

## Experience Report

### Universität Zürich

Summer Semester 24 – Major at FU: MA Media and Political Communication

#### Preparation

I chose the University of Zurich (UZH) and Switzerland for my study abroad to gain new and diverse perspectives. Some professors at UZH's Institute of Communication and Media Research (IKMZ) work in areas that interest me and have been cited in my bachelor's thesis. Additionally, with my major in Media and Political Communication, I saw the potential to connect with international organizations like the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee. Having previously visited Switzerland and Zurich, I already had a general understanding of the city and country, which made the transition easier. The opportunity to study in both German and English further influenced my decision. Moreover, I am interested in exploring the differences between Switzerland and similar regions in Germany.

Compared to other overseas exchange programs, the general preparations for the SEMP went smoothly. I started my preparation for the Spring Semester 2024 in January 2023. My home school had an internal selection process, and I secured the exchange place in March 2023. For the Spring Semester 2024, I was nominated by UZH in mid-September 2023. I received regular emails with relevant checklists and deadlines for submitting documents and was able to track the current status of my preparations in the Mobility Online portal. After arriving in Zurich, we still needed to complete some bureaucratic tasks, such as city registration and health insurance exemption.

The SEMP program offers a scholarship for our stay, which you will receive in cash at the beginning of the semester. This is practical for students who do not have a bank account initially. The cost of living in Switzerland, including rent, groceries, and restaurants, is almost twice as expensive as in Germany. Transport is also costly, so getting a **Halb-Tax card** can be helpful, as it reduces train fares by half, making travel more affordable.

## Accommodation

Accommodation is key to settling in the city, as it is essential for opening a bank account, securing a phone contract, and completing city registration. If you are not an EU citizen, having an address or registration in Switzerland is mandatory for these processes. Finding a room was much more difficult than I expected, so I strongly suggest starting your search as soon as possible.

UZH offered the opportunity to live in a student dormitory, and I applied for the WOKO student dormitory in mid-November 2023. However, despite the reports I read that indicated it was a safe option, I did not secure a spot in one of the WOKO dormitories in Zurich. Since then, I have been looking for a room in Zurich for three months. Dormitories and rooms in shared apartments in Zurich are very popular and expensive.

The most significant difficulty I encountered in Zurich was not having a permanent address or city registration. During the first month, I lived in several different Airbnb apartments, which was particularly challenging as I had to juggle new lectures with the ongoing search for accommodation and frequent moves. I tried various platforms, including WG-Zimmer, Flatfox, and UZH Marktplatz. Please be careful as there are scammers out there, especially if they claim to be out of town or out of the country. Meanwhile, I also inquired about possible offers and sublets from various student residences, such as "**Livit**" in Winterthur, "**Maximilianeum**" in Zurich, and "**Student Village**" at ETH. About a month after classes began, I finally found an apartment through the Housing Office of University/ETH. I am very appreciative of all the help from the Housing Office as well as the student residences.

## Studying at UZH

Courses at UZH are diverse, with many majors offering classes in both German and English to accommodate international students. I chose my courses based on my interests, and they were held on three different campuses. One interdisciplinary class I took was Machine Learning, offered by the Department of Computer Science and Computational Linguistics. This class covered topics from physics, political science, and neuroinformatics—areas I had not explored at my home

school. It required programming in Python and included weekly programming assignments, which were challenging as I had to learn from scratch.

Another course I attended was "AI, Big Data, and Social Media Analysis" from the Institute for Communication and Media Research (IKMZ). This course did not require any programming background. The Machine Learning course was a good complement to this lecture, providing a practical basis for understanding the technical aspects discussed in the AI and Big Data course.

Additionally, I took a French beginner course (A1) from the Language Center. It cost 100 CHF and was held once a week. UZH/ETH also offers a Self-Learning Center with materials for learning different languages. With my student card, I could borrow books and movies from there.

### **Everyday Life and Leisure**

Zurich is a German-speaking city, but English is sufficient for daily life, city office staff also speak fluent English. When speaking Standard German, most people will switch from Swiss German to Standard German. If international students want to learn German or Swiss German, the Language Center offers courses.

The city center is small, so you can reach most places in the center within 30 minutes. However, to get to our institute in Oerlikon, you will need to use public transport. Students do not have a semester ticket for public transport, so it is advisable to buy ZVV monthly tickets, which cost around 90 CHF depending on the number of zones and the time of day.

Since I spent the first month searching for accommodation and do not live in a student dormitory, I only got to know a few of my classmates, mostly from lectures. Many local Swiss students commute daily or weekly and have their own social circles, so I did not have many opportunities to meet them. However, Zurich has a large international community, providing plenty of chances to meet people from other countries, especially from Spain and Italy. Additionally, I observed the presence of Jewish communities, which was a new experience for me compared to Germany. I made several local friends and we visited museums and attended various events. The city also hosts public events for residents. I particularly enjoyed the rose fountain during Easter.

For sports activities, the university offers **ASVZ**, which is one of my top recommendations. ASVZ provides over 200 different sports, most of which are free, giving students the opportunity to try various activities. Unlike my home school, where registration at the beginning of the semester is required and there are charges for sports, ASVZ allows more flexibility and exploration.

Living close to Switzerland, I had several visitors from Germany and Austria. We explored various places together, and I enjoyed traveling with familiar friends. I love nature in Switzerland, which remains beautiful even in bad weather. During my stay from winter to summer, I experienced different seasons, and the Swiss landscape was always charming.

### **Conclusion**

To summarize, I recommend the exchange program at the University of Zurich (UZH) for its diverse courses, supportive academic environment, and vibrant international community. Despite the challenges of finding accommodation and managing daily expenses, the opportunity to live and study in Zurich is invaluable. The experience of engaging with different academic disciplines, exploring the beautiful Swiss landscape, and connecting with people from various cultural backgrounds significantly broadens one's perspective. For non-EU citizens, early preparation for accommodation and bureaucratic tasks is essential. Overall, this exchange program offers a unique chance to enhance both your academic and personal growth.