



# **EXCHANGE REPORT**

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2023/2024 Semester 1

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## **My exchange experience in IST Lisbon**

### **Before departure**

I wanted to study in another country because it seemed like a really special chance that I shouldn't miss. I chose Lisbon for my exchange studies because I wanted to explore Europe and enjoy the warmer weather there. I also heard that people in Lisbon speak good English, which would make it easier for me to get around.

I went to Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) for my studies. While I didn't have super high expectations for the university, it ended up being an important part of my time abroad. Being in a European Union country made things simpler for me in terms of paperwork and vaccinations. I didn't need to take an extra language course, just English, which I already studied at KTH.

My main preparations that was need were finding a place to stay and choosing my courses, and I'll talk more about that later.



### **Upon arrival**

I got there on September 1st, and the classes started on September 12th. About a week after I arrived, there were activities for all IST students called welcome week, which I really recommend. At the same time, there were also events for all Erasmus students in Lisbon that continued throughout the month and even beyond. Going to these activities is a great way to meet people and make friends. The events range from wine tasting to surfing on the fantastic beaches. Depending on how much time you want to spend on your studies, these activities go on until late October. The organization that plans these activities is Erasmus Life Lisboa (ELL), and many exchange students are members there. They have their own headquarters/bar where a lot of Erasmus students gather and socialize.



### **Financials**

I got the Erasmus+ scholarship for my exchange studies in Europe. Prices in Lisbon are more or less the same as in Sweden. Some groceries are cheaper, but with the euro getting stronger against the Swedish crown in recent years, it doesn't feel that cheap. Service labor like Bolt/Uber, food delivery, and barber services are much cheaper compared to Sweden. However, accommodation prices are, in my opinion, high. If you don't have contacts or an offer from the school, which is likely, be prepared to spend around 550-650 euros for a shared apartment (more on this later).

The school didn't have any mandatory fees, but to join different activities, you need to buy a membership and tickets for each event. Besides the usual tips, to save money, I recommend the school canteen, where you can get a proper lunch and dinner for three euros. It's quite popular. Also, as a student, you can get a discount for the local transport system.

### **Accommodation**

I found my accommodation through Spotahome, a shared apartment with 3 other rooms. The school had some options, but getting a spot was random and limited. So, I didn't count on university housing, and none of the Erasmus students I talked to got a spot either. The school recommended websites to find housing, and that's how I found Spotahome. I wanted a place near the campus with a window, and I got it. Initially, I looked for hostels with single rooms and bathrooms, but the prices were too high, so I opted for a shared apartment. Looking back, I'm happy because my roommates became like a family.

Housing conditions in Lisbon are lower than in Stockholm. Lack of insulation causes mold in winter. The significant difference is the cold inside the apartments since most houses don't have heating. It gets hot in summer but cold in December and January. I recommend bringing warm clothes or buying an electric heater, widely available in the city. Lisbon's accommodation prices are surprisingly high. Locals mention a rapid recent increase. Be ready to spend around 550-650 euros a month, plus extra fees to the landlord and the

website you used. Some places may not include water and gas or have limits, so check before renting.

### **University and studies**

I studied at Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) which is the largest and most prestigious university for technology, science and architecture in Portugal with its 11 000 students. Due to I study within in the EECS department at KTH led to I mainly took courses within computer



science. The content in the courses themselves reminds a lot of the content in the courses at KTH. However, IST has almost an exam in every course, which compared to the EECS courses it is much rarer if it is not a math course. I prefer KTH's system because here you get examined through hands on practice of the subject which in my opinion makes it more useful instead of memorizing. However, the courses at IST also have laboration but in my courses they were more optional to do but they still got projects very similar to the projects in KTH. All the courses were in English but the smaller courses had some material in portuguese but it was not a problem. I took a language course in portuguese which I enjoyed and got some fun and useful knowledge from which I can recommend. However, this classes are held two times a week after school at around six o'clock in the evening at the other university.

### **Courses**

#### **Linear Model Analysis (AML):**

This course spanned two periods, with the first dedicated to attending lectures. The second period involved a project and an exam, focusing on linear models in mathematics, resembling those at KTH but centered on linear relationships. The course teaches how to identify a linear relationship in a dataset and use a linear model to represent the data with a fitting line. Being in the machine learning master's program, I found this course valuable. The small class size and engaged teacher made learning easier and more motivating. However, the downside of having few students was a lack of organization, such as uncertainty about the exam date and time until two days before.

#### **Information Visualization (VI):**

The course centered on visualizing data through diverse charts and graphs, with a primary group project spanning the entire duration. Additionally, there were optional tasks for acquiring supplementary knowledge and earning extra points. Completion required passing at least four out of six quizzes, which were easily manageable with regular attendance at lectures. I found the course enjoyable due to the hands-on experience in developing

interactive webpages featuring diagrams and graphs. Furthermore, I appreciated the course's well-organized structure and the engagement of the instructors and assistants.

#### **Data Analysis and Integration (GTI):**

This course teaches how to extract, analyze, clean, and materialize data using various programs and a bit of SQL. It includes eight labs, one project, and an exam, all of which need completion for course fulfillment. While it may seem stressful initially, the labs and assignments are manageable, and there's constant support from teachers and assistants if you need help. I feel the exam focused a bit too much on specific software details rather than the broader subject. However, overall, the course is well-structured and recommended for those interested in learning about data analysis and preparation, which is why I chose to take it.

#### **Network and Computer Security (SIRS):**

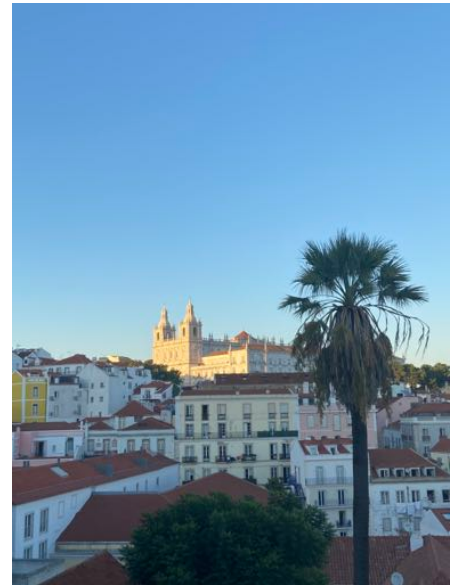
This course covers the theory behind secure network systems and their construction. The main project involves creating a secure network for a theoretical bank using virtual machines. Personally, I found the project to be too extensive, especially considering the course includes an exam. I enrolled in this course to gain insights into security, a topic I hadn't explored before, and to understand how developers approach software development with a security perspective. However, the focus shifted more towards creating a network using virtual servers, hubs, and switches. This required some prior knowledge, which I initially lacked, but the project eventually went well. Unfortunately, due to the project's size and having other exams in the same week, I struggled to find enough time to study for the exam, resulting in not passing the course. Nonetheless, I am satisfied with what our group achieved in the project, and overall, the course had a good structure.

#### **Intensive Portuguese Course**

This is an introductory course teaching the basics of Portuguese at the A1.1 level. I found it enjoyable because it was a departure from my regular university courses, and it was fun to learn with other Erasmus students who met twice a week. It's a great opportunity to learn and make friends. The course ran from mid-September to mid-December, with a mid-term and a final exam. I've gained many useful words and phrases, achieving my initial goal of understanding the language to some extent. I can strongly recommend this course! It's worth noting that the course is at the University of Lisboa, not IST, and takes place in the evenings from 18:30 to 20:30 twice a week.

### **City and country**

The culture in Portugal differs significantly from Swedish culture. While it's challenging to pinpoint exactly how, the architecture and the warm, welcoming nature of the people contribute to this distinction. I embraced the cultural change and didn't experience any culture shock. The most noticeable distinction between Lisbon and Sweden is the climate. I thoroughly enjoyed the predominantly sunny weather, even in December and half of January, which are considered the coldest months. Daytime temperatures peaked around 15 degrees Celsius, with chilly nights ranging from 7-10 degrees Celsius. From a Swedish perspective, it doesn't quite feel like winter. The warm climate ensures constant outdoor activities, such as dining at outdoor restaurants or watching sports, adding vibrancy to the city.



### **Leisure and social activities**

There's a plethora of activities to explore in Lisbon and throughout Portugal, making it impossible to do everything. Early in my stay, the university organized various events, including a large concert/festival at the beginning of each semester, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Initially, much of my time was dedicated to traditional tourist activities like visiting famous monuments and museums. Taking advantage of the excellent September weather, I spent a lot of time at the beach, a decision I was grateful for, as the autumn weather became less conducive to beach outings, not only due to colder temperatures but also large waves, particularly challenging for surfing.



Football plays a significant role in Portuguese culture. Evenings are often spent in bars watching teams play. Being a football enthusiast, I explored different stadiums inside and outside the city. These activities are more enjoyable when shared with fellow students. If you're worried about finding friends to join, don't stress; there are numerous opportunities to meet new people.

### **Sustainability**

I took a plane to Lisbon. Since houses lack heating systems, the energy consumption per household is much lower compared to Sweden. The pleasant weather and the novelty of the city encouraged me to walk extensively. The metro system is excellent, but unfortunately, the bus system isn't as efficient, which is disappointing as it could be a sustainable transportation alternative. I indulged in trying a variety of Portuguese foods. While I wasn't explicitly informed about the university's encouragement of sustainability, I noticed numerous second-hand stores in the city. Additionally, on weekends, there are bustling street markets where people sell various second-hand items.

### **Other recommendations and observations**

In addition to what's been mentioned, I don't have any extra tips. However, I strongly recommend Lisbon. I can assure you it will be a trip you won't forget. This advice extends beyond Lisbon—engaging in exchange studies, in general, will provide you with invaluable experiences, memories, and contacts. Wishing you all the best during your exchange studies :)