

Experience Report

ESCA Ecole de Management, Casablanca, Morocco



A. Application

As exchange students from the Technical University of Munich, we applied for a winter semester abroad in 2022 at the ESCA Ecole de Management in Casablanca, Morocco, as part of our Bachelor's program in Management & Technology. To apply for ESCA at TUM, we needed a certificate (which can be obtained for free at TUM through DAAD – register as early as possible as spaces fill up quickly) of French proficiency at level B2 or English proficiency at the same level, along with proof of basic French knowledge (e.g., Abitur). In early February, we received a confirmation from TU Munich that we were recommended to the partner university. In mid-April, we received our first information from the partner university regarding the application process, which involved filling out an online form and uploading several documents (motivation letter, resume, photo, passport, transcript). We both chose to participate in the PGE IB 4th year program (which stands for Programme Grande Ecole - International Business) as all courses were in English and the content was best suited for credit transfer. Of course, one could also take courses in French and from other disciplines (such as Marketing, HR, Finance, etc.). However, since ESCA is a pure business school, no courses are offered in your technical major. In mid-June, we received our final acceptance letter via email, confirming that our application as exchange students for the winter semester 2022/2023 at ESCA was successful.

B. Preparations

Apartment hunting:

The information about accommodation options we received included contact details for a Moroccan student who would support us in our apartment search, as well as a dormitory (which unfortunately had no availability when we inquired). Additionally, there was a Facebook group with all exchange students, where we could team up to find an apartment together. The ESCA contact was the successful way for everyone to find an apartment, but we had some last-minute problems with the apartment, and in the end, we found one on Airbnb. The total rent for an apartment was approximately 10,000 Dirhams per month, which was around 910 € split between two or three people - therefore expect to pay around 350€ - 450€ p.P.. The district close to the university is definitely one of the most modern but also expensive areas in all of Casablanca. The neighbourhood was newly built after the pandemic and was still under construction while we lived there.



Course registration:

Upon receiving the acceptance letter, we had about two weeks to fill out a "Learning Agreement" with the courses we wanted to take at ESCA, have it signed by TU Munich, and send it back via email. Each program had about 10 predetermined courses, each with 3 ECTS credits, which the local students were required to take. However, as exchange students, we were not required to take every one of these courses, and we also had the option to take additional courses such as "Moroccan Studies" and "Dialectal Moroccan Arabic for Beginners." ESCA did not impose a minimum or maximum number of courses that had to be taken. However, TU Munich expected its exchange students to take courses worth at least 20 ECTS credits while abroad. To gain a better understanding of the courses offered, there was a

three-page course description for each course that outlined the course content, structure, grading, and other important details.

Semester dates:

The semester at ESCA started at the beginning of September and ended at the end of December.

Visa:

German nationals only require a passport that is valid for at least 6 months upon entry to Morocco, as stays of up to 90 days for tourism or business purposes are visa-free. However, as the semester lasts longer than 90 days and obtaining a visa is very complicated and time-consuming, all exchange students have left the country within these 90 days and re-entered (sometimes on the same day) to extend the stay duration, as the 90-day period starts counting anew.

Arrival:

After booking a flight, one could send their flight details to the ESCA's "Welcome Team" via email, so that they could arrange for pick-up from the airport and transportation to the desired accommodation. A member of this team had contacted us via Facebook to provide information and answer any questions. We were then conveniently driven by car from the airport with our luggage directly to the door of our accommodation. We were also assisted during our first visit to the accommodation.

C. Arrival in Casablanca

Welcome/Guidance:

In the first few days after our arrival, we connected with other exchange students and spent many hours together at the beach or in one of the apartments. The university kick-off took place at a breakfast on the rooftop terrace of ESCA, followed by a tour of the university and a presentation on all important matters, including the delivery of our student ID cards and access codes to online timetables. The rest of the day was spent at an amusement park where activities such as paintball were offered. The next day, a city tour of the most important points in Casablanca was scheduled to help us navigate the city with over 3.5 million inhabitants. The following weekend included a joint trip to Marrakech, which is about three to four hours away by car, as well as a nearby adventure park in the south of the city, all in the spirit of team-building measures, but of course, fun was also an important part of it.

After these first two weeks, a very strong sense of community had already developed, which would continue throughout our stay. I count the friendships that were formed during this time and the further joint trips during the semester among the greatest gains of the semester abroad in Casablanca.



Contact Persons:

The first point of contact was Oumaima Hamilou, who organized the entire program and also coordinated the welcome team. She contacted us by email before the trip and was our main point of contact for all questions from the very beginning. She was also our first contact person on site at ESCA, who took care of any problems in case of doubt. The second constant was Madame Mediha, who was responsible for academic coordination at ESCA and whose office door was always open for any questions and problems with the course schedule, etc.

D. Studies

Course selection:

With the Letter of Acceptance, we also received a course schedule for the possible "tracks" of the Bachelor's programme. Since ESCA is exclusively a business school, almost all subjects should count towards this area (but it is best to clarify this with our outgoing office before the trip). For the course overview, as already mentioned, we received a description of the individual courses by email and could thus choose the courses that seemed interesting to us. The biggest track was International Business with courses such as International Purchasing, Human Resources, International Negotiation, International Trade and Global Market Analysis. In addition there is also the option of voluntarily taking the courses Moroccan Studies and Arabic, which we can highly recommend, as it is very helpful in everyday life in Casablanca.

Organisation of the courses:

The courses themselves took place in classes of 15 to 30 students, either once a week in three-hour lectures or as block courses. The lectures had more of a seminar character than the format of classical lectures. The students are always involved in the teaching. In addition to a final exam, performance usually has to be in the form of presentations and reports or papers, which result in an overall grade at the end. Attendance is therefore compulsory for all students. If you attend less than 70% of the lectures, this will affect your grade. Basically, the lectures, with their rather unusual length for us, are not a problem, however, as the time can be used sensibly by involving the students.

Exams:

Examinations are generally held at the end of the lecture period, usually one week after the last session, but in any case before Christmas. The above-mentioned papers or mid-term examinations are usually held during the semester. In the case of block seminars, the examinations are sometimes attached directly to the last day of the course. The scheduling of these examinations is not always as transparent and structured as one is used to at TUM, so it is advisable to find out about the scheduled dates in good time. The examinations require both reproduction and transfer performance. Although ESCA offers one of the highest levels in francophone Africa, the requirements cannot be compared one-to-one with TUM. Grades are awarded according to the French system (0 to 20 points).

E. Life

Life at the university:

Esca has a terrace outside, a spacious entrance area, several seating areas for studying and a sports hall. Compared to TUM, these places are all very small. The spacious roof terrace as well as the access to all the classrooms offer space for individual or group work within the ESCA. Nevertheless we moved most of our studying and preparation for the examinations to our flats. For the breaks there are food stands along the streets, mainly for the construction workers, where you can get a (smaller) meal from 70 cents. There are also restaurants, bakeries and a supermarket within 10-20 minutes walking distance.

The seminar character of the lectures means that you automatically come into contact with other students, which also leads to one or two extracurricular activities. For example, we met from time to time with both Moroccan and other exchange students to play football after class. In addition, the exchange coordinator and her team offer organised excursions (e.g. to Marrakech and the desert) for the exchange students. We have been on every one of these excursions and can highly recommend them, as they are a lot of fun and promote a sense of team spirit among the exchange students and also the local students who organise the excursions.

Living in Casablanca/Morocco:

Casablanca is the city with the largest industrial port in Morocco. This is one of the reasons why many Moroccans come to Casablanca to find work. The many inhabitants (the majority of Moroccans) and thus also many cars ensure that the air is heavily polluted by exhaust fumes and the cleanliness of the streets cannot be compared with German cities. There are heaps of rubbish on every corner. The city as a whole has a rather industrial flair and, apart from the Hassan II Mosque (one of the largest mosques in the world), which is one of the few mosques that can also be visited by non-Muslims, offers few tourist attractions. On the coast facing the Atlantic Ocean, there are several surf schools that rent surfing equipment cheaply and also offer courses. The surf school we went to is located on Ain Diab beach and, after a short negotiation, rented us surfboards and wetsuits for 10€ per day. From ESCA, the beach can be easily reached in about 15-20 minutes by taxi or tram for about 0,7€ - 3€. In Moroccan cities, it is generally possible to reach destinations that are not within walking distance by taxi. If necessary, however, the taxi driver should be told to please turn on the taxi meter or a price should be negotiated in advance (especially at night). For a group of up to 4 people, the red taxis are also recommended in terms of price, or taxi apps such as InDriver.

Of all Moroccan cities, Casablanca and Tanger are probably the closest to European cities. This is also clearly visible in the two shopping centres "AnfaPlace" and "Morocco Mall", which are in fact no different from a shopping centre in this country. Casablanca therefore offers a great interface between the usual environment with, for example, upscale restaurants (the prices are in the lower Munich average) and at the same time the "real" Moroccan experience (which is sometimes much cheaper).

Religion:

The biggest difference, and probably the one that causes the most headaches at the beginning, is the religion. Morocco and Casablanca are mostly Muslim and do not have a secular system of government. This also highlights the importance of religion to the people. To learn more about the practice and the religion itself, we definitely recommend the voluntary course "Moroccan Studies", in which you gain very exciting insights and also tips for dealing with religion. Basically, however, we would like to say that Casablanca itself practices a very progressive and open interpretation of religion and accepts people who think differently without question. Casablanca is a very safe city in most parts, even for women. Even though the percentage of female exchange students was not very high, we would by no means advise against it! Of course, especially as a young woman, you should adapt to the environment and some customs might be different than at home, but in our opinion, a safe and exciting semester abroad is definitely possible for female students as well. (The Moroccan female students and supervisors are always there to help with any questions and you can wear a bikini to the beach club or to the beach in Casablanca without any worries).



Travelling

On our days off from lectures, we often enjoyed travelling around the rest of the country. Casablanca is very centrally located in Morocco and has excellent infrastructural connections. Most cities and areas can therefore be reached easily and cheaply via the existing train and bus connections. The capital Rabat, for example, is only a 1.5 hour train ride from Casablanca and a ticket is affordable for about 7€ (round trip). Renting a car is also easy and inexpensive at around €30 per day. Morocco offers a variety of different cities and natural features such as the Sahara Desert, the Atlas Mountains and many long coastal areas that are definitely worth many trips. During our time there, we made many trips over the weekend with up to 20 people and could easily rent a riad or hostel. From surfing to riding camels or horses, hiking in the mountains, to partying in Marrakesh, there is a lot to offer.



F. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that we definitely enjoyed our time in Casablanca and in Morocco as a whole and would always choose to spend our semester abroad there again. Morocco is definitely different from European countries, but it is precisely these differences and getting to know foreign cultures and conventions that make a semester abroad so interesting and valuable that you should definitely not miss this opportunity. Not to mention the many friendships that you make during this time, which hopefully last as long as possible.