

Experience report Stellenbosch - WiSe 2025/26 (July-December)

Preparation

After being selected for Stellenbosch University I started the application process for the visa immediately. This process took a while and comes with some tricky challenges like an in-person signature from your bank account while applying for the visa in Berlin or Munich within the same week. But with proper organizing it is possible, one just must start early. Throughout the preparation process I visited the meeting hours of the WiWi exchange office more or less weekly to make sure I am on track with the process and do not miss out on any important deadlines.

Course selection & Uni

Especially for the course selection a detailed and frequent communication with the WiWi exchange office is necessary. The course system at the Stellenbosch University is different from ours. It is very important to understand the number codes for the modules since they will determine wherever the course is available at the summer semester (or winter semester) or not or are scheduled for a entire year. I had the feeling that there are less courses available for the second semester compared to the first. Therefore, one must check the yearbooks from different faculty to find an appropriate course but only if your studies allow it to jump between the faculties. As a Sustainable Development student, I was allowed to choose modules from different faculties but this required a detailed communication and argumentation with the WiWi exchange office and the Stellenbosch University.

When it comes to chosen modules, I can recommend the Arts and Social Modules “Political Conflict” and “International Relations of South Africa” if one wants an insightful experience in South Africa’s political science. Moreover, it is beneficial if one likes writing essays since one must write two essays in each course as an examination performance. I would also recommend choosing a GEP since there are only international students in the class which makes it easy to expand your circle of friends within the Internationals. The GEP “Political change in contemporary South Africa” was interesting and expanded the knowledge in political science. However, the GEP about the history of South Africa was the most popular among the international students. “Introduction to Geology” from the science faculty is an interesting course if you want to understand how the world was created. One can derive knowledge regarding

sustainability and climate change but it is not mentioned often. I would not recommend the module “Public Management and Policy” since there is little content and the classes were not that insightful and cancelled frequently. However, maybe it is just me and the course is a perfect fit for anyone else. In the end, regarding the timetable one can make last minute changes until the end of July after a test week in Stellenbosch. In general, I find the quality standard from the lectures comparable to the one in Göttingen. However, the volume is higher due to (multiple) quizzes in addition to the exams. Finally, when it comes to any question regarding the Stellenbosch University and everything around it, try to look for Ms. Kalon Damons. She replies to any emails fast and can answer almost every question or knows someone that can.

Arrival & Welcome week & Writing Göttingen exams in Stellenbosch

For the flight I would recommend Emirates since they provide a discount for students and one can travel with more luggage than usual. The arrival and the communication around it are very well organized. From the transport from the airport to Stellenbosch to the welcome week, everything was well organized and support was provided throughout. Especially the following welcome week provides many opportunities to get to know the university and the city. Since the start of the semester in Stellenbosch is in July one might want to write an exam from Göttingen. This would work but it requires more planning which is quite complex and stressful. I would suggest writing on the second possible date (around October). On the other hand, this would collide with the exams period in Stellenbosch. Therefore, it would be beneficial to decide on modules in the fourth semester where one does not have written exam but rather a different kind of examination performance.

Accommodation

After the application the university offers different kinds of accommodation. I would suggest the accommodation from the university since it is the main spot where international students and local students stay. Thereby, it does not matter if one decides for Academia or Concordia. It is in the same place and both have access to sport activities (Padel, Calisthenics, table tennis, ...), a small shop and a study area. Plus, there is a lot of security around the area. Most of my friends that lived at other places end up coming to Academia/Concordia to relax or to study. Moreover, do not worry about what kind of apartment you want to take. Most of the people that met in a

shared apartment came along and many new friends were made. Of course, one could always end up with a roommate you cannot get along with. Even in single room one could get in contact with other people easily.

Friends & Free time

Talking about friends and free time in the beginning I thought that I would end up connecting with people from all over the world and make new local friends. Turns out that 2/3 of the approximately 450 Internationals were German thus, most of the people one connects with are German. The German bubble makes it difficult to dive into the South African lifestyle but not impossible. For example, the Vibe Van organization is communicating various adventurous experiences throughout the WhatsApp groups where one can get to know culture and anything else. I have never attended anything from the Vibe Van but I have only heard good things. From my experience, I can highly recommend the sport facilities in Stellenbosch. At the foot of the Stellenbosch mountain, one can spend a lot of time on the track, at the gym or pursuing different kinds of sport at the facilities. With a bit of luck, the German professional athletes will be back there for their training camp at the beginning of December next year and one can train with them. Another recommendation is Jonkershoek which is a beautiful place to run/hike/bike between the mountains.

Recess

Recess is a one-week break in the middle of the second semester. It separates the third from the fourth term and gives the international students an opportunity to travel. In the beginning, I thought that one week to relax and do nothing sounds good. I was wrong, everyone was travelling and thankfully I was also convinced. I flew to Durban and spent a week at the east coast and visited different cities with two friends. We also made a trip across the Sani Pass to Lesotho. I highly recommend to visit the country if one is into the topic around economic development and poverty alleviation. Very insightful and humbling at the same time. But one should book a trip, I would not recommend driving the Sani Pass without professional help. Other recommendations for recess are a trip to Namibia, the Garden Route or the Kruger National Park. If one is too busy during that time no worries, many of my friends, me included did other great trips after the semester and the exams during November or December.

Social work

Stellenbosch, like South Africa, in general suffers from great inequality. Although Stellenbosch is known for its wine and wealthy neighborhoods most citizens live in Kayamandi, a township that can be seen in the distance from the university. The university has a cooperation with three organization within the township that are working on improving the lives of the children by helping them with their schoolwork or providing a safe environment where they can play. I attend the Songo project frequently and highly recommend it. Once again, there is a great linkage to my studies seeing how systems operate and how development is provided. But it is also about the excitement of the kids one is touched by and one starts to build relationships easily. A very heartwarming and important experience to make.

Safety

South Africa and especially Cape Town are known for the gangsterism and general violence and it is important to discuss safety. I think the most important thing is to attend the safety instructions that are provided to one during the welcome week. It is important to know how to behave in Stellenbosch and after the meeting one can convey it to other places in South Africa. Tips that seem obvious or irrelevant must be taken seriously. I can at least recall five incidents where friends got robbed, cars were broken into or they were followed because they were in the wrong areas or behaved improperly. One must be careful. Nevertheless, I also want to address that I went for multiple runs on my own and nothing happened. Just know where to go and at what time. Bottom line be careful but not biased.

Conclusion

In the end, Stellenbosch is great. The university is a lovely place to study. Concordia is very familiar even though the housing looks kind of like a prison. The German bubble was very helpful in making new friends, but it prevented me from improving my English. The local people are very kind and open-minded. The landscape in Stellenbosch is beautiful especially the trails at the mountains. There is a very sporty atmosphere and the opportunities are great. There is also a different understanding of time pressure compared to Germany. And even though the studies are very interesting and important it is also about the people you meet and the trips you take. Decide wisely and have a good time.