at reasonable prices. One can also work for these activities and this is a good way to meet other students. Besides, there is the Erasmus Student Network that organises various gatherings and trips at discount prices.

Sweden is rather expensive, especially in terms of rent and groceries, although the Erasmus grant helps a little. The student should plan this before beginning the semester, so that they have a good budget in advance. It has to be remembered that the ticket machines and buses usually don't accept cash or bank cards, so it is advisable to have a credit card if possible, or to buy tickets well in advance at the Skånetrafiken offices. Another option is to have reloadable "jojo cards", which can then be used to buy tickets. There are also fixed-rate student jojo cards available for

unlimited travel in the specified regions. Hiking is, of course, free, and one of the best activities to do in Sweden. During my exchange semester, I did not visit many cities or museums, but have discovered some wonderful hiking trails. Chances are, there is one right in your backyard (there was a nature reserve a few hundred metres from my home, in fact). Cycling can also be enjoyable. Lund is a bicycle-friendly city. There are also public bicycle-rentals at major spots. Indeed, it is recommended to buy or rent a bicycle for the time you are in Lund.

A particularly difficult part for me personally was the vagueness surrounding my visa requirements. Since I am an international student at Oldenburg, there was no one knowledgeable about my visa needs at the university who could offer advice. The instructions in the email from the Swedish consulate were also misleading, which led to a lot of wasted time, missed exams and stress. So I would advise students in similar situations to try to get as much information as possible beforehand. Even if the email from the consulate gives you the necessary details, confirm them again from the migration agency in Sweden, or better yet, go to the nearest consulate and verify everything in person.

Lastly, the weather in Lund can be unpredictable, but it is not very much colder than Oldenburg. However, it can be extremely windy, especially in autumn and winter, and it is helpful to have suitable clothing. It can be rather rainy, although umbrellas might not be helpful, because of the heavy winds. Swedish autumn was breathtakingly beautiful and the best for hiking. All in all, I enjoyed my stay to a great extent.