

Antwerp 2019-2020

I have spent the Fall semester 2019/2020 in Antwerp and had one of the best experiences ever. It was not only worthy of going to see another academic environment but also to grow personally and take back memories, which you will have for life. In this report, I am sharing some of the tips and information about my stay in Antwerp.

Antwerp and the University of Antwerp

The city of Antwerp is beautiful with a charming old town part, little cafés and nice bars (also student bars), but also for example museums (Museum aan de Stroom, diamond museum, chocolate museum, etc.). I especially liked that you can get around by bike everywhere, and would recommend renting a bike from Swapfiets. The information on how to rent a bike, etc. will be provided during the Orientation Days. The bike lanes and traffic are not always the best in Antwerp, but you get used to it. However, the city is not a metropolis, and you have seen the major city parts very quickly. I liked it, though, because I did not want to go to a big city and preferred the manageable size. In hindsight, the smaller size of the city made me also feel at home. Besides, you can travel from here easily and visit other cities and make day or weekend trips (for example, Bruges, Brussels, Ghent, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Paris, Lille).

The University of Antwerp itself has multiple campuses, and the department for social sciences, and hence also political science, is located at the Stadscampus, which is composed of multiple buildings. The university has many cultural and recreational offers, which are also presented during the mandatory Orientation Days. I would strongly recommend participating during the Orientation Days, as you get a lot of useful information. My Orientation Days were shortly before the semester start (19th and 20th September), and in general, it is advisable to arrive a bit earlier to get to know the city, etc.

Amongst the offers of the university, there is, for example, also a sports pass similar to the ASVZ. The university also organizes a one-week Dutch course for beginners, which starts before the Orientation Days. I did not participate in the Dutch course, though, and thus can not say much about it. Furthermore, the ESN association organizes a lot of events for exchange students, and it is advisable to join, for example, their Facebook group.

The official start of the lectures was in my case on the 24th September, and the official launch of the academic year was on the 26th. Most lectures started, however, on the 1st October, and I had lectures until Christmas (for example, I had the last class on the 19th December). Therefore the study period overall is slightly shorter than in Zurich. The official exam period was between the 6th January until the 31st January. The exact schedule of your exams/submission of papers depends, as always, on the courses you take. In addition, depending on the courses, you have to submit already assignments during the semester (same as in Zurich).

During my stay, I had mostly interactions with exchange students, primarily because I made my first contacts with the students from my dorm, which were all exchange students. However, the few local students I was in touch with were all extremely nice and helpful. The same applies to the Professors and the student coordinators from the social science department. In general, as always, it is the people who make your stay unforgettable, and I met many coming from all over Europe. Furthermore, I got to know over time my classmates better and had a positive experience in this regard, even though you do not have class always with the same students as it is the case in MACIS.

Tips and Tricks

Visa: I stayed only one semester (less than six months) in Antwerp, and I am a citizen of Switzerland. Therefore I did not need a visa and also did not need a residence permit. See the official information from the University of Antwerp regarding this: "All non European students staying longer than 3 months and European students staying longer than 1 semester should apply for a residence permit. Please read the information carefully on www.uantwerp.be/residencepermit".

I also did not open a local bank account, but I think if you want to open one, you need a residence permit as well. This will be all explained during the Orientation Days once you arrived in Antwerp.

Insurance: My private health insurance company covered already for stays/travel in Europe (I had the "Europäische Krankenversicherungskarte"). I just needed to clarify with my homeowners and liability insurance that they also cover events/issues abroad.

Housing: I received a dorm room from the international student housing office in Antwerp. During your application in mobility online, you can tick off whether you would like to receive their assistance in housing. There are multiple options. For example, they assist you in finding a private room/flat, or they provide you with one suggestion for a dorm room from the university residences. It is not given though that you receive such a dorm room (I guess it depends on the number of applications/availability). If you receive a suggestion for a dorm, you have to decide whether you want it or not, because you will not receive a second suggestion. I had, in the end, a furnished room close to my campus, i.e., Stadscampus. The costs for the room were 355 euros, all included (internet, electricity, water, fire insurance, etc.). I had the dorm room from the 1st September 2019 until 31st January 2020. In general, the staff at the international student housing were very helpful, and I would recommend to seek out their help to find accommodation.

Costs of living: The University of Antwerp provides an estimation of the expenses on their website: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/study/international-mobility/international-degree-student/before-you-come/cost-of-living/>. Because you also do more activities during your exchange I would consider a bigger budget than you usually have, even if living in Belgium is generally cheaper than in Switzerland.

Travel: To arrive in Antwerp, I traveled by plane (from Zurich, either Brussels Airport or Amsterdam is possible). However, it is also possible to travel by train (approx. 8 hours), which I did on my return. The train option is especially useful considering your luggage, which can easily exceed the usual 20kg.