IT University Travel Report

Host University: Universitat Politècnica De Catalunya

Study Programme at IT University: MSc. Software Design

Exchange Agreement or Study Abroad: Erasmus exchange

Courses studied abroad:
> Algorithmic Methods for Mathematical Models
> Introduction To Machine Learning
> Assistive And Health-Care Technologies
> Geometric Tools for Computer Graphics
> Computational Vision
> Cognitive Interaction with Robots

Exchange Period: Autumn 2022

Your stay abroad

What was it like to study at UPC (including choice of courses, academic level, social life at campus)?

There is a fairly big variety of courses to choose from (make sure you have the pre-requisites and fit your interest). The academic level is quite high, but professors are very nice and want to help. There are more assignments (and even exams) during the semester that are counted into the final grade. A lot of focus is also put on group projects that are graded as well. So, it can become overwhelming, especially since you have more courses than at ITU (5-6 compared to 3-4).

You can always try to ask for deadline extensions or for help from the professors since most of the time they are understanding and want you to learn something from the courses.

Life on campus is very social, there are a lot of cafeterias/bars where you can hang out with students, as well as plenty of places around the campus. Some courses have mostly exchange students, so it is easy to find people to socialize with on/off campus.

What was your initial motivation for going abroad and did your stay meet your expectations?

I wanted to try living in a new country again and escape the dark/cold/rainy weather in Denmark for a few months. I thought it will be the perfect 'mental break' from studies. I also wanted to take the opportunity to study courses that were not offered at ITU that I was interested in (more focus on AI). Exchange life can be sometimes very glamourous (going out, partying, traveling, meeting new people), but it's not always the case. Some people have troubles with their accommodation, some people have a hard time adapting to a place where they don't know the culture or the language, some people miss their home comfort zone (friends, family, partners), university is demanding so a lot of time is spent the library studying. Overall, it was a good experience and learned a lot both academically and personally.

Please describe what you got out of your stay, both personally and academically, and how do you expect it to contribute to your further studies?

From a personal point of view, I gained a lot by this experience - moving to a new country where you do not speak the language or know a lot of people. I learned to better adapt to a new environment and a new culture. I made lots of good friends that I am still in contact with and made memories that I will always look back fondly.

Academically, I gained a lot of new knowledge within artificial intelligence. My favorite courses were Machine Learning and Computational Vision, which will definitely contribute to my future career since I am planning on working in this domain. Moreover, I also had to opportunity to experience a new style of teaching, with more work throughout the semester and less emphasis on the final exam. This helped me be on top of the course content, and have a less stressful exam period.

Arranging your stay

Please give a short description of the process of arranging your stay:

I have made a list of everything that I needed to arrange prior to my exchange (flights, accommodation, documents, tests, insurance) and made sure to attend the meetings organized by the exchange coordinators. Everything is explained quite well, so it was a streamlined process.

What resources did you find helpful in planning your stay and which people did you use (if any)?

Staying organized is very important. Connecting with the students from the university that are also going is helpful since you can share useful information with each other (also nice to know somebody while you're there at the beginning). Contacting the host university or the exchange coordinator is always helpful since they have plenty of experience. The host university also organized presentations about living/studying in Barcelona, as well as a quick Catalan workshop.

How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?

In Spain, it is quite popular to use the app Badi to find rooms to rent (that's also where I found mine). Student dorms are more expensive, but they have some benefits in terms of cleaning and social activities. If you are a few people going, you can try to look for an apartment together, but it is harder to have agencies answer you especially if you don't have a Spanish number. I always had a video meeting with the person posting the room to check the place and get to know my possible future roommates. Living close to university is not a must since with public transport you can get around anywhere within 30 minutes. I'd pick a safe fun neighborhood closer to the center and just making sure a metro station (preferably L3) is super close by.

Expenses and Financing

Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad

Barcelona is relatively cheap (groceries, eating out, transport), but since you are on exchange you will want to see/try more things than in your average daily life. Accommodation can be fairly expensive (550€-800€/month). Besides the accommodation, I have spent an average of 850€/month for everything else (trips and activities included, friends and family visiting). I'd recommend having some room in your budget for travelling around and going out with friends.

Did you apply for scholarships and would you recommend any ones in particular?

I applied only for the ITU Travel Pool.

Recommendations for other students:

The hardest part was enrolling into courses at UPC. It is a slow process, and not a lot of spots are open for exchange students in some courses. Therefore, it is important to submit your application as soon as possible to have the highest priority. It is very important that you meet the pre-requisites stated in the course page (and that they can be proved by previous courses or certifications). You can always sign-up for waiting lists in case the seats are full in a course, but you really want to take it. It is also important to apply for pre-approval for more courses than you need in case you don't get a seat at the host university and can easily swap with another one without needing to wait for another approval from ITU.
In terms of social life, join ESN, SALSA'M program and local organizations (shazlist, welovebarcelona, friendslist etc) that create events/trips for Erasmus/international students. Also, make the most at the beginning of the semester when it's still super warm out and there is not a lot of studying/group work.