

Double-Degree Stellenbosch 2015

I spent the year 2015 at the University of Stellenbosch as part of the double-degree program. I had a great experience exploring this beautiful country, making new friends and studying in a different environment.

Preparation & Accommodation

After I received my acceptance letter, the preparations for my stay in South Africa began. The first step is to register at the University of Stellenbosch and apply for a student visa (information about the process can be obtained under <http://www.suedafrika.org/en/visa-sa-documents/temporary-residence-visa.html>). The second step is to find an accommodation in Stellenbosch. There are a few private student residences (Campus Key, Beach House etc.), but those are quite expensive and often fully booked by October. Another and often cheaper alternative is to find a room in a shared apartment (WG). I found mine under gumtree (<http://www.gumtree.co.za/>) which was relatively easy. I would suggest looking for an accommodation close to town and campus as those areas are safe which is particularly important when returning in the evenings. Rent in Stellenbosch is unfortunately quite expensive so I would budget R3,500-R4,500 per month. Lastly, flights can be booked to Cape Town (check Condor for cheap and direct flights) and transport arranged with the University (they should send you a form where you can sign up for free airport transfer).

Arrival

As an international student you generally arrive a week in advance for the so called orientation week. During this week you take care of all your admin which is rather complicated, and learn a little about how the University works. There also a few social events like a welcoming dinner and an organized trip to Cape Town. There should then be a separate event by the Faculty of Economic Science in which you are introduced to the different classes the department offers etc. In general, the first week in Stellenbosch is perfect to explore the town and surroundings a little before classes start.

Town of Stellenbosch

Stellenbosch is a beautiful student town located about 45 min from Cape Town. It has a population of about 100,000 and about 30,000 students. Stellenbosch is surrounded by mountains and vineyards and offers lots of outdoor activities. The town itself has lots of cute little cafés, shops, restaurants and bars to offer which are all relatively cheap so that cooking is not a necessity. Since the town and university are historically Afrikaans, the predominant language is Afrikaans, but English is understood and spoken everywhere as well.

University

As a double-degree student you are enrolled as a full-time student at the Department of Economic Sciences and thus are part of the regular student body. Since the Master's degree in Economics is only one year long and starts in January, you are part of the Master's class which I found very helpful as you quickly make local friends and everyone is quite helpful when it comes to passing on knowledge about the South African university system or

particular classes. So if you ever find yourself struggling with an assignment or the coursework, don't hesitate to ask your classmates for help. The Master's class is small with only about 25 students, but some classes are shared with the Honour's class (which is a separate degree that you obtain after your Bachelor's degree).

In your first semester you are required to take 'Dynamic Economic Theory' which is a mixture of Macro and Microeconomics and tends to get quite technical. You can then choose two electives among classes such as Development Economics, Economics of Education, and International Trade etc. In the second semester you are required to take Microeconomics which is fairly similar to the class taught in Göttingen and Macroeconomics which is more a Development Economics than a technical Macro class. In addition, you take another elective. Even though you are only required to take three classes per semester, the workload should not be underestimated. Every class requires to hand-in various essays, group projects etc. and in most cases you write a midterm and final exam. Especially the first semester can get quite stressful since you still have to write exams in Göttingen. However, the entire experience is worth it. Since the classes are relatively small, you develop a closer relationship with the professors and the continuous assignments make you engage more closely with the topic and encourage you to conduct your own research. As the coursework is quite intense and you're reliant on group work, you also grow closer to your class.

Social Life

As mentioned before, the small program encourages to bond with your classmates so that I found most of my friends within the department and I also became good friends with my flatmate. South Africans are generally quite open so that is easy to meet people. Stellenbosch also has quite a large number of foreign students coming each semester (mostly Germans), but most of them are undergraduates and have their own separate international classes so that I didn't meet very many of them (with the exception of the few in the Economics program). The university also offers a wide-range of clubs and societies which always offer a good opportunity to meet people or try something new. For example, they have a surfing, scuba diving, outdoor and wine club among many others. At the beginning of the semester, they have a fair where all of those clubs are introduced, so look out for that.

As most student towns, Stellenbosch has a vibrant café and bar/club culture to offer where Wednesday-Friday are the prime days to go out. Cape Town and the sea are close so a day trip every now and then is recommended. The mountainous surroundings also invite for hiking, mountain biking and other outdoor activities. And then there is of course always the option of wine tasting at one of the 400 wine estates in the area.

For the recesses in between and the break in June/July, South Africa has many things to offer. The Garden Route and the Klein Karoo are close and can easily be done in a week. However, I would recommend leaving the Western Cape and seeing what the rest of the country is like at least once. The Drakensberge, Johannesburg and the Kruger National park are definitely worth a visit and if you have time, also think about a trip to the neighboring countries (Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique etc.)

I had a really good year here in Stellenbosch in which I progressed academically as I definitely improved my scientific writing skills and gained insight into new topics and perspectives, in which I got to explore a beautiful country and meet great people.

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Maren Molde