

Pieter-Jan Keleman: Biology erasmus in Lisbon, first semester 2016-2017

Going on Erasmus means that you have to stand on your own two feet and you get to know yourself better in many perspectives. The first month you will have to deal with a lot of paperwork, find a place to live in, explore and get adapted to the culture and uses of the new city where you live in and try to meet a lot of new people who can become real friends. This all may be a little scary in the beginning, but also very exciting. Be aware that, as you expect a lot from it before leaving, this can be disappointing: things don't always turn out how you expected they would be. It takes some time to really start to feel at ease in a completely new environment. But no worries, in the end you will definitely not regret you took the opportunity to go study abroad and it will be one of the best experiences in your life so far!

Lisboa/Lisbon

I really fell in love with Lisbon and as people from the city itself say: "once you get to live here, you don't want to leave anymore." The sun, the sea, great food and Portuguese hospitality play a major role in the satisfying feeling of living in this paradise-like city.

Universidade de Lisboa/University of Lisbon

This university is the oldest and biggest one of Lisbon, way bigger than the VUB. The biology department of the university is also the biggest one of the Science faculty (contrary to the VUB) and has a lot of students. The campus "campo grande" is not located in the city centre itself, but is easily accessible by metro or bus from the city centre (about 20min). Courses are mainly taught in Portuguese, some in English. This may scare a lot of VUB students, but it sounds more difficult than it actually is. I had no idea that most of my courses would be taught in Portuguese and went without any knowledge of the language. Google translate will become your new best friend, but in the end I passed all my courses without any difficulties. The international office, professors and even student are willing to help you; you just need to ask them. Exams are in English, with the second phase starting two weeks after the first examination period. This is in my opinion more beneficial: since you haven't forgotten all what you studied before and especially for Erasmus students it is more advantageous when you failed one course in the first phase, so you don't have to retake them at the end of the academic year.

Políticas e Direito do Ambiente/Policies and environmental law (Master)

This course was part of the "Ecology and environmental management" master. It is taught in Portuguese, but the professor gave us a small summary of what he said in English during the lectures. This course was called a "block course" since the lectures only took place during the two first weeks of the semester, although these were very intense. After two weeks, you will agree a date for the examination, which will normally take place in the next month. This decreases the pressure of having a lot of exams in the normal examination period in January.

Alterações globais e sustentabilidade / Global changes and sustainability (Master)

This master course was taught in English. It also took place during the semester for one month and doesn't involve a theoretical examination. You have to write a scientific article and do a presentation about a certain global change topic in a group of three students. Going to theoretical lectures is mandatory though, but these were very interesting.

Ecologia das águas continentais/Freshwater ecology (bachelor)

I took this bachelor course because of overlap between my master courses. It was though a very interesting course, given by two very helpful professors. The theoretical lectures are in

Portuguese and not mandatory to go to. The practical classes are mandatory and are normally taught in Portuguese, but as we were 3 erasmus students, the professors did it in English. These practical classes also involve a field trip to a river, where they will teach you how to do electrofishing and where you will determine different fishes and macro invertebrates that you caught that day. The professors of this course were really nice and gave me the opportunity to arrange personal meetings in their office, when some parts of the course were not clear. The exam was at the end of the semester in January in English.

Impacto ambiental/Environmental impact (bachelor)

I was planning to take a master course "Environmental assessment", but that proved to be a continuation of this bachelor course, which I didn't have in Brussels before. The theoretical classes were taught in Portuguese again and not mandatory. For the practical classes, the professor decided to give the classes in English for the Erasmus students, separately from the other Portuguese students at a different time. The exam was in English and involved a theoretical part (80% of the final grade) and a practical part (20% of the final grade). For the practical part you had to write a scientific essay about a certain topic, which was selected by the assistant. The theoretical part was an exam at the end of the semester in January in English.

Portuguese language course for Erasmus+ students by the Faculty of Letters

I decided to take a Portuguese language course during my stay in Lisbon, since it would help me for my daily life in the supermarkets, restaurants, pubs, and even with my courses that were being taught in Portuguese. I took the lowest level of Portuguese (A1.1), which was actually not that hard. Especially when you already speak French or Spanish, Portuguese is quite similar. You follow this course with other Erasmus+ students from the different faculties of the University, which gives you the opportunity to meet even more people and make new friends.

Don't hesitate to go on Erasmus! I have absolutely no regrets at all. I'm so happy I decided to go to Lisbon and explore other parts of beautiful Portugal. I had an amazing experience, which I will remember for the rest of my life. If you have any doubts or want some more information, feel free to contact me!