

Experience report Universidade de Coimbra – winter term 24/25

Dear Fellow Students,

I am writing this report directly to you because I vividly remember reading Erasmus experience reports when I was considering applying for a semester abroad. So, if you are reading this because you are thinking about doing Erasmus or specifically going to Coimbra for your semester abroad, I can only encourage you to do so. I know it is a step that requires courage, but you won't regret it.

I am currently on the train back home, returning to my family and friends, and I have time to reflect on the last five months. I applied to Coimbra through the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Oldenburg. The application process was easier than expected. Once I was accepted, I had to start filling out forms. I was very grateful to receive some tips from the person who had spent their Erasmus semester in Coimbra before me. However, both my coordinators (from my home university and the host university) were also easily accessible and helped answer my questions.

Even before your departure, it's worth following the Instagram page of ESN Coimbra ([esncoimbra](#)). ESN – Erasmus Student Network – organizes many events, trips, longer excursions, and parties throughout the semester. They are always there to answer your questions and create a WhatsApp group for all Erasmus students in Coimbra for that semester. From the main group, you can join subgroups based on your interests. In our semester, for example, there were groups for volleyball, hiking, surfing, cooking, reading, watching movies/series, board games, photography, and yoga – just to name a few. No matter what your hobbies or interests are, I am sure you will find like-minded people among the approximately 1,500 Erasmus students :)

I flew to Porto Airport, and from there, you can either take a FlixBus or a bus from the company Rede Expressos to Coimbra. The same applies if you arrive at Lisbon Airport. When I arrived at my shared apartment in the old town at Praça do Comércio, I was initially very relieved that it actually existed and wasn't a scam. I lived with five other Erasmus students. As far as I know, ESN Coimbra collects accommodation recommendations from previous Erasmus students, so if you are looking for housing, it is worth asking them. I highly recommend finding a centrally located apartment, either in the old town, near the university (Polo 1), or close to Praça República.

It is important to mention that many Portuguese apartments do not have built-in heating, and the walls are poorly insulated. Most apartments can be made livable with electric heaters. However, in my accommodation, six people could not use them simultaneously without blowing a fuse. As a result, I spent my last few weeks in a very cold room, and I highly recommend packing warm socks and a hot water bottle, regardless of whether you are going for the winter or summer semester. Of course, you can also buy these things locally.

Coimbra is a city where everything is within walking distance. I never used the bus. Since the city is built on a hill, you will get quite a workout just walking, and cycling is hardly an option. The small, charming streets with many restaurants, cafés, pastelarias (a Portuguese mix of bakery, confectionery, and café), and bars give the city a lot of character and quickly made me feel at home. As mentioned earlier, the ESN Coimbra WhatsApp groups make it easy to integrate socially. I met other students on my first day and got to know many people in the following weeks, some of whom became close friends and made my Erasmus experience so special.

A week later, lectures began. The University of Coimbra is a beautiful, historic, and tradition-rich institution. Unfortunately, many courses are only offered in Portuguese. However, in most cases, you can make arrangements with professors in the first class to complete your coursework in English. In Portugal, there is usually no single big exam at the end of the semester covering an entire lecture series. Instead, continuous assessments take place throughout the semester. The advantage of this system is that I didn't have to end my Erasmus semester with a stressful exam period but instead had the opportunity to travel around Portugal in my final weeks.

During weekends, I took trips to Figueira da Foz, Porto, Lisbon, Braga, Peniche, and Nazaré. Since Coimbra is quite centrally located, many destinations are perfect for day trips or short stays. In my last few weeks, I traveled to the Azores, which are easily and affordably accessible from the Portuguese mainland. I also visited the Algarve and hiked parts of the Fishermen's Trail. The nature in Portugal truly amazed me, especially the dramatic cliffs along the Algarve coast.

In short, I had an incredibly enriching and wonderful time in Coimbra. I met amazing people, discovered beautiful places, and, in a way, got to know myself anew. Moving to a city where you know no one is liberating – there are no expectations placed upon you. You can be whoever you want to be, and among all the people you meet, you can choose those who resonate most with you. I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to take this chance, and I will cherish these special memories for a long time.

However, I also want to paint a realistic picture of my Erasmus experience. Before my time in Coimbra, I had only heard about the positive aspects of studying abroad. But of course, there are days when things don't go as planned. At the beginning, you might feel overwhelmed by all the possibilities and new experiences, realizing that you have to navigate everything on your own without your familiar support system nearby. But you are not alone. Looking back, my friends and I have all had these moments. You don't have to attend every event to avoid missing out or to keep up with new friendships. Give yourself time to process everything. Ultimately, all these experiences helped me grow.

To conclude, I would like to share a list of places and things that became part of my Coimbra experience. Maybe they will shape your time there too :)

- The jam session at Liquidâmbar, every Wednesday
- The courtyard of the Faculty of Psychology (I highly recommend the chocolate croissant from the café there)
- Sunset on the terrace of the Faculty of Psychology library
- The second-hand stores Reútil and Zero Waste Nelly
- The ice cream shop DOPPO Gelateria at Praça do Comércio
- The pastry shop “Padaria Fidalgo da Baixa” (I recommend the pistachio croissant)
- The footbridges on the Rio Mondego, which rise above the river behind the Ponte Pedonal Pedro e Inês as seen from the city centre
- Sunset at Seminário Maior
- Nau Café
- Café Galeria Santa Clara
- Indian Kebab (Av. Sá da Bandeira)
- Mr. Pizza at Praça República
- República parties
- Pottery workshops at Atelier 13