

Saint-Petersburg State University

International Relations Office

EXCHANGE STUDENTS' REPORT

Please complete this form and send it to Scientific and Academic Cooperation/Students Exchange Dept.
nechaeva@ir.pu.ru, fax +7 /812/ 3240788. Thank you.

TO BE FILLED OUT ELECTRONICALLY

The international experience you have gained while the exchange period at St.Petersburg University is the unique practice you will remember all your life. It can also help other students when they are planning for their exchange. To make sure that prospective students have a chance to learn from your experience you are required to submit the **Exchange Students' Report**.

Please complete the form and **return by email to nechaeva@ir.pu.ru**.

When filling in the returned student report try to remember the sort of things that you wanted to know before you went on exchange, be honest in your responses and try to avoid simply giving yes/no answers.

Please do not hesitate to contact Scientific and Academic Cooperation/Students Exchange Dept. staff if there are any issues you would like to discuss regarding your exchange experience.

Name:	Yuta Tamberg
Host faculty at SPSU	Biology and Soil Science
Exchange Study Period	22.10.2008 – 28.07.2009
Home Institution	University of Algarve

Do you give permission for prospective exchange students to contact you if they have questions? **Yes**

If yes, please give your preferred email address: yutamberg@gmail.com

The Host Institution

What influenced your decision to select the host institution that you went to?

I had no choice at the time of application. University of Algarve was the only available institution.

Please describe the location of the host institution.

Portugal, Algarve province, Faro.

Please describe the courses that you took while on exchange. What were their pros and cons?

All courses except two were taught by Portuguese professors. Many of them included either lab or computer practical work, but almost no field work. I find this strange and disturbing for the field faculty of the University located on the ocean shore with rich and diverse coastal ecosystems.

Between particularly good courses I would name

1. Statistical analysis
2. Marine Biogeography and Evolution
3. Numerical Taxonomy
4. Marine Biodiversity and Conservation - all of them detailed, comprehensive, provide most recent knowledge and give completely new perspective of the field.

Worst courses were:

1. Methods in Molecular and Cellular Biology – too superficial,
2. Methods and Processes in Biological Oceanography
3. Marine Biogeochemistry and Global Changes – badly organized, ill-structured, give insufficient information, content of the courses and amount of work required do not match the length of the course and it's value.

How did course content, class size, marking, etc compare with St. Petersburg State University?

In general courses at Home and Host Universities are of the similar level. However in Algarve University each semester is divided into three modules, each, in turn, comprise two courses. The length of the module is about month and a half, and each module ends with exams. Therefore the length of each course is the same. In my opinion this is an obstacle for learning, since the courses are not by nature equal, some are more important, require more time and should be valued higher than others.

I had classes either in group of 20 or 40-50 students.

Grades in the Host University are defined with a finer scale – from 1 to 20. The marking is therefore more detailed. Threshold between “satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory” is 9.5.

All exams I took during the study were paper-based, either multiple-choice tests or detailed written answers.

Did you find the academic and international office staff helpful?

Yes, and besides all very friendly.

Please describe the resources available to exchange students (i.e. computers, the library).

University has several computer rooms, two major libraries and wireless internet. All these resources, however, become available only after obtaining the student ID and this process is unbelievably slow. I and my colleagues received our IDs after two and a half month.

Did you experience any language or cultural difficulties at the host institution?

I had no language difficulties while communicating with professors, international officers and main part of fellow students. Yet, the life in Portugal itself presents a challenge for foreigner.

Do you think that going on exchange contributed to your academic and personal development? If so, how?

Yes, it definitely did. It improved my knowledge and gave new perspective. It allowed me to establish personal contacts with researchers in the similar field. Also it was important cultural experience.

Practical

Accommodation

Please describe the accommodation options available to exchange students.

1. Dormitories – far better than dormitories of SpbSU, particularly in sense of location, moderate and effective instead of arrogant, aggressive and over-sized security.
2. Private accommodation

How expensive were the accommodation options?

1. Dormitories – about 120 euros per month
2. Private – between 120 and 200 euros per month per person (if renting together with fellow students)

What type of accommodation would you recommend?

Both options are good, but of course rented apartment gives much more flexibility. I would recommend the latter.

Food

Did you have self-catering facilities or were meals provided with your accommodation?

I bought and cooked my own food.

Was food expensive?

Yes, but not very much.

Where is the best place to shop?

Everywhere. Large supermarkets are cheaper of course, and the central market of the city gives good choice of fresh fruits, vegetables and fish.

How much does it cost to eat out at a local restaurant/café?

At the University full-sized lunch costs between 2.5 and 4 euros. Restaurants are more expensive, with average price of 15-25 euros.

Transport

Please describe the local transport options.

City buses, buses and trains over the country. All are in good order. For over-country traveling I would recommend trains.

Was it expensive to use local transport? Please give an example of the costs.

From the first month on I used monthly tickets which cost 25 euros. One ride is 1.65

Personal Safety

Did you find the city in which you stayed safe?

Yes, quite so. It is all right to leave laptop in the library for several hours. The lost wallet will be returned untouched with all money. It is safe to walk alone in the city after midnight.

Do you have any safety advice for other exchange students?

Nothing except regular caution.

Highlights

Briefly describe the highlights of your exchange experience.

My time in Portugal was pretty heavily loaded with study. I had not much time to learn about country and no time at all to study language which I find most unfortunate. Still, this experience is extremely valuable for me.

Problems

Briefly describe any problems you experienced and any suggestions you may have to help others avoid them.

My main problem was visa. First of all it took very long to gather papers for application. Next, the Portuguese consulate is located in Moscow, which is also an obstacle. Last, the visa preparation also requires a lot of time. My only advise is to learn about visa requirements and start to gather papers as soon as possible.

Other Comments

Do you have any further comments?

I believe information about exchange programs similar to one I attended should be widely distributed. I found out that programs like this are common and well-known in Europe and over the world, while here not many even heard about them.

Thank you for taking the time to share your exchange experiences in this report.

Please save your report as a **Word document** and email a copy to nechaeva@ir.pu.ru

Date: 31.07.2009

Name: Yuta Tamberg