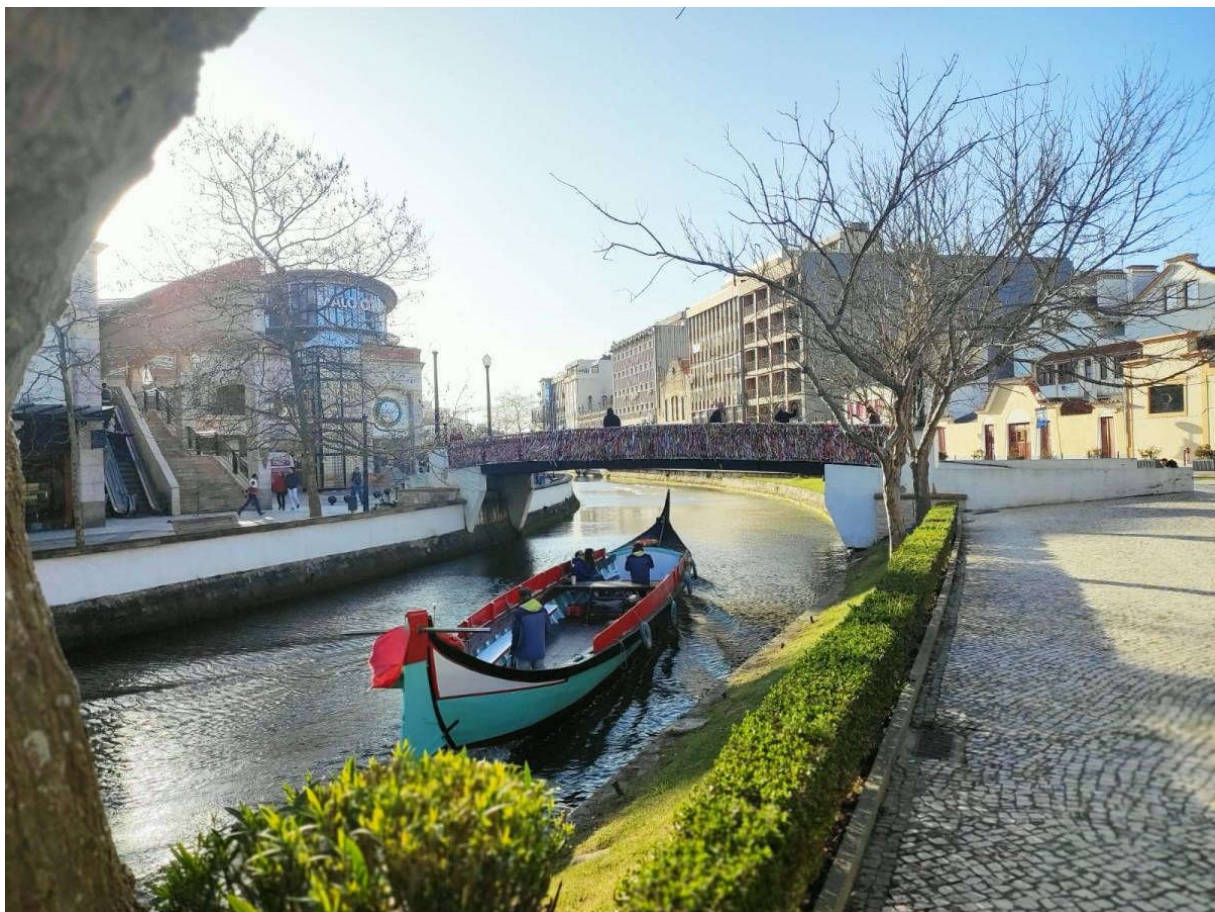
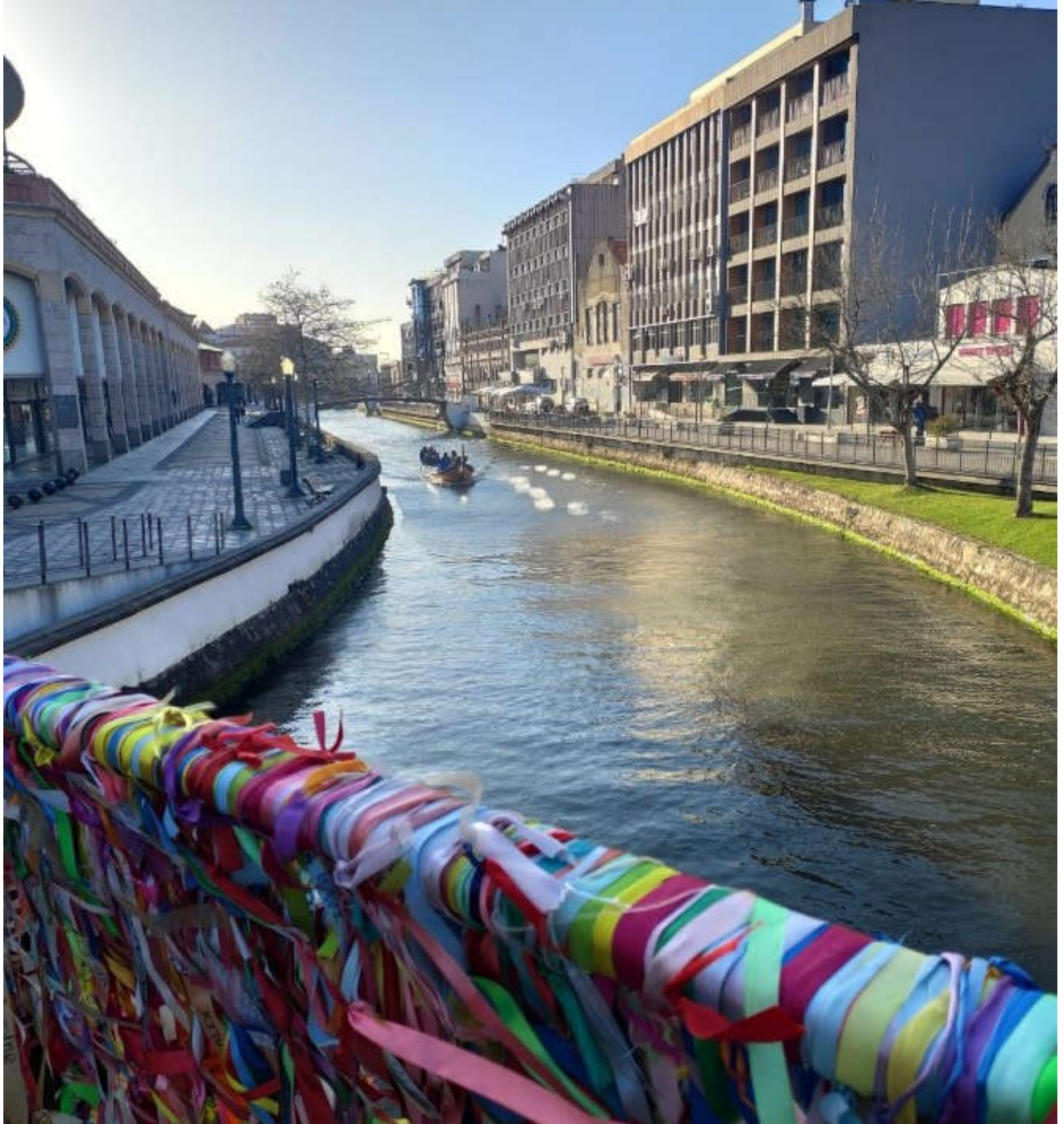




These words are coming to you from a vivid and lively little town in central Portugal called Aveiro. Located on the coast of Atlantic, adorned by colourful tiles on every corner, vibrant house facades, with old, paved streets and a unique character, Aveiro captured my heart very quickly.



The city is also known as Venice of Portugal, because it lies on the Aveiro River, and has a similar system of canals and boats. One of the first unique experiences I had was a ride on the river with said boat, called Moliceiro. The ride offered a complimentary champagne glass and an Aveiran delicacy called Ovos Moles. What a treatment, am I right?





The beauty of Aveiro also lies in its good connection with the rest of Portugal. Inter-city trains are very common and fairly cheap, fast and comfortable, therefore making Aveiro a perfect hub for my planned adventures.

Until now I visited the city of Ovar, which hosts one of the biggest and most important Carnival celebrations in Portugal and the wonderful city of Porto.



The Portuguese way of life is also worth mentioning, which I was absolutely excited to experience. The Portuguese are, as a nation, very friendly, fun and socially oriented. Even if they do not speak or understand English (which is, for me of course, the primary source of communication), I found that they try to go extremely out of their way to assist you with anything you need. I would also like to use this opportunity to thank all the wonderful volunteers of ESN Aveiro for their troubles to organize everything they did for us, we would have honestly been lost without you. It is fun for once to be on the other side of this, and experience the way Erasmus see the ESN Volunteers, I am immensely grateful to you! I would also like to commend you for your patience with all our never-ending questions. You are a gift to this world!

Most bigger stores and all restaurants here work until 11pm. AND THEY SERVE COFFEE AT THAT HOUR! I was shocked (positively) when I was offered a cup of coffee after dinner, at 22:45. For a Croatian caffeine addict such as me, this was the best news. Back home, if you order a warm drink at a café after 7pm, the waiter gives you a look so dirty your ancestors shiver in their graves.



Another thing I very much enjoyed (while I had the opportunity) is the beach. Long and sandy coast offers many opportunities for hanging out with your friends, long walks, swimming in the ocean and even taking up some surfing, all of which I was very much looking forward to.



Unfortunately, my Erasmus experience was halted (temporarily I hope) by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing this article, I am in my 9<sup>th</sup> day of self-isolation, along with my current best friend Netflix and a lot of snacks, and occasional video-lectures from my host university.

To conclude this, yes, I had an unusual beginning of my Erasmus experience. Am I in lockdown? Yes. Do I regret it? No. From my point of view, this is also one more experience to have, hopefully just for a while. I had a good start, which I enjoyed very much and I hope everyone will be responsible enough to contain the infection and stop the spread, so everyone can go about their lives and Erasmus students everywhere can continue to get to know all aspects of culture their host country prides themselves with, as well as spread their own.

For all those that are having doubts about applying for Erasmus mobility exchange, I implore you to go for it. This is truly a unique and memorable experience that can only help you along in your life.

On final note, I would like to share some tips on living in Portugal:

- Learn the basic words and phrases. Quite a lot of Portuguese people will understand you, but will not know how to speak English. This will make it easier for them to communicate and they will also appreciate your effort
- Try every Portuguese delicacy that exists. I am honestly in love with them! My personal favourites are Pastel de Nata, Pao de Lo de Ovar and Tripas de Aveiro
- Coffee lover: I have not had a bad cup of coffee in this country. Even airport coffee is delightful
- Barra Beach Lighthouse in Ilhavo near Aveiro has 271 steps, but the view is very much worth it
- Rent a bike! Go everywhere with it!
- Hang out with the locals. They know all the best places. Inside information is something else, I swear!

And I know this is the time for social distancing, but still remember, united we stand, this time, emotionally.

