

Experience report from the „InterAct!“- stay abroad at the IPS - Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal

In July 2022 I received the confirmation for my scholarship. Now it was for sure that I would go to Setúbal. I then started my preparation and searched for an accommodation together with another Ostfalia student who would study in Setúbal. About a month before I arrived in Setúbal we finally found an accommodation with two rooms for an appropriate price. With regards to the bureaucracy and the sending of documents to the "Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal" Ms. Motard-Schäfer has been of great help to us.



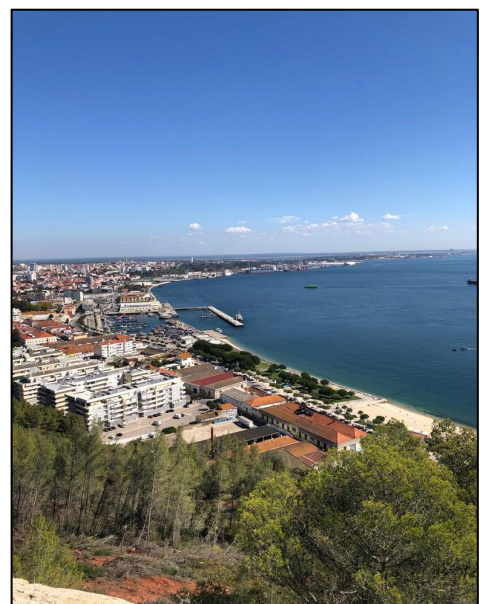
Setúbal: City Hall Square

We had the chance to complete our semester abroad as part of the "InterAct"-support program. There were no complications with the program compared to the usual Erasmus-Program. We had the same contact persons and all procedures were identical to those of the Erasmus students from other countries. Our advantage with this scholarship was that we received slightly better financial support than the Erasmus students.

In addition to the usual application documents, documents such as a letter of motivation, an ECTS transcript of records, a language proficiency proof for the language of instruction or the national language, and a curriculum vitae had to be submitted to Ostfalia. For the language proficiency proof, it was possible to obtain an English language certificate at B2 level from Ostfalia by having a conversation with a responsible staff member of the Language Center.

The partner university IPS required the same documents as for an Erasmus exchange: Student Application Form, a copy of the ID card, proof of health insurance, and finally, a Transcript of Records.

The apartment search was quite successful as the responsible international coordinator at IPS Setúbal, Ana Dias (ana.dias@ips.pt), had sent us an Excel file in advance with various contacts for apartments. However, some of the information was outdated, and we received some rejections. In the end, we were lucky with one of these email addresses (Matthieu.martal@gmail.com). Some of the other Erasmus students initially booked an Airbnb in Setúbal for the first few days because they had started looking for an apartment too late beforehand and faced difficulties.



Setúbal: View from the local castle over the city.

After a few days, everyone had found an apartment. So, there is no shortage of housing options on-site. However, one should be cautious not to overpay for the apartments.



Setúbal: Street that passes by my apartment.

In the range of 250-400 euros per month, one should be able to find an apartment suitable for a 4-month stay. Compared to other Erasmus students on-site, we paid relatively low rent (around 300 euros for my roommate and around 250 euros for me per month). However, it should be noted that the apartment was not in the promised condition initially. We suspect that it had been unoccupied for a while and was therefore in an unacceptable state. My roommate and I had to equip it with some necessary items, but the landlord reimbursed us for the expenses. After the settling-in period, we were both satisfied with the apartment, especially because it was located right in the center of Setúbal.

When searching for apartments in Portugal, especially during the winter semester, one should be aware that the condition of the buildings cannot be compared to those in Germany.

However, it should be noted that the walls are so thin that they retain permanent moisture in the air, leading to mold formation. Although it may sound concerning, this mold can be easily removed. It is recommended to purchase a small heater, which can be plugged into the socket since most apartments do not have central heating. Even during the winter months of December and January, temperatures usually do not drop below 15 degrees Celsius.

I was happy with the selection of courses available. I had the opportunity to choose from approximately ten different English-language courses. My case for the semester abroad was somewhat unique since I had already completed all the modules in my civil engineering program and fulfilled all the ECTS requirements. However, as I wanted to study in the master's program of industrial engineering, I had the opportunity to take modules at the IPS Faculty of Business and Administration, which focused on the field of economics. If I had chosen to study civil engineering at IPS, this would have also been possible.



Setúbal: Park with a beach view

A few friends I met in Setúbal were studying civil engineering at the IPS Barreiro campus. Despite the official language of instruction being Portuguese for these subjects, they received English-language support from the professors, allowing them to study in English.

The language of instruction for the international modules at the Faculty of Business and Administration was English. I must admit that I had a lot of respect for the language barrier beforehand and doubted whether my high school English (which was about five years ago and I hadn't spoken English since then) would be sufficient. However, after just one week, I became more accustomed to the situation of speaking English, and my language skills improved over time to the point where it became effortless to communicate in English.

The academic level was slightly easier compared to the level in Germany (at least compared to the civil engineering program).



*Costa de Caparica:
Sunset at the beach*

The support was excellent, and I could always rely on the reliable, friendly, and competent contact person for Erasmus students, Ana Dias. She referred to herself as the "mother of Erasmus students" in Setúbal, and she lived up to that description. For the lecture sessions, introductory events were also organized, and we received all the necessary information through Ana Dias.

To get to know the other Erasmus students, introductory events were organized at the beginning of the semester. We went kayaking and hiking with a large group.

The leisure activities and interaction with the locals are truly unparalleled. There are many organized meetups and ample opportunities to pursue hobbies or simply enjoy time at the beach. Personally, I frequently attended a futsal course at the university and joined a local gym. Wednesday evenings almost became a tradition as we would visit the smaller nightclub called "Twelve," which was always worthwhile, especially because they hosted Erasmus Nights on Wednesdays, making it the perfect opportunity to get to know other people, especially in the beginning.

Frequent gatherings organized by the "MeetUp Setúbal" organization were also held (there is an Instagram page dedicated to this where you can get an impression).



Setúbal: Club Twelve



Lisbon: Trip to a viewpoint.

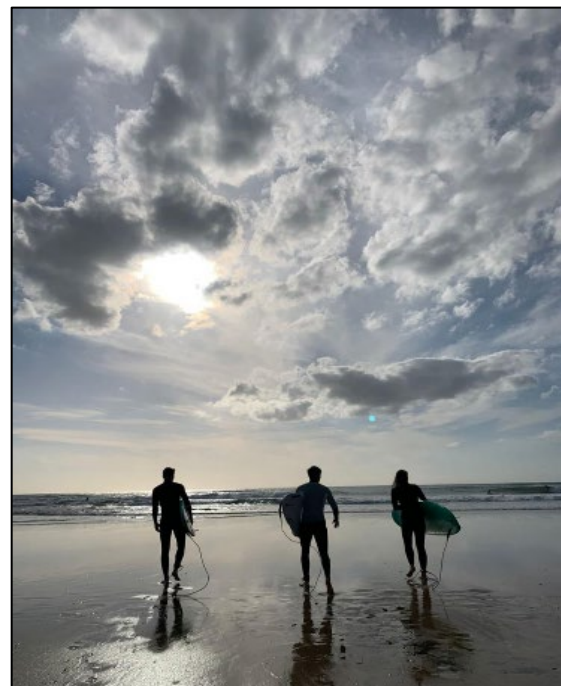
It was very easy to connect with people and make friends over a beer. It didn't take long at all to build friendships. There is absolutely no need to worry about not finding a connection there!

One of my highlights was also the price of coffee in Portugal. In many good cafés in Setúbal, you could get an espresso from a traditional coffee machine for around 70 to 90 cents, which is a delight for any coffee lover. The prices for items like a burger menu (around 7-10 euros including a side dish) or a large 0.5L beer (around 1.80-3 euros) are not comparable to German prices.

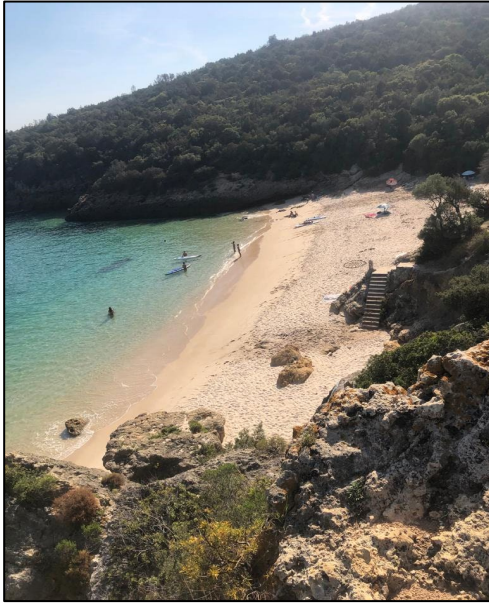
The location near Lisbon was also great for exploring other parts of the country and neighboring countries. From Lisbon, it was easy and affordable to visit places like the city of Porto, the islands of Madeira and the Azores, Morocco, Spain, and many other destinations.

I personally visited the city of Porto, the surfer town of Nazaré, the Caparica beach, the island of Madeira, and the French city of Toulouse. Most of my fellow students took trips to the Azores, Marrakesh in Morocco, Seville, and Madrid. Of course, the city of Lisbon itself, which is easily accessible, is a cultural highlight in its own.

For navigation around Setúbal, it is important to know that you should get the "Navigante Card." In the first few days of your stay, Ana Dias will provide you with a student certificate, which you can use at the local main train station, known as the "Interface Station," to obtain the "Navigante Card." The card costs 30 euros per month for students and allows you to use all trains and buses in Setúbal and Lisbon. It also covers the metro usage in Lisbon at no extra cost. To register for the card, you only need a passport photo, which you can either get in Setúbal or bring from home.



Costa de Caparica: Surf beach, only 45 minutes away from Setúbal.



Setúbal: One of the many beautiful beaches that are no more than a 30-minute walk away.

Apart from the relatively simpler living conditions (which you quickly get used to and are also cheaper compared to other Erasmus destinations), I had many great experiences. There are many open-minded and friendly people here with whom you can have a great time during your leisure activities. Moreover, there are plenty of excursion destinations, travel opportunities, and beautiful beaches that make this place special. The cost of living, including food, coffee, and beer, is relatively affordable, and I was able to significantly improve my English language skills in a short period of time.

An exchange semester in Setúbal, Portugal is 100% worth it. It was one of the best experiences of my life, and I can only recommend everyone to take this step!

For tips or questions, you can also send me an email or message on WhatsApp:

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