

ICPS 2005 Report
By
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I arrived in Porto, Portugal on Wednesday August, 10th after roughly 15 hours of traveling to meet a person from the organizing committee who would drive me the remaining one hour distance to Coimbra, the location of the 2005 International Conference of Physics Students (ICPS). Relief came when I saw the sign being held in the baggage terminal by Ricardo stating "ICPS". Ricardo drove me to Coimbra and I saw along the drive my first views of Portugal. When we arrived at Coimbra University, one of the oldest universities in the world, he showed me around the physics building and guided me to the main organizing headquarters- I was one of the first participants to arrive. The organizing committee was energized with planning and logistic details so I waited until more people arrived. We were all assigned rooms in university dorms and guided in a large group to our respective buildings. After settling in I promptly passed out until the next morning.

I awoke Thursday morning and since people were still arriving I explored the city a bit and sampled my first Portuguese food. I was amazed at the intricately laid mosaic sidewalks that filled the city. I later proceeded to the university and went through the check-in process where I received a messenger bag, hat and various papers and schedules relating to Coimbra and the conference.

Friday morning we attended the opening ceremony and later began organizing ourselves for a city tour that we had each signed up for during registration. Complete disorganization ruled the process of grouping people into their respective tours and eventually random people armed with maps of the city and a vague idea of where they should go headed off. I followed a large mixture of people from my group and various others lumped together. We viewed the beautiful New Cathedral then the large group of about 30 people disintegrated and I found myself with one person from Spain named Ricardo who happened to be in my originally planned tour. We found four others, two from Italy, one from Austria, and one from Germany and created an ad-hoc tour group. We wandered the city together never really following the guided plan, but enjoying the

beauty of the city non-the-less. Coimbra is filled with such small winding corridors that one can spend all day exploring each new passage. Within each small street there exists surprisingly spacious markets, retail stores and cafes. After dinner I attended a jazz concert at the University which lasted the remainder of the night.

On Saturday, among many other excellent lectures, Brooke Chuzles from the U.S. gave an in-depth talk on her research. After lunch we all filled tour busses and headed to Figueira Da Foz to play on the beach and enjoy the Portuguese coast. Certainly the largest beach I had ever been on, it took us over 15 minutes to walk from the parking lot to the ocean via boardwalks set over the sand. These boardwalks served as the passageway to and from the ocean through the huge “desert” of sand that lay in between. I met a person named Ciira from Kenya and we hung out together while we swam in the ocean and lounged on the beach. Later, I headed off the expansive beach to the city to explore some of the shops and streets. The streets were crowded with many tourists as August is prime tourist season in Portugal. I returned to the beach and found the tent where “Physics on the Beach” was being held. Demonstrations on electricity and magnetisms captivated children and adults alike and after a large BBQ was organized for us.

As we ate and played volleyball we were informed that a surprise was in store for us. We were truly surprised when a small band of giant headed dancers flocked into the BBQ and prompted us to follow them to a stage further down the beach. There traditional folk music and dance was performed by people in traditional Portuguese dress. As the performance continued the dancers began pulling people from the crowd and taught them the dance. By the end a large part of the crowd and the entire dance stage was filled with people dancing. When this was over we were shuffled onto the busses and taken back to Coimbra.

Sunday morning offered many interesting research talks from students, two of which were by Annett Thorgersen from Norway, who spoke of the use of quantum dots for use as memory storage and Muneeb-ur Rahman on his astrophysical research. After lunch we listened to a thought provoking guest lecture by Professor Simon Goodwin entitled,

“Are We Alone?” The talk questioned whether the possibility of other intelligent life in the universe exists. After more student lectures we had the National Party, where students brought food and drink from their respective homes for others to sample. We had peanut butter sandwiches from the U.S. thanks to Brooke’s fore-thought.

I gave my research talk on Monday along with Adrian Buzatu from Romania. After the talks and lunch we heard our guest lecturer for the day; Professor Fernando Nogueira “Predicting some Properties of Nanostructures”. The talk started out digestible by listing various applications of nanostructures, but about halfway through he proceeded to explain, through extensive mathematical rigor, the details of determining theoretically systems interacting with many electrons. This proved to be very complicated to say the least as was the point of his talk. After dinner we held the costume party, which was quite entertaining and a new addition to the ICPS meetings. I dressed as a Hawaiian hula dancer and had a great time dancing to the DJ set up in the university square.

Tuesday there was scheduled a trip to Lisbon to tour various manufacturing facilities, but because of miscommunication about the departure time of the busses or perhaps as a result of the success of the costume party many of us missed the bus. The enthusiasm of being in a beautiful foreign city had still not worn off so I decided to explore the city more. I wrote postcards, sat in cafes and attempted to “brush up” on my Portuguese by chatting with locals. It wasn’t long before I ran into two guys from the U.K. named Wil and Doug. We spent the rest of the day viewing the city and taking pictures. We ate a delicious Portuguese dinner at the Café Democratica and afterwards returned to the university to meet up with our fellow ICPS participants. Unfortunately, the busses were running late and were not due back until after 1:00 am, so we hung out with some people from the organizing committee along with others who had missed the busses.

The last day of the conference we saw the remaining student talks and our final guest lecture. The closing ceremony took place rather quickly and goodbyes were made to many new friends at the farewell party.

Thursday August, 18th was departure day. I awoke and met up with my girlfriend who had come from the U.S. to meet me. We walked to the bus station as I told her about the fabulous time I had had at the 2005 ICPS. We purchased two bus tickets to Lisbon and mounted the bus to begin the next leg of the adventure.

