

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name****Year and semester for exchange**

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Exchange university

Politecnico di Milano

Degree programme

MSc Machine Learning

Exchange studies at Polimi; a chance to discover Italy

Before departure

I did not really plan to do any exchange studies when I started at KTH but as time went by and most of my friends applied for exchange studies I thought; why not. I wanted to stay within the EU and have always liked Italy as a country. Politecnico di Milano (Polimi) was the school which had the most similar courses to KTH and all master courses are also in English which was a necessity. Apart from the applications to KTH and Polimi there wasn't really any other planning that had to be done to study in Milan. I would recommend start searching for accommodation early but more on that later.

Upon arrival

I did this exchange together with two of my friends from KTH and we arrived two weeks before the courses started and one week before the introduction. The first week we just wanted to get to know the city and do some shopping for the apartment. The Introduction lasted five days but it was usually not more than one or two activities per day at school. They also arranged meet-ups and gatherings in the evenings which I can really recommend in order to meet other students.

Financials

Apart from the ERASMUS scholarship I did not receive any other scholarship from KTH. Italy as a country is generally cheaper than Sweden but as Milan is the most expensive city in Italy, I would say that most of the prices are similar to Stockholm. One thing that is definitely more expensive in Milan is accommodation. However, bars are generally cheaper than in Sweden.

Accommodation

The school does not help you with finding any accommodation. As we were three people, we were looking for an apartment with at least two bedrooms. If you go by yourself, I recommend searching for a shared apartment to reduce the cost. We found an apartment with two bedrooms and two bathrooms and paid around 3000 euros per month. I recommend searching through different agencies as there are a lot of scammers on Facebook etc. As the demand for apartments are very high in Milan it is strongly recommended to begin your search for accommodation as early as possible. We confirmed our apartment 3 months before arrival. You will always find somewhere to stay regardless of how late you are, but you might have to pay a higher price.

I would say that there are not really any "bad areas" within the circular road around the city. We lived close to campus Leonardo, and I can really recommend this. It was close to school and it was easy to get to the rest of the city as well.

University and studies

Politecnico di Milano consists of two main campuses in Milan, campus Leonardo and campus Bovisa. Most engineering masters are located at campus Leonardo which is the old original campus. At Bovisa it is more Management and Economics students but also some engineering masters are located there. Campus Leonardo has a cozier feeling to it while Bovisa is more modern and has a more industrial vibe.



Campus Leonardo

The lecture halls are much worse than at KTH. In the summer they are really hot and in the winter they are cold. All classrooms are also completely flat which means that most of the time you can't see the blackboard at all because of the people in front of you. The chairs and tables for your laptop/notebook are really small, you cannot fit a standard A4 sheet on the table. The rooms also have a terrible echo to them which makes it hard to hear what the professor says.

However, don't be too sad about this because you hardly spend any time in the classrooms. I attended three classes per week in person. All lectures are recorded and can be watched afterwards. Two of my courses also published the recordings from last year which I watched instead of going to the classes in person. The video recordings are very good quality and for me they worked perfectly as a substitute to attending in person.

The schedule is much sparser here in Milan compared to KTH. There are very few exercises and you have usually two or fewer classes per day. Most of the lectures are 90 minutes without break so be prepared for long lessons. Some of them are even 150 minutes without break. They do not have any designated time for lunch break which means that you can have lessons from 10am to 4pm without any longer breaks in between.

The courses I attended were much more theory heavy compared to KTH. A lot of proofs and theoretical backgrounds but not many examples of applications.

Courses

I searched for courses that were as similar to my courses at KTH as possible. I attended the courses; Foundations of Artificial Intelligence, Multiagent Systems, Game Theory, and Numerical Analysis for Machine Learning. The first three courses did not have any examining moments except for the exam. This meant that the workload was minimal. The last course, Numerical Analysis for Machine Learning, had some labs in Python during the course and a group project. This was the course I put the most time into. As the time of writing, 20 December, we have still not been able to start working on the group project as the professor have not published the material yet. This is a big problem for exchange students as this means we have very limited time to complete the project before we go back to our home universities.

Both due to my own experience and what I heard from others I would recommend attending courses with as few group projects as possible to ease the workload.

I did not attend any language course.

City and country

Milan is a perfect combination of the best parts from both southern and northern Europe. You have the climate and nice food from southern Europe but still not a totally chaotic city. The city has about 1.5 times the population as Stockholm but does not feel as big once you get to know it. You are almost never further than 30 minutes from the Duomo which is in the middle of the city. This means that you can walk almost from and to all places in the city. The public transport is fantastic and there are buses, trams, and metro everywhere. A monthly pass only costs 22 euros. The city also has a very good nightlife. The most popular areas for bars are Navigli, Moscova, and Porta Venezia but you will find good and cheap bars almost everywhere. You can also get discounted night club entry via some Instagram sites.

I would recommend learning some Italian before arriving in Milan as there are very few that speak English. It is a massive help even if you only know a few basic phrases. Try to avoid the most touristic areas around the Duomo if you don't want to pay too much. Just a few minutes' walk in either direction will reduce the prices. It is a beautiful city just to walk around in due to the nice old houses and the many parks around the city.

Leisure and social activities

As the workload at school was minimal, we had a lot of free time. We tried to explore as much of Italy as we could during our four months stay in Milan. The three great lakes north of Milan, Lago Maggiore, Lago di Como, and Lago di Garda, is really worth a visit. We visited all three of them and the best time to go there is when the climate is a bit warmer.



Lago di Como

We also made some shorter trips to nearby cities such as Turin, Bergamo, Bologna, and Florence. All those cities have their own charm and if you have time, you should definitely visit them. We went to Turin, Bergamo, and Bologna just over the day and this was enough time to see most of the city. In Florence we had a one-night stay but if you wake up early and go back home as late as possible you can probably go to Florence over the day as well.

We also made some longer trips to Rome, Naples, and Sicily. These cities differ more to Milan compared to those previously mentioned. If you haven't been to Rome before you should go there but otherwise it was too many tourists and too crowded for my liking. Then I would rather spend a weekend in Naples which was a positive surprise. I've heard that Naples would be quite a dirty and unfriendly city, but it really wasn't. It only takes around 6 hours with the train from Milan to Naples and the Italian train network is really good with nice modern trains. Finally, I would recommend going to Sicily when the weather is a bit colder in Milan. We went to Sicily in November and it was still a lot of people at the beach.



Rome and Sicily

Lastly, we joined a Ski trip with other students from different schools both in and outside of Milan. The ski trip went to Sestriere and apart from that there were quite few slopes open, we had a great time. The trip was quite affordable, and all students stayed at a massive complex built for the Olympics 2006.



Sestriere

Apart from traveling we have been to several football matches at San Siro. If you are a football fan, this is the city for you. The tickets are relatively cheap compared to other European countries and you get to see great matches. If you are not a football fan, I would recommend choosing one of the cheaper matches and go with some of your friends in Milan at least once just to feel the experience.



San Siro

A lot of the social time was spent on different bars having aperitivo with friends. This is a perfect way to spend an afternoon in the sun.

Sustainability

As the public transport is really good and you can go by foot to almost anywhere in the city it is quite sustainable from the transport point of view. Also, the Italians love to recycle everything. Otherwise, it is not much different from Stockholm regarding sustainability.

Other recommendations and observations

Go to Milan a few days before the introduction to get to know the city.

Attend the introduction activities to meet other exchange students.

Save money ahead of your exchange, this is easier than to do it during the exchange.

Take the opportunity to explore the country while you are here.