



Embassy of Sweden Bucharest

Learn about the experiences of Monica, a Romanian student studying in Lund

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1. Short introduction

Your name, your age, when you moved to Sweden, what you are studying and at what university.

My name is Monica Paraipan, I am 23 years old and I have been calling Sweden home since August 2017. Currently, I am studying a Master's Program in European Studies at Lund University.

2. What inspired you to study in Sweden and have you encountered any difficulties?

What was appealing with Sweden? What were your expectations? Have they been met?

Deciding to study in Sweden was a natural step forward for me, determined by a combination of restless curiosity, personal fascination for the mysterious Nordic grounds, love and an utter need of change, meant to represent a conspicuous stage in my professional and personal development. To be more concrete, I've been studying the Swedish language and culture at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, University of Bucharest, where I fell in love with the culture and history of Sweden and Scandinavia as a whole, the musicality of the Swedish language and where I realized that the Swedish social concepts align so harmonically with my own set of personal values. Moreover, my professors from the Swedish language department had a very - let's call it *Swedish* – pedagogical approach, different from everything I knew until that moment. In this way, they managed to offer us, in such an innovative, relaxed and out-of-the-box, yet challenging and demanding manner, not only the language and culture related knowledge, but a slice of what Sweden stands for as a global entity. This was when I realized that an academic environment that emphasizes a flat structure chain

of command, challenges the critical thinking, supports student's ideas and opinions and values the quality of the information rather than the quantity is one which would fit my work ethics and would expand my horizons.

When I was thinking of studying in Sweden, I expected a qualitative and innovative manner of teaching, as well as practicality and a culturally diverse environment. So far, my expectations have not only been met, but have been overpassed.

What do you think could be difficult while in Sweden?

Most people say that dealing with the dark and cold Swedish winters can be a great challenge. In the beginning, I didn't believe that these were factors that can affect one's well-being in a significant manner, but once November came, I found myself affected, physically and mentally, by the lack of sunlight exposure which determined a general state of fatigue and slight depression. The natural solution for that stands in social interaction, doing sports and keeping yourself busy, so make sure you stick together with your group of friends, go out for a run, swim, yoga, gym, dance, squash or any other activity that you fancy, especially during the cold and dark months.

3. What was your first impression of Sweden?

How do you find the people, the environment, the education, student life etc.?

My first substantial contact with Sweden was in February 2017 when I had been granted a research scholarship by the Swedish Institute in order to conduct my Bachelor's thesis research in Sweden. During that time, I lived in Örebro and Stockholm where I worked with professors and researchers from Örebro University and Stockholm University, as well as with Swedish MPs and civil society. I remember being especially enchanted by the beauty of the Swedish nature, the impressive architectural legacy where the old meets the new in an utmost harmonic way, Swedes' devotion to biking regardless the weather, the infrastructure and the general state of serenity and calmness that can be felt here.

Not so long after this experience, I found myself having a one way ticket to Sweden and made Lund my temporary home. Lund is the second oldest city in Sweden, located in Skåne, the southernmost county of Sweden. Perhaps ironically, the university keeps Lund young, its vibrant, engaged youth driving a lively arts and culinary scene. You'll feel it humming along the old town's photogenic lanes, flanked by cafes, bars and a clutch of engaging museums. Lund is hosting the Lund University, one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Scandinavia, which makes it an amazing hub for internationals. I am studying a MA program that encompasses students and professors representing more than 10 different nationalities, which offered me the opportunity to meet people from different corners of the world and

made me embrace the perks of a multicultural environment: getting in touch with foreign, sometimes rather exotic cultures and observing the cultural particularities and approaches to work, relations and life in general.

Regarding the Swedes, well, my experience might be rather particular and subjective due to the fact that during my university studies in Romania I had two native Swedish professors who had a crucial contribution in shaping my way towards Sweden through their teaching activity, closeness, empathic and supportive nature. Moreover, during my first year in Lund, I had the chance to live with an overwhelmingly kind, supportive, warm and welcoming Swedish family that made me feel at home and helped me embrace the Swedish culture on a daily basis. So, to me, the myth according to which the Swedes are cold and unfriendly is nothing but fake news. In general, on a society level, I found the Swedish people extremely polite, helpful and despite their rather reserved nature in comparison to ours, they can be a really outgoing, friendly and reliable bunch once you manage to penetrate their social circle.

As I already mentioned, the Swedish educational system puts an accent on critical thinking, innovation, creativity and offers a plethora of occasions for putting your knowledge and skills into practice. The courses and seminars are interactive and the professors are trying to create constantly a proper ground for discussions and debates on the topics related to the respective field of studies. The schedule is rather flexible, at least on a Master's level, and offers the students the chance to enjoy the rich student life that traditional student cities such as Lund or Uppsala offer through different student organizations, the well-known Nations, sport teams, language cafes etc. Due to my interest in international relations, politics and diplomacy, I became part of the Career Committee of the Association for Foreign Affairs in Lund where I organized a series of events dedicated to the students interested in this field and had the opportunity to take part in a mentorship program where I've been assigned a former Swedish Ambassador as mentor and professional guide.

4. What do you think are the main differences between studying in Sweden and studying in Romania?

How is the pedagogical approach? What do you think are the advantages of it? Have you experienced something that you did not expect?

I believe the main differences between the two educational systems can be found in the pedagogical approach and the general dynamics between the students and the professors. While the Romanian system emphasizes acquiring a large amount of information that, most of the times, isn't practical and adapted to what the labor market is requiring, the Swedish one really focuses on offering to the students the knowledge and skills that can be later on applied in their chosen fields. Moreover, rather than having a plethora of obligatory subjects, the study programs in Sweden

offer the students the possibility of picking their topics, according to their interests, as long as they are somehow linked to their study field.

Regarding the student-professor relation in Sweden, empathy and mutual respect are the key words. I will never forget my first introductory seminar, when our professors entered the room with a big smile on their faces, introduced themselves, insisted on calling them by their first name and said that whatever problem we have, academically related or personal, we can always reach out to them. And they meant it. From advising us when we felt lost on the chosen academic path, misfits in this whole new society to understanding if someone was in a bad state and couldn't prepare properly for the class, they managed to be humans first and professors second.

5. What have been the highlights of your time in Sweden so far?

Share an inspirational story and/or describe in general what you enjoy with Sweden.

Sweden holds an immensely important place in my heart and having the chance to be here is a highlight in itself. Life in Sweden taught me that living at a slower pace and doing things the rational *lagom* way doesn't mean lack of progress, but the contrary. Moreover, I've learned how to embrace simple pleasures of life such as riding a bike in the emerald-green nature brought to life in spring, having *fika* and chatting in the outdoor spaces of the university campus once the oh-so-craved rays of sunlight come out, that sauna can have a therapeutic effect and that kindness is a normal and expected act in a well-functioning, healthy society.

6. Do you have any advice for Romanian students who want to study in Sweden?

Would you recommend studying in Sweden? Why?

I wholeheartedly recommend studying in Sweden first and foremost due to the pedagogical approach in the academic system, the vastness of the subjects that one can choose from, the study conditions and the opportunities offered by the Swedish universities such as exchange studies, study trips, research scholarships and internships. Secondly, I recommend Sweden as a space for personal growth, where one can challenge their adaptability capacities and embrace Nordic values like tolerance, openness, gender equality and progressiveness.

Go for it, even if the choice of being away from everything familiar scares you, you will receive so much in return for this little act of courage.

A new country, new weather and new people can be overwhelming at times. Do you have any insider tips for future students?

Be open, approachable and curious. Engage yourself into activities that would facilitate meeting people because, as I mentioned above, social interaction is crucial when moving to a new place and it can shape your whole lifestyle. Also, make use of your time in Sweden and try to learn the language, at least to a small-talk level. It will offer you a totally different perspective on living here and even though basically everyone speaks English, the Swedes will always be enchanted if you can say “hello” and “thank you” in their language, thing that can facilitate your interaction and experience with the locals.