

# MY STUDENT EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

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I always dreamt of an opportunity that would allow me to experience life abroad. One normal day, one of my lecturers at the University of Zambia informed my class about the Erasmus Student exchange program, and at that moment, I realised my dream opportunity was right in front of me and I had to seize it! Because selection was based on merit, interested students were told to apply with transcripts and so did I, and... *Voilà!* I was nominated for the Erasmus exchange in my program of study in Political Science. I was so excited and overjoyed.

It was only after receiving a confirmed place of study at the University of Hradec Králové and my booked flight ticket to the Czech Republic that the nerves actually kicked in.



I suddenly realised that this would be one of the biggest challenges I've ever had to face. It was scary, yet exciting, especially as it would be my first time flying to a foreign country all by myself.

Having to figure out how to communicate in a foreign language (Czech), and navigating my way with public transport was challenging in the initial weeks, however, I was suddenly getting involved in the Erasmus atmosphere.

Nestled in the centre of Europe, the Czech Republic encapsulates the concept of what the Erasmus programme is about. Being a central node in this European network of cities, routes, and ideas, I knew that studying in Hradec Králové would expose me to a unique diversity of people and cultures and



provide me with the ability to travel easily around the area that gave me with this opportunity in the first place.

Coming from Zambia, the knowledge that I could take a brief train ride to a range of neighbouring countries in Europe for the same price it would take to get to other cities of my country was too much of a novelty for me to pass up.

Through my interactions with people from all around the world in class or out socially, not only did I learn about their culture and their experiences, I learnt a lot about my own, I learnt of other similarities and differences with other cultures and realised the unique and shared features of my own country.



And this diversity was not restricted to the social realm of Erasmus; it was also present in an academic aspect too. I was permitted to enroll in courses outside my core discipline of study, and in the process expose myself to new lines of thinking. Accustomed to large lecture halls and essay-based exams in my home university, the variance in teaching and assessment posed a learning curve for me. Yet aside from the constant battle faced with the Czech keyboard in seminars, I gained a lot from the diversified teaching methods of group projects, presentations, verbal examinations, and assessment trips.



I have been asked to write a short story about my Erasmus experience and honestly, no words can accurately describe the experience. You have to experience it!! Get ready for the months that will flip your life a whole 180 degrees because once you have this experience, your life will not be the same and once you return to your country, you won't be the same person with the same mindset, otherwise you were not on Erasmus! The Erasmus program was a lifetime opportunity worth seizing with both hands and I have left with a heightened sense of closeness to Europe.