

## PREPARATION

The preparations for an exchange in Faro are easy and straightforward. As soon as you register for ERASMUS you are guided through the process step by step and deadlines for documents will be sent to you by mail. In the “mobility online” portal you can always check the current state of your “application”, which makes it very easy to see what comes next. It might seem a lot in the beginning but if you organize yourself you will manage easily. But I also made great experience with the coordinators in Bremen, who answered every question very kindly and helped me a lot.

As an EU citizen you also don't have to worry about issues of everyday life since you should be able to get cash with your credit card without paying an extra fee (meaning that opening a Portuguese bank account is not necessary) and you don't need a new sim card to use mobile internet with your phone. Faro is also very touristic so you will always find someone who speaks English, if you don't speak Portuguese in the beginning.

## ABOUT THE HOST INSTITUTION

Faro has an airport that is only 20 min away from the center so you can either take a bus or an Uber (which is quite cheap in Portugal) if you have a lot of luggage. If you plan to come by train you should be aware that travelling by train in Portugal is very slow and takes a lot of time.

You will get a time and a date, when to register at the Mobility Office in Faro with all your documents and you should bring a lot of time for this as well because there are also students who come without an appointment and the waiting line was very long. To fulfill your registration, you have to go to different buildings but even though it was very stressful there are many nice people who are always willing to help you.

During the orientation week, diverse activities from trips to nearby cities, boat tours in the Ria Formosa, a free lunch or a city tour in Faro were offered but in my opinion the organization was unnecessarily complicated. To participate you need a voucher for each activity, which you get during the registration at the mobility office. The problem was that many students (including me) only had their registration dates after most of the activities were already over.

## COURSES

The Universidade do Algarve offers a wide variety in master programs that are marine related, for example marine biology, marine and coastal systems, marine biological resources or Aquaculture. You can choose any of the courses as long as they don't (thematically) overlap with courses that you already took in Bremen. What I really liked is that I could choose subjects where I could connect my already existing knowledge but also learn about new things. The course *eutrophication and harmful algae blooms* for example combines phytoplankton dynamics, oceanography and anthropogenic disturbances of marine systems. All courses are taught in English so you don't have to worry if you don't speak Portuguese in the beginning.

You can easily find the courses on the webpage of the Universidade do Algarve, which is also in English. Usually (but not for all courses) there are detailed info sheets about the course

content and the number of practical classes. By the time you fill out your learning agreement “before the mobility” it might be that the courses are not up to date but you will have to change your learning agreement “during the mobility” anyway because timetables are only available close to when the semester starts.

Making your schedule can be a bit tricky, especially when you choose courses from different master programs. Schedules can change weekly so make sure you look at the dates of the whole semester for each course to avoid having too much overlap. In most of the courses, attendance regulations were quite strict and we had to sign on a sheet at the end of every lesson (lecture and practicals). The ERASMUS coordinator of the science faculty at the Universidade do Algarve was not very willing to answer questions and usually unfriendly so I would advise you to change your learning agreement according to your schedule (with as few overlap as possible) and then just go to her office to get her signature and for her to enroll you in all the courses. During the semester I went, there were no regulations on how many ERASMUS students are allowed in each course but that might change because professors complained about overcrowded courses. There were for example 8 ERASMUS students in a course with only 20 full students.

During the semester the schedule changed many times so its advisable to check the times again online in the beginning of the week, in case this creates overlap with other courses you have enough time to talk to the professors to find a solution.

## **ACCOMODATION AND LIVING IN FARO**

Finding accommodation in Faro can be a bit tricky because the university takes many ERASMUS and exchange students every semester but you will definitely find something.

Most of the students came to Faro and stayed in a hostel until they found something and I think the best way is to simply talk to people. The staff in the hostel, other students from the university and even staff in supermarkets because some landlords leave pamphlets there when they have a room available. The advantage is that you are already in the city to have a look at the room and to get to know the landlord before you pay the rent.

From what I heard, prices for rent have increased drastically over the past years because the number of foreign students in Faro is very high but don't be tricked into an overpriced apartment. A normal rent should be around 300 Euro. You can find cheaper accommodation but rooms are very simple anyway, usually only a bed and a cupboard.

Joining the WhatsApp group from the ERASMUS Student Network (ESN) can be helpful in the beginning because sometimes students post when they found an apartment and have a free room.

There are also some webpages suggested by the ESN or the Mobility office of the Universidade do Algarve. I know that many students found accommodation there but said it's not comparable to the German equivalent “WG-gesucht”, so be careful if someone asks you to pay anything in advance if you haven't seen the room before.

There are also many Facebook groups, like “expats living in Faro”, “rooms for rent in Faro” or “Negocios na hora Faro”, where you can post that you're searching for a room or where people post who have vacancies. This is the way I found my room, even in advance, before arriving in Faro.

The faculty of science is not in the city center of Faro but a bit outside in a part that is called Gambelas. This is a very quiet and nice area and you can reach the beach easily from there. Most students live in the city center because there is another campus in Penha and accommodation there is quite cheap. Many marine biology students live in houses at the beach, at least during the winter semester, when the tourism season is over. In summer they usually have to leave their rooms and houses are rent for tourists.

Busses in Faro are not very reliable and often late or full and the monthly bus ticket costs around 27 Euro. During the week there is a bus around every 15 minutes but on the weekend the schedule is scarcer and especially the connection between Gambelas and the city center is difficult but if you share an uber with other people for example to meet in the evening it can even be even cheaper than the bus. However, I think the most practical solution is to buy cheap or used bike because Faro is not very big and you can go around by bike easily and sell it again when you leave. For example, from Gambelas to the city center or to the beach is only 20 minutes. Google maps for bikes doesn't work in Faro and you won't find the best routes there so again just talk to other students because many of them go to university by bike and can show you how.

If you go to Faro during the winter semester you will most likely experience perfect summer days with cloudless skies but in the evenings it can get quite cold and houses usually don't have heating systems so don't forget some warm clothes.

## **RETURNING**

Before you leave, remember to go to the mobility office at the Universidade do Alentejo again. In the beginning they keep your "confirmation of ERASMUS study period" and they will sign and give it back to you before you leave. They will also send your transcript of record via email to your home university. After that you just have to follow the rest of the steps in the mobility online portal to get the rest of the money for your ERASMUS exchange.

## **CONCLUSION**

During my exchange in Faro I was able to greatly extend my network. I now have contacts to many professors and students from all over the world, which is nice and opens up many opportunities. Experiencing another way of teaching in subjects that I couldn't have chosen in Bremen was also very helpful to figure out my interests and my future career. The Universidade do Algarve is very good to study marine sciences and offers a great environment on top. Getting to know Portuguese culture and language was also a great joy.