



From meatballs to pierogis

Before departure

I love traveling and seeing new places and cultures, so it was natural for me to apply for an exchange semester. Initially, I had applied for an exchange to Hong Kong (the more exotic the destination the better), but this got shut down by corona. From there, I had to choose a country in Europe. I wanted to select a destination with the following features: a good university, relevant courses, strong English used in courses, inexpensive country, open in spite of corona restrictions, good nightlife. With all these factors in mind, I ended up with Warsaw at the top of my list!

As an EU citizen, I did not need a visa or any vaccination certificates. Given that the course was being conducted in English, I also did not need to know Polish. The main preparation, however, was writing up the learning agreement. It was relatively hard to find enough relevant courses for my major, and searching through the university's website was a bit laboursome. Thankfully, I did not need to perfectly match courses between KTH and WUT, so I managed to compile a list. This I believe will be the biggest hurdle for students applying to Poland.

Upon arrival

I had arrived to Poland on the same day the semester officially started, but the classes themselves actually started a few days later, giving me some room to breathe. There was no special welcome from the university, in fact, I had some trouble finding it on the first class day. However, while the university community is weak, the international Erasmus community is very strong here, with many events and welcome meetings (explained below).

Financials

Since this was an Erasmus exchange, I had received the Erasmus scholarship, about 350€ a month. This was enough to cover all basic expenses (accommodation, food, transport), however only because I was living in a shared dorm. Nonetheless, Poland is substantially cheaper than Sweden, at least 2 times. If you want to go the extra mile to save some money, there are select student restaurants (Bar Mleczny) and supermarkets (Biedronka), which are the cheapest.

Accommodation

I was given accommodation in the Riviera dormitory, I only needed to apply via email once. This was a dormitory with mostly students studying at WUT. It was extremely close to both the WUT and the city centre, which is an enormous plus (other dorms can be very far away from centre). It was also very cheap and you could get friends into the dorm (which is prohibited at other dorms). On the downside, it was very dirty and the small (bed)room is shared by 3 people, but I believe all Warsaw dorms are as such. Also, our window was covered by a huge semi-transparent billboard for advertisement. Expect a downgrade in dorm quality as compared to Stockholm's ones, but an incredible price.



University and studies

The university itself is large, however, my faculty (Mathematics and Information Science) was relatively small. It was a single 3-story building. The university and faculty alike offer a lot of relevant courses, however, mostly in Polish. I had to choose from a very restricted pool of English-taught courses, and it was difficult to make selection. I had to choose less relevant courses in order to fill up the quota. Another huge issue is that the average course has 3-4 credits, unlike in Sweden where the norm is 6-7. This means that you will be burdened by a lot of small courses, each requiring substantial time investment. Mainly because of this, I would say studying at KTH is much easier.

The quality of the courses varies, but is decent overall. It largely depends on the professor, of course. Some lecturers just go through the slides in a few minutes and then give huge homeworks you are unprepared for. Others complement their lectures with personal experiences and make learning much more immersive and efficient. Due to the pandemic and my course selection, it was not mandatory for me to attend most courses in person, so I had the freedom to go to the faculty when I wanted to. If you will have to attend every course, your timetable may not allow you to do much else during the week.

Courses

I studied MSc Machine Learning. The courses I chose at WUT were: Data Processing in R and Python, Introduction to Image Processing and Computer Vision, BI Analyst, Introduction to Management, IT Projects Management, Management of Organisation and Intellectual Property in ICT Industry and Social Networks and Recommendation Systems. The first two were most relevant to my studies. They tackled R and Python, and Computer Vision, highly useful in Machine Learning. They were well organized courses, with frequent lectures and labs. Then, the three management courses each tackled industrial management from a different perspective. I gained some knowledge in how to efficiently and in a structured manner conduct IT projects. While they were theory heavy, these courses were also well organized. The last course I would advise against attending, simply because it was way too difficult for its number of credit points. Unless you are willing to invest a lot of time on studying this, at the expense of other Erasmus activities, do not take this course.

City and country

I really loved Poland. Warsaw is a huge city, and there is always something happening. There is not too much historical sightseeing to do, but the nightlife here is truly amazing. Polish people are a bit cold, but they will help out if you need them, and are

kind. I did not really experience a cultural shock, the only thing that was difficult to handle was the cold winter weather. But, those living in Stockholm will not have a problem with this. The only issue in Poland is that the level of English knowledge is very low, so expect to need to use Google translate whenever you are talking to a local.



Leisure and social activities

As for social activities, Warsaw was a truly awesome option. I hanged out mostly with fellow Erasmus people, and foreign students studying here full-time. ESN organizes a one-week introductory session, where each day there is day and night activity for newcomers. So it is essentially non-stop partying and hanging out for a whole week. Moreover, each university has one of these weeks, so you could join other uni's events too to extend the activites for another week or two. Even after the first weeks, ESN organizes nighttime events at least bi-weekly and also host Tandem meeting every week for language exchange and meeting new people. The university itself did not offer any activities.



Sustainability

I traveled via plane, but a long train journey is certainly feasible. I cooked myself in the dorm kitchen and used public metro, which contributed to sustainability. Also, you can study here without physical textbooks (all material can be found online).

Other recommendations and observations

Don't forget to try out all the different flavours of Soplica ;)