

Faculty of Law, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium)

1. Overall impression

Leuven is a beautiful town with perfect central location to travel and discover Belgium and the countries and cities around. I enjoyed my year abroad a lot and would absolutely recommend going to the KU Leuven to study. It is a very old university with a lot of history and does not have without reason a good reputation. Besides the university and the town itself Leuven has a lot to offer when it comes to hospitality and night life/student life. There is for sure always a concert, a comedy night or a party going on in Leuven.

2. Making preparations

(e.g. administrative matters, finding information)

The preparation process turned out to be relatively easy. A visa is not required for Belgium and therefore the main thing to be prepared was booking a flight. The website of the KU Leuven is very helpful to find information about living in Leuven (housing, administrative matters etc.)

3. Contacts/Responsibilities

(e.g. important contact persons at the Partner University and Faculty)

Miss Miki Ashida was assigned as a contact person to the Double Degree Students. She can and will help you with almost everything, from getting a bank account to signing your rent agreement.

Also, Nancy, PhD-student from El Salvador has been very helpful and kind to me. She has lived in Kyoto for several years and is fluent in Japanese but also knows what it is like to be a foreign student in Japan.

She certainly would be glad to meet you!

4. Housing / Finding accommodation

The KU Leuven website about housing is very helpful for finding an accommodation. I decided to find an accommodation from home and started looking for a room in May for the autumn semester. This turned out to be not too easy. Finally, I found a room through one of the big housing services (company called Xior) and after a long e-mailing process I finally got a room confirmed. After this the signing of the contract was very easy and quick via e-mail too. When I got to Leuven in September I had the impression that a lot of rooms were still available. It would definitely have been possible to look for rooms after arriving in Leuven as I had the impression that a lot of rooms were not posted online and having the chance to look at the room would have been nice, even in my case where I was happy with my room even if I did not see it before renting it.

5. Arrival

Arrival was very easy. Due to a lot of luggage I decided to take a taxi from Brussels Airport Zaventem to Leuven, which was about 60 euros (if pre-booked online taxis are cheaper – around 45 euros to the airport). Taking the train from Zaventem to Leuven is also possible and of course the cheaper option. Before arrival I checked with the office of the housing company the time when they hand out the keys to the apartments/rooms to make sure somebody is around upon arrival. After moving to Leuven everyone has to go to the Stadhuis (located next to the train station) to register. During my stay they changed the system and I think they now offer a service where one can make an online appointment instead of going there and waiting in the line there.

6. Telephone

(e.g. costs, carriers)

The provider I used was orange. They have one offer for 15 euros, which includes 15 euros of credit for phone calls and a certain amount of text messages as well as 4 GB of data, which is valid for 30 days. Before I switched to orange I used the provider proximus which turned out to be the more expensive option.

7. Bank account

I did not create a bank account in Leuven, so not really any information to give here. But the students, which had a bank account, were often with BNP Paribas or ING.

8. Transport (e.g. from Switzerland, to the University)

I only travelled to Belgium by airplane even though by car or by train are possible options. Cheaper flights are offered by easyjet from Basel to Brussels Zaventem. Swiss operates from Zurich to Brussels Zaventem. Brussels Charleroi is also a possibility to fly, however, Zaventem is much closer to Leuven.

In Leuven most of the students travel by bike. Some of them rented a bike from "velo" (offer from the KU Leuven), some bought cheap used bikes from other students (e.g. on facebook group "Leuven Junk Shop"). There is a bus card for 20 Euros, which allows to travel in the city centre by bus for one year. As I did not live very close to the train station and did not have a bike (I walked everywhere) it was useful to get to the train station and then to the airport in case I had luggage with me.

9. General information about the Partner Faculty and student life

The organization of the KU Leuven and the courses in general was absolutely satisfying. The online platform "Toledo" is very handy. There one can find a progress file with an overview over the booked courses, a timetable for each day/week, all e-mails and all the documents for the courses as well as podcasts in case such exist. The student life in Leuven is very vivid. Often there are parties or events taking place in Leuven, even during the weekend when most of the Belgian students are at home and not staying in Leuven. The exams were sometimes not as well organized as at the UZH, but everything worked out in the end. The courses in general are very interesting, the choice of available courses is broad and all of the professors have a tremendous background and knowledge. There is a centre for the international students called "Pangea", which offers activities. Study space is to be found in either the library of the Faculty of Law or in the learning centre "Agora".

10. Teaching and studying at the Partner Faculty

(e.g. program structure, methodology, exams, etc.)

The main focus of the DD program at the KU Leuven is on EU law. The compulsory courses are mainly in the area of EU law and are fairly difficult. The other courses are either in the field of EU law or international law. Some of the courses are more and some of the courses are less interactive, but only a few are graded on the base of the attendance and the contribution made in class. In the first semester I booked 6 courses and completed all with a written exam. In the second semester I only had to take 2 exams but had to hand in 4 papers, which all were due in May. Some of the courses are completed with an oral exam or a presentation of a paper.

11. City

(e.g. cultural activities, sports, discounts, nightlife, must-sees, short trips, etc.)

Leuven is located in the heart of Europe. It is easy to get around and do trips to other Belgian cities (Antwerp, Ghent, Brugges, Knokke-Heist, Brussels – all reachable with the train pass called “go pass”, which comes down to about 5 euros per one way trip for under 26 years old. Otherwise weekend-tickets are cheaper than during the week). There is a cinema in Leuven. It is possible to register online for free for a student discount card and get cheaper tickets to the cinema. The cultural centre STUK offers concerts (some of them are free, e.g. Jazz on Sundays at 21:00), which are usually busy. The (old) Stadhuis and the central library (with the tower, where one can go up) are the main attractions of Leuven besides the botanical garden, the Stella Artois brewery and of course the Groot Begijnhof (UNESCO world heritage). The university offers a range of sports in the sport centre in Heverlee. Some of the courses need to be booked in advance (either in the beginning of the semester or weekly) and are usually crowded.