

EXPERIENCE REPORT InterAct!

– Study Abroad at IPS Setúbal

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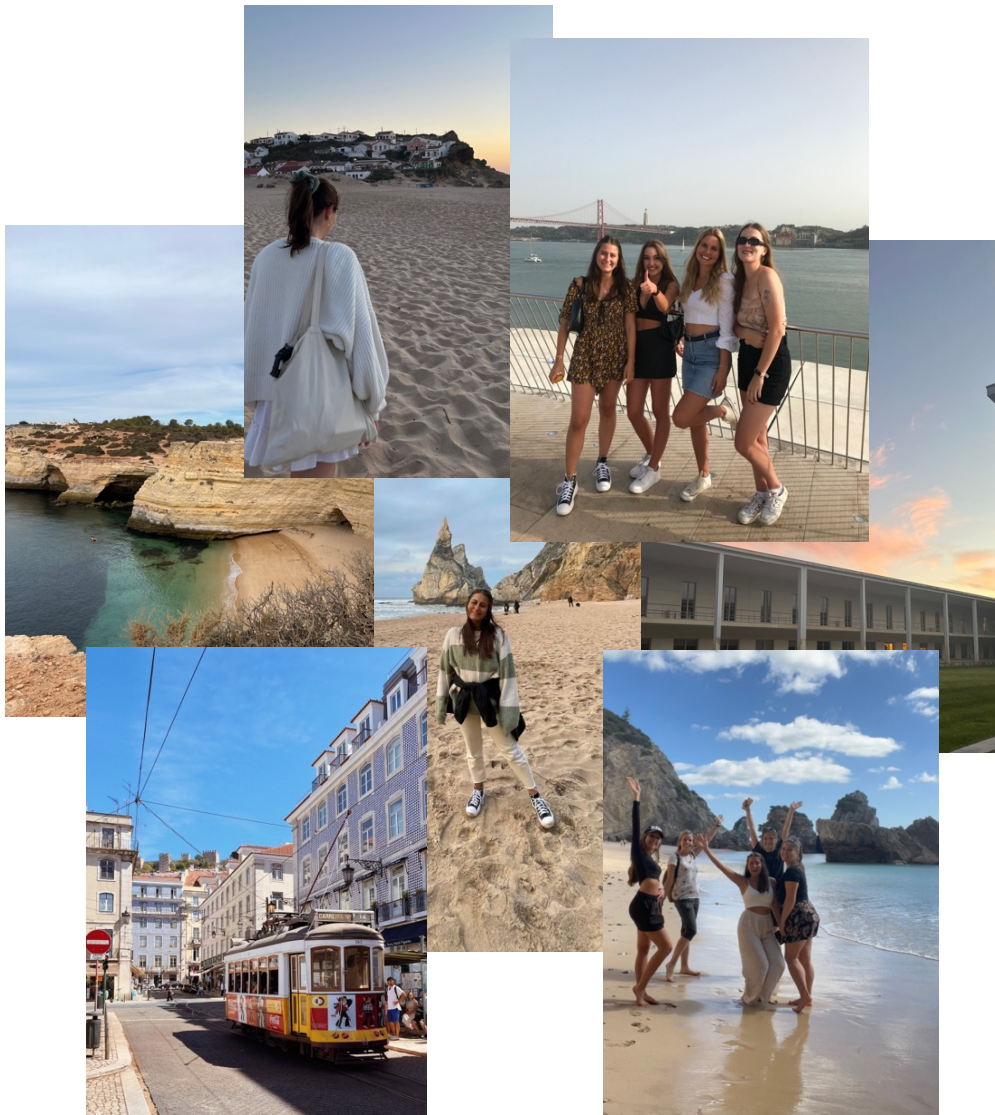
Degree Program: Media Management (B.A.)

Host Country: Portugal

Type of Stay: For studying

Name of Host University: IPS - Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal

Duration of Stay: 5 months (Winter Semester 2022/23)



My preparation:

Planning, documents and contact information

Ever since I started studying, it was clear to me that I wanted to study abroad. Ostfalia recommended using the fifth semester for this because there is a mobility window during this time that makes it easier for us to have our courses recognized and complete our exams abroad.

I always wanted to live near the sea during my time abroad and spend the cold winter in a warmer climate. That's why I quickly decided on Portugal, specifically the partner school of Ostfalia in Setúbal - Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal (short: IPS). The city is right by the sea and has a cultural character.

I completed my semester abroad as part of the "InterAct!" scholarship program. The generous scholarship allowed me to have a worry-free stay and allowed me to fully concentrate on my studies and Portuguese culture. I was aware that applying for the scholarship involved several deadlines and requirements. Therefore, I started early to familiarize myself with the necessary documents and requirements in order to prepare my application optimally. With the help of Ms. Anumba (n.anumba@ostfalia.de), International Coordinator, I was able to create my Learning Agreement and choose my courses for IPS.

After receiving the InterAct! scholarship and being accepted at IPS, I was able to immediately start looking for a place to live. Together with a student from Suderburg, who was also studying abroad at the institute, we searched for a suitable accommodation.

If we had any questions or difficulties during the planning phase, we could always turn to Ana Dias, the IPS International Coordinator (ana.dias@ips.pt), as well as Ms. Motard-Schäfer (c.motard-schaefer@ostfalia.de), a staff member of the scholarship program. They were also our reliable contacts during our stay.

As part of the preparations for my stay abroad, I had to take care of other organizational steps. This included, among other things, taking out international health insurance and booking my flights. I also started using learning apps and watching English-language movies to refresh my language skills and be optimally prepared for the upcoming classes.

My Accommodation:

Finding an apartment was a bit difficult because many available apartments and rooms were already taken. At first, Ana Dias gave us a list of contact details for previously used apartments. However, we found out quickly that the list was outdated and many apartments were already occupied or no longer available. So, we also searched on the website [idealista.com](https://www.idealista.com), which is used as a platform for apartments and shared rooms. However, many landlords required on-site visits, which was difficult because we were not in the country yet. The IPS offered a student dormitory near the campus, but local students had priority, so we could only apply for a room after their application deadline had passed.

After many rejections and despair, someone recommended a student-run platform that offered current apartments in the two campus locations Setúbal and Barreiro. There, we finally found our apartment.

My classmate and I lived in a residential area mainly inhabited by locals. This proved to be a great opportunity to get to know the local life. Our apartment also reflected the charm of the area – a slightly old-fashioned building with a typical Portuguese balcony.

The location of our apartment couldn't have been better. The city center with its small shops, cafes, and many restaurants was just down the street. The way to the university was less than 30 minutes because the train station was only a minute away, and the train took us directly to the institute. The nearest supermarket was about a 5-minute walk away, and the next larger one was about 15 minutes away.

The apartment was already furnished and fully equipped. My room was spacious and provided enough space for a desk, bed, and wardrobe. I could easily dry my laundry at higher temperatures on my balcony and enjoyed how beautifully the sun shone into my room. The price for the apartment was reasonable considering its location and size. Thanks to the scholarship, I could choose an apartment with perfect conditions. We also faced some challenges, such as a leaky toilet and outdated inventory. In winter, we had a particularly hard time because many apartments in Portugal don't have heating, and that year happened to be one of the coldest winters. As a result, the apartment was always cold, and the high humidity led to problems with mold. Despite these difficulties, we quickly felt at home, and our landlord was extremely accommodating and always willing to help us with problems and find solutions.

Partner university:

Course offerings, support, exams, language level

At the beginning of the semester, there was an introductory event where the institute was introduced, the semester's schedule was shown, and activities and questions were clarified. Ana Dias was always available to us for questions and kept us informed about organizational matters.

On the first day of the semester, we were warmly welcomed by all teachers, who introduced themselves personally online and gave us an introduction to their courses. Additionally, Ana Dias contributed to the planning of activities to get to know our classmates. For example, she organized a hiking day to a secret beach and a beach day with water sports activities.

The IPS offered a wide range of courses, which gave me the opportunity to delve into different subject areas. Particularly fascinating were the courses with an international focus, although some courses were only covered in a basic way. The course offerings were designed exclusively for international students and tailored to our needs. This allowed us not only to benefit from good education opportunities but also to build valuable relationships with other international students.

Because the teachers were not native English speakers, I was able to follow the classes despite having limited English skills. In addition, I was able to understand many of the learning materials during the follow-up. The procedure used at the institute is called "Continuous Assessment". Small presentations, term papers, and tests were written throughout the semester. This made it easy to handle the exams. Thanks to the mobility window, all of the work I did at Ostfalia was recognized and integrated into my studies. In general, the courses complemented my studies and showed me new perspectives.

At the partner university, I also had the opportunity to participate in a Portuguese language course, which I successfully completed. This allowed me to better integrate into society and deepen my cultural understanding of the country.

During breaks between classes, we either stayed in the library to work on our projects or sat on the terrace in the sun. At lunchtime, we went to the cafeteria. The partner university had a total of two cafeterias and a kiosk with school supplies, snacks, and printing facilities.

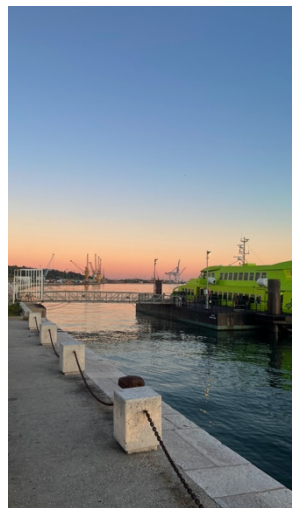
My everyday life in Setúbal and excursions:

Freetime activities, culture, and tourism

Setúbal is an ideal place to live and study. The city has good transportation, making it easy to reach all facilities and attractions. Compared to other popular tourist destinations, Setúbal is pleasantly quiet and offers the perfect opportunity to experience Portuguese life and culture. My favorite café was located near my apartment and directly at the train station. I regularly met with my classmates there and also used it as an alternative to my home desk to study. Coffee is much cheaper in Portugal compared to Germany – for example, an espresso only cost 70 cents. Setúbal offers many cafes, restaurants, and leisure activities, including a copy shop, post office, a football stadium, and much more.

There is also a large shopping center with a huge supermarket and shops located outside the city. Although Setúbal had a city beach, many beautiful natural beaches were just a few minutes away by car. My personal favorite was the "Galapinhos Beach," which I regularly visited.

Every week, there was a "Meetup" organized by a person responsible for planning activities for international students during the semester. In addition, a "Boatparty," a Christmas party with an international buffet, and a graduation party with karaoke and many other activities were planned. IPS itself offers a variety of leisure activities such as football or a fitness studio. However, I visited a yoga studio in the city weekly. I felt very comfortable there, and it provided a wonderful balance to my studies. Additionally, I could learn the language better and had contact with the locals.

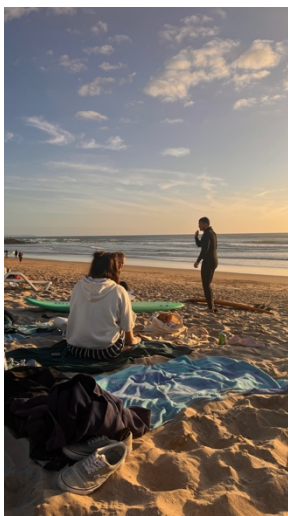


Insights to the city of Setúbal

Apart from my daily routine in Setúbal, I regularly traveled to Lisbon. Our monthly pass allowed us to have a wide range of transportation options, which made it easy to travel to different areas and cities. The connection from Setúbal to Lisbon was straightforward, and the bus ride took about 45 minutes. I explored the city a lot or met with Erasmus students from Germany who I got to know during these trips.

As a group, we planned many trips and took every opportunity to explore Portugal. Surfing in Caparica or taking the train to Cascais are just some of the activities you can experience here.

Here are some insights into places I visited:



Costa da Caparica



Cascais



Praia da Ursa



Lissabon



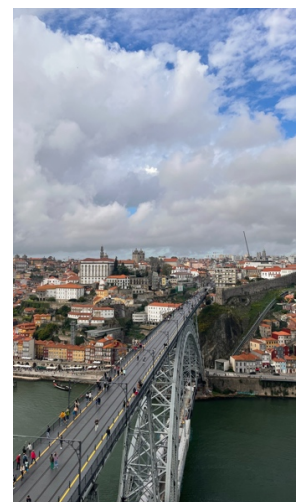
Nazaré



Sintra



Algarve



Porto

My Conclusion

Overall, my semester abroad at IPS was an incredible experience. Setúbal turned out to be the perfect place for my semester abroad with the sea in front of my eyes, international students from different countries, affordable housing, and the perfect location to travel around Portugal. Although I was there in the winter, it was much warmer and sunnier than in Germany, and at the beginning of the semester, I could even go swimming in the sea. The shared activities with my classmates and the cultural exchange made for an unforgettable study experience. Everyone was open-minded and friendly, so we felt like a big family in the end.

I highly recommend studying abroad to anyone who wants to grow personally and gain new experiences. It is also particularly suitable for those who want to improve their English skills. If you have any questions or need advice, feel free to email me at tia.herbst99@gmail.com.