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Host institution: Universidad de Alicante

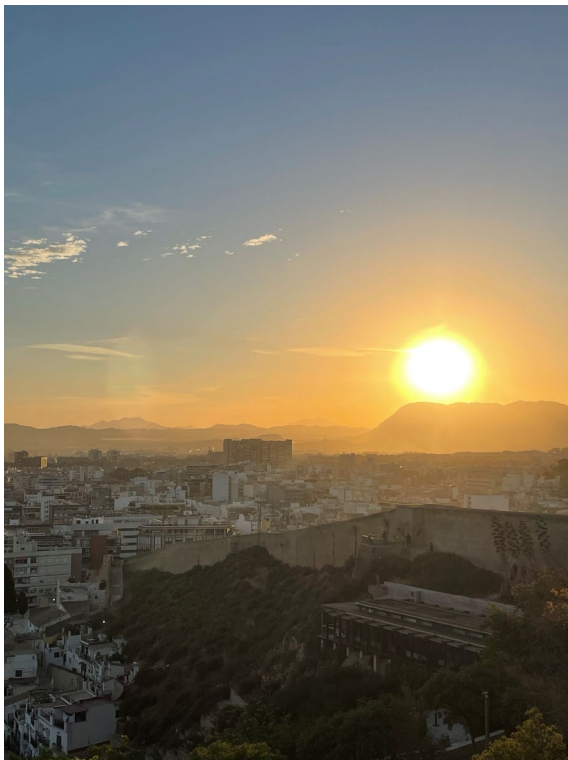
Contact person: Jose Parra Martinez

Period of study: September 2022 – January 2023

## Introduction

After being introduced at KEA to the possibility of going abroad for a semester, I knew I wanted to do it. Therefore, without much thought I chose Alicante. Although maybe it wasn't the most suitable destination for me, I still enjoyed the experiences and the opportunities I had.

The city of Alicante is a very touristic destination, which I wasn't well aware of. Plenty of people visit for the warm temperatures and beautiful beaches around. There weren't that many sightseeing things to do in the city, and that got a bit boring in the end, but there are plenty of places to travel to in Spain.



Sunset seen from Castillo de Santa Barbara in Alicante

The university's program is called "Fundamentals of architecture", and the study options were broader, offering drawing, mathematics, or urban planning classes. That for me seemed interesting, considering that the subjects are very technical at KEA.

The classes I ended up choosing were Urban Planning 1 (unit code 35514), Urban Planning 2 (unit code 35524), Urban Planning 4 (unit code 35534), Singular building systems (unit code 35535), and Spanish Language course.

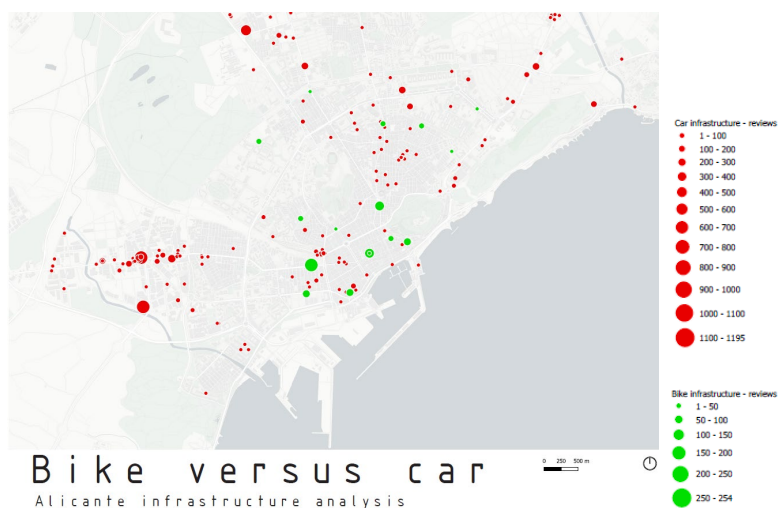
In all Urban Planning classes, we worked with QGIS, a mapping software (which is free to download), and I found it very fun and exciting to learn. We had (in each urban planning class), two sessions with a professor who taught us how to use the software.

## Experiences at Universidad de Alicante

### Urban Planning 1

In this course, the focus was on the city scale. We analyzed the different types of grids in the city, and the city structures, and looked at these different patterns. It was interesting to compare our own cities (where we are from or in which we live), to Spanish cities, or very large cities like London or Ciudad de Mexico.

We had both individual and group assignments. I attached a photo of a group assignment, where we needed to focus on one feature of Alicante and create a map-based analysis.



This class was fun and a good introduction to Urban Planning. The professor had lots of materials to support the teaching – videos, games in class, and lectures.

## Urban Planning 2

In this course, we focused on the human scale in public spaces. We investigated what makes people stay in a place, and what features are attractive.

It was strange that mid-course the professor changed, and the new one didn't present as much enthusiasm as the first one.

The course was split into two group tasks – an analysis of a “bad” plaza in Alicante, which in the second part we had to redesign based on the good features we learned during class.

Both parts were very fun, once again we worked with QGIS. The final submission was a poster, a video, and a presentation of our design for the plaza.

The only downside in this class was my personal experience of working in a group of 5, where 2 people were almost absent. The load of work was huge, especially since almost all deadlines for the subjects are in one week. We struggled a lot, but the professor was aware of the situation and appreciated our work.

Before



After



Render from our group presentation of the new plaza design.

## Urban Planning 4

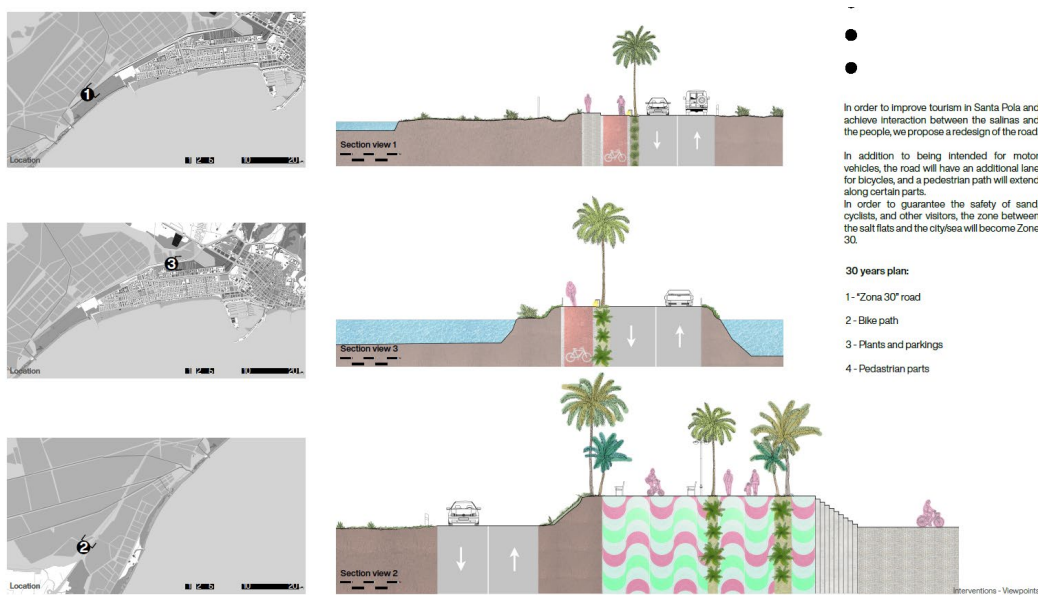
In this course, the focus was more on the geographical features of the urban landscape. For the final project, we worked as a group to create a new local plan for an area called Santa Pola, where salt mines exist next to the holiday homes of people. We wanted to connect these two, and the professor emphasized a smooth transition, without affecting the environment or making drastic changes.

I appreciated this class because it was the only one where we had a field trip, we went to visit Santa Pola and had a guide with us to explain the different characteristics of this place.

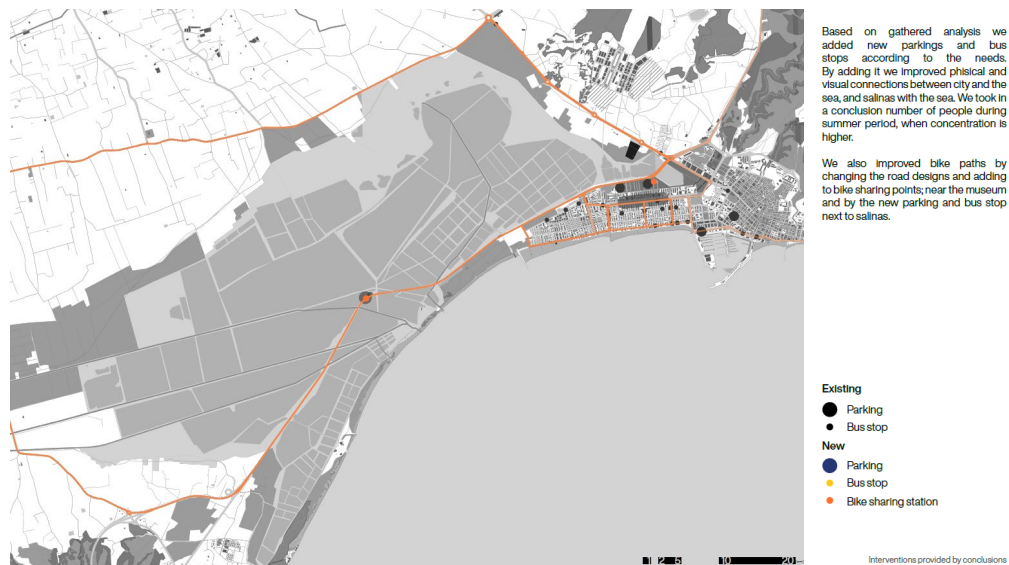
The professor also seemed very passionate about her teaching and presented lots of materials to support the teaching, from local magazines to TED Talks.

Once again, the final assignment was a group one, which we presented during the final class and later got graded on it.

Although this subject didn't spark that much excitement in me, I still enjoyed it and my working group too.



Some screenshots from our group's masterplan proposal





And the view from the Santa Pola field trip

### Singular building systems

This class was very intense, and it seemed to me like I was back in high school, where I had to deliver assignments, read at home, and present abstracts weekly.

The professor was very passionate, and I really appreciated that, but sometimes his criticism felt mean, and it was rather discouraging.

I learned a lot in this class, where we worked in a group with prefabricated modules to build a hotel in a holiday resort in Croatia. The best thing is that this is an actual competition, open only to students' proposals, so we get to take part in that too.

Dani, the professor, had so many resources and he wrote a few books himself, so there were plenty of sources for information.

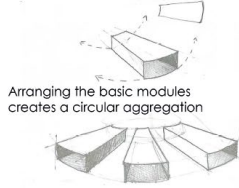
But, during the semester we used so many different platforms to deliver or stay connected to the other students in the class, that it was overwhelming. We often got very confused about what and where to deliver, as his indications were often "encrypted" with so many numbers and letters that we were lost.

Still, I can recommend this class and Dani. We worked a lot, but I feel like I got the most from this class. It was challenging and competitive, but worth it in the end.

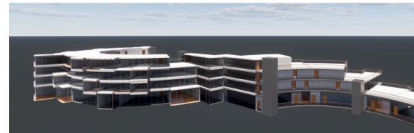
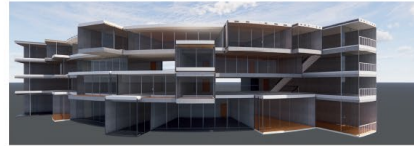
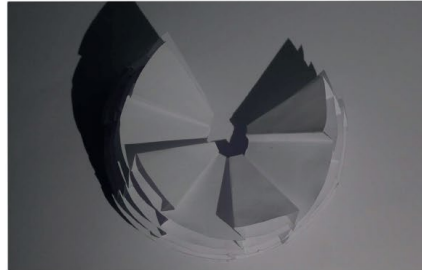
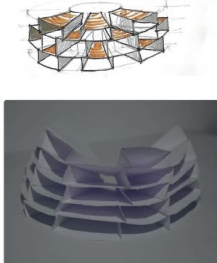
Here is a slide of our final proposal for the prefab-built hotel.



Basic Modules



Adding height to the Composition



## Spanish language course

This was my favorite class of the week. Although I had doubts about whether to start learning a new language, I realized it would be a great help in Spain as not many people speak English (and it was true that it helped me). But this turned out to be my favorite class and the professor, Santiago, was very fun and easy-going.

I would recommend taking this class, as you meet new people who don't study the same as you, and it is not as intense as the architecture subjects.

After all, I am satisfied with the knowledge I gained from Universidad de Alicante, but I must mention that sometimes it all felt very unorganized and unstructured. Moreover, the classes were 4 hours long, although you would get a break after 2 hours, it was exhausting. Classes lasted sometimes until 19.00 PM. In the beginning, I chose a class (Basic building systems) that ended at 21.00 PM, and after trying it twice, I couldn't keep it due to the late hours and my inability to focus on such times.

The university's facilities were plenty, the campus is huge and has a big sports unit, with tennis, paddle, squash, football, basketball, and plenty of courts! The library had plenty of books and spaces to study and lots of cantinas with coffee and food. Sometimes we had very long breaks in between classes (2 hours), and it was nice to have some lunch and a rest in the sun at the cafeterias.

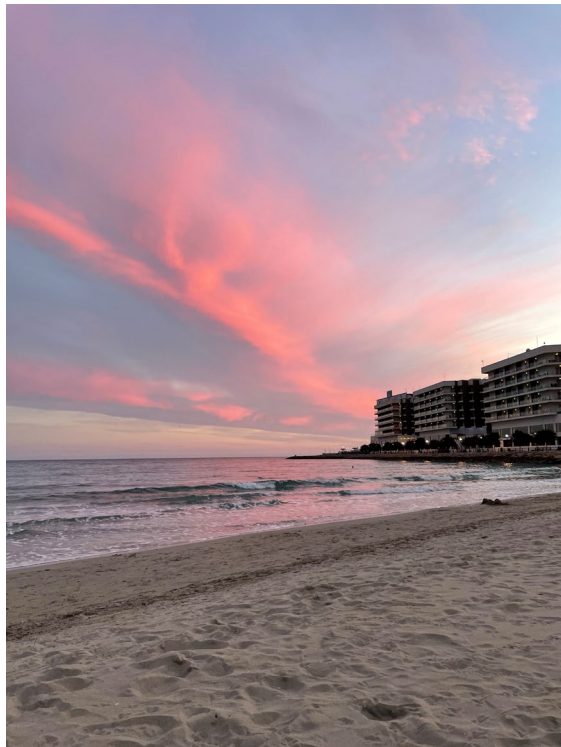
The university didn't offer any cloud for sharing files between group members, which ended up with us having to share through WeTransfer or WhatsApp, and never being able to work on the same files at the same time.

Also, everyone was modeling in different programs, so group collaboration on that was often impossible. We had to divide the work very carefully.

Another disadvantage was having all the final deadlines in one week. Compared to KEA where you have one group and one project to work on, in Alicante we had four different teams and four different projects to work on. It was often impossible to meet and work together. The last few weeks felt very intense.

## Social and cultural experiences

There are so many opportunities in Alicante! First, there is the beach, where students would often gather and play games or chill. There were plenty of WhatsApp group chats where people would talk and plan meetings in the beginning, as everyone is looking for making friends and creating a group to hang out regularly with.



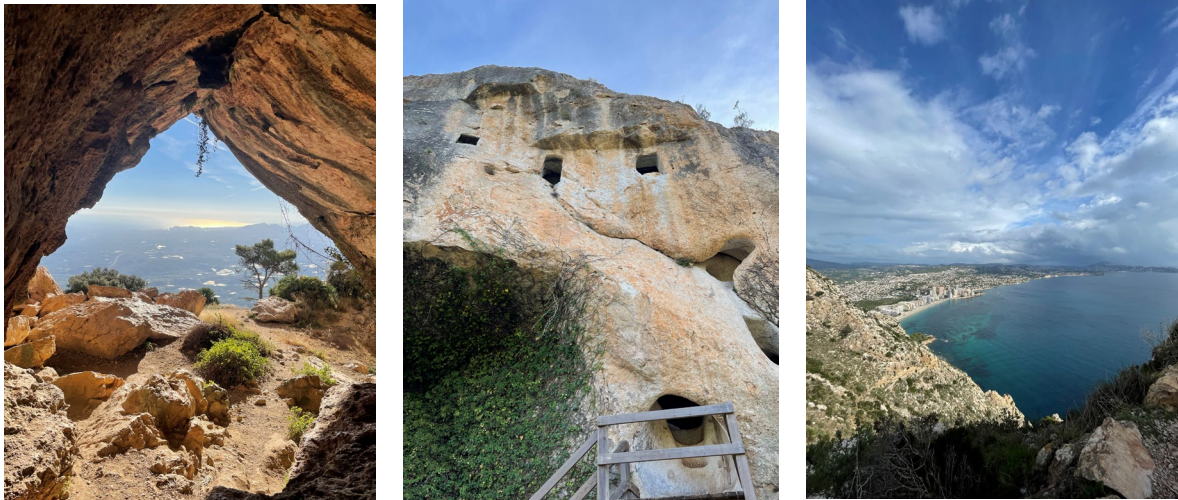
Postiguat beach in Alicante

I can recommend going there one week before the actual classes start, as the Erasmus Student Network in Alicante organizes a lot of events to kickstart the socializing. That is how I met most of the people I ended up hanging out with.

Then, there is Erasmus Student Network, which organized trips in or around Alicante, as well as longer trips f.ex. to Sevilla or Granada. I went on a few day trips in the beginning, visiting small towns like Altea or Calpe, and going hiking. It



was a good and cheap opportunity to see some beautiful places only reachable by cars, and I recommend it as you meet a lot of people.



Hiking views in Les cases de Bernia, La Cova de les Finestres, and Altea

I found the best option for me to travel in Spain (as there is so much to see!), was to go in smaller groups, either by car, bus or train (or plane, if necessary). BlaBla Car, which is a car-sharing website was also popular, but I never got to try it.

I visited Madrid, Bilbao, Granada, and Valencia during my stay with different groups of friends, and I can recommend all 4 cities as they are all different from each other.



Photos from Granada, Valencia, and Madrid

Moreover, the areas around Alicante are beautiful and to some places, you can get by tram or train. Villajoyosa and Tabarca island are a few examples of the beach in San Juan which is so much better than the one in Alicante.





San Juan beach, Tabarca island and Villa Joyosa

Alicante is full of restaurants, from local to international cuisine, and there is always plenty of food to try. I am a vegetarian though, so I struggled a bit when going to Spanish restaurants. I know some people that became flexitarians during their Erasmus 😊).

I can recommend Vino Y Mas and El Garage for tapas, Livanti gelato for ice cream, Fahrenheit 451, Sip&Wonder, Madness Coffee, and Pynchon&Co for coffee or study dates. And Sale e Pepe for the pizza!!



Pynchon&Co

There are lots of party opportunities in Alicante, including clubs, bars, and live music. I was not a fan of the club scene. Everything in Spain starts very late, around midnight, and people actually start gathering around 1-2 AM. I preferred

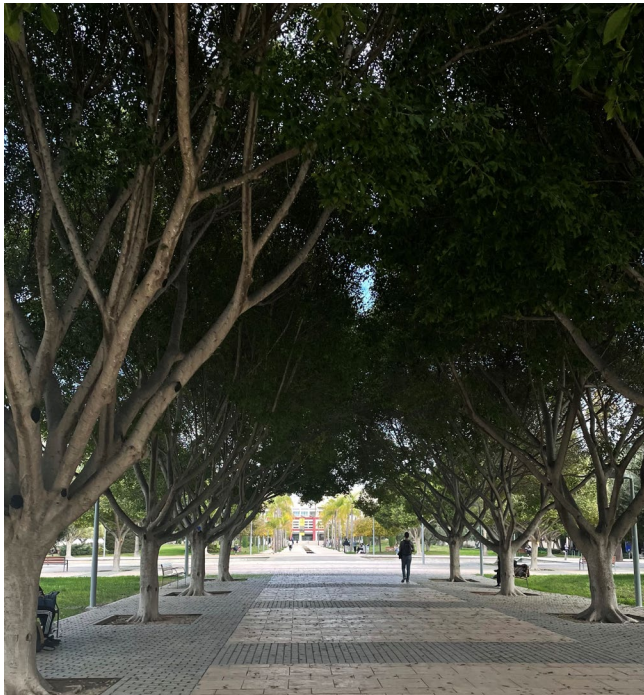
to go out and listen to live music, and I can recommend Cantina El Colectivo or El Refugio for that.

Other popular clubs which I tried myself and were pretty fun were Marmarella, Monna, and Parabarap, where ESN organized every Wednesday beer pong tournaments. So, all students showed up with hangovers on Thursdays 😊).

After all, what I can recommend is to be open, go out there and meet new people, form a group, and enjoy the rest of your stay!!

## Practical experiences

During the application period, Andreas was the guide for us. The collaboration went smoothly, even after I arrived in Alicante and I still had questions. It may seem like a lot of things to do to go on exchange, but I found it very easy.



The campus of the university

I traveled to Alicante by plane from Copenhagen, there are a few companies flying there directly, like RyanAir, Vueling, SAS, and Norwegian. I flew both with SAS (with the youth under 26 offer), and RyanAir (with the Erasmus card).

I bought my Erasmus card at the ESN office, with which you get lots of discounts, including RyanAir flights with free luggage, ESN trip discounts, bars, ALSA (which is the national Spanish bus company for traveling), and plenty more. It was around 10 euros, but worth it considering the discounts you get with it.





Photos from ESN trip to Guadalest Castle and Fonts de Algar

Regarding accommodation, I started looking well in advance, and around May I had something secured. I lived with two other girls (Canadian and Italian) in a three-bedroom apartment, in Campoamor, 5 minutes by walking from Mercado Central.

The school offers student dorms, but those are located in San Vicente, where the campus is, which is outside of the city. And as everything happened in the city, I chose to live there.

I had my own bedroom and shared bathroom, kitchen, terrace, and living room with the two others. The landlord, Silvia, was very nice and communicative, and everything went smoothly.

The apartment was modern compared to what you can usually find in Alicante, so I recommend starting searching early (February/March), as competition is high in a city where so many students come on Erasmus.

Silvia's contact: Silvia Villanueva Maranon +34 717 703 749

I found my apartment on Idealista.es, which I reckon is the most popular website for housing in Spain. I paid 350 euros for rent and the fixed amount for utilities worth of 50euros/month. My room was the most expensive in the apartment, as it was the biggest and had more natural light compared to the others. Each of the girls I was living with paid this sum for the utilities, although we concluded it wasn't worth it, as during September the apartment was unbearably hot, with one AC in the living room that didn't reach our bedrooms, and one heater in the bathroom, which once again didn't make a difference in our own rooms.

The buildings in Spain have very thin walls and sometimes weird layouts. I often could hear my downstairs neighbor snoring, so if you're a light sleeper like me bring some earplugs!!

One thing is for sure, and that is that you can find cheaper rooms in Alicante. I know people that paid less than 300 euros for their rooms, so just make sure to search well.

The month of December had temperatures of around 18-20 degrees on average, with the sun, but the apartment was so cold! I had such a difficult time bearing with the coldness of the apartment that month, and I would wear so many layers all day indoors. The same was for the school. It was very cold indoors, and warm and nice outdoors.

Groceries in Spain are very cheap, and you can find fresh, local products, both in the Mercadonas and Mercado Central. Another option was to shop at El Corte Ingles if you wish for some more international brands, as at Mercadona you only find Spanish brands.

Compared to Denmark, eating out and shopping for fresh groceries was cheap, and I did it a lot.



Vino y Mas cheese platter 😊

I had a monthly budget to which I (more or less) stuck to. I had my savings, plus the Erasmus grant which was approximately 490 euros per month. I was able to travel within Spain, plus a short trip to Denmark, eat out, pay the rent and enjoy Spain, as well as do some personal shopping.

To get to the University I had to take a bus every day. There is also the option to take the tram, but that was slow and a bit far away from my apartment. I got the Spanish youth card from the municipality in Alicante, which I used to get my Bono Jove (the bus card), where I paid around 15 euros for 30 trips. I found that reasonable, although the process of getting that Youth card was a bit long, so maybe for a semester it is not worth it. You can simply get the Bus pass from the TAM office, which I think was a few euros more expensive than the one I had.



## Conclusion

After all, I am happy that I went abroad, as it was a very enriching experience, both personally and professionally.

I got to experience and understand better a new culture, learn a new language, make new friends whom I will definitely see again, travel, and see more of Spain.

In school I got to experience a different type of teaching, I worked with people from all over the world, and I got plenty of new knowledge about architecture and urban planning. I got to experience another way of learning about construction. And although in Spain building regulations are completely different from the ones in Denmark, it was interesting to compare the two.

Everyone in Spain that I came across, was very nice and helpful. And even if sometimes we struggled to understand each other in class, everyone was very nice and helpful.