

My Erasmus Experience

I am currently a final year law student that has completed an Erasmus semester in Trento, Italy. I arrived in Trento at the beginning of September with another student from my class. The first few weeks were quite challenging but exciting at the same time. I had to learn how to communicate with others despite the language barrier and adapt to the different style of teaching. When I first arrived, the weather was great and for this reason most of the activities I was part of were outdoors. The University organised a sports day just for Erasmus students within the first week in order for us to get to know each other. Furthermore, in order to help us settle down, the University also gave us the chance to sign up to be part of a 'Tutor Buddy' programme. This meant that I had a student tutor to guide me throughout my Erasmus experience. When I arrived my tutor and I went for lunch where she answered many of my questions. She herself was an Erasmus student at one point and therefore was very helpful. She also showed me around the town and recommended places to go for nights out as well as where to shop in order to get the best deals.

Living in Italy meant a new culture and a new lifestyle quite different to that I had ever known at home. For instance, Italian people have their dinner really late, around 8 or 9pm, meaning that some of our classes did not finish till then. Although at first I was surprised at such timetable, this however meant that I got to have many lie ins which is a lot better (compared to 9am lectures in Queen's!) The people were always very friendly in public spaces as well as shops. If I ever needed help for instance with directions, I had no difficulties with getting help for Italian people were extremely helpful.

Since I have never lived away from home I hoped to become more independent whilst studying abroad. During Erasmus I have learnt how to cook (especially how to make good pasta) and manage my money. Since this was the first time I had to pay rent and bills at first I have greatly benefited as I had to figure how to manage my money in order to also be able to travel to new places. In Italy, I also joined the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) which brought many advantages. Being such member meant that I received many discounts such as 15% off RyanAir flights including a 20kg luggage. This was great for I was able to travel outside of Italy to places such as Budapest or Vienna for a lot cheaper. The ESN also organised many trips such as Oktoberfest in Munich. I have never travelled as much as I did when studying abroad.

I also hoped to meet new people and indeed I did. When in Italy, I met many students from all parts of the world which became my close friends. I have already made plans to visit some in the upcoming months. When you have an amazing Erasmus experience with other students, you will always be connected with them. Despite not seeing the friends I made in Italy almost every day I still keep in touch with them via social media and cannot wait to see them again.

Erasmus had a greatly benefited me academically for I was able to take on modules that were not available in Queen's such as 'Energy Law' or 'International Law' which had given me ideas and potential topics I could cover in my dissertation. Although the style of teaching was one similar to Queen's, the examination process was much different. The majority of my exams were oral exams. At first this seemed very stressful and challenging for I am quite a nervous individual and for this reason I was worried that this would have a negative impact on my overall mark. As this was the first time I was about to sit oral exams I made sure to speak to the lecturers beforehand and ask for advice in order to achieve a good grade. The staff were extremely helpful when I had a meeting with them during their office hours and reassured me that that every year Erasmus students worry about oral exams yet still achieve good marks. Furthermore due to being part of the ESN I was also able to speak to older students that already sat oral examinations before and get tips on how to prepare for such exams. Sitting such exams has greatly benefited me academically as it improved my confidence for this was the first time I sat an oral exam yet managed to achieve a high mark.

During Erasmus I was also able to take on Italian language classes. They were very helpful for after attending such classes I have learnt very useful phrases and was even able to order food in Italian in restaurants. I enjoyed learning Italian and I am considering taking on Italian classes in Belfast in order to become fluent in three languages.

I could not recommend the Erasmus experience more highly. It is a great opportunity to meet new people, learn a new language and travel. Although I had only spent four months in Italy, I believe such experience has helped me grow as a person and has greatly improved my confidence. Before Erasmus I never considered going away after I graduate to work as I did not want to live far from my family. My Erasmus experience changed my attitude and I have already been searching for careers outside of Northern Ireland for Erasmus has showed me that I am an independent individual that can adapt easily in different places. This period of time will forever be a special one for me and so my advice is for anyone that is considering Erasmus to apply as not for one second I regret it.