

MY STUDENT EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

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BRAZIL

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Being an exchange student at the University of Hradec Králové changed my life in many ways. Getting to the Czech Republic was an adventure, to begin with. I was supposed to come in September 2020 but, due to the pandemic, the exchange was postponed. After almost six months of living in this chaotic situation that had not shown any signs of going away, I had lost all my hopes of living abroad, and that was when the UHK got in contact with my home university in Brazil (the Federal University of Santa Catarina), informing that they would accept me and grant me a scholarship thanks to the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility project, even if the classes would primarily be held online... At that moment I began to live the best year of my life already.



When I arrived in February, I received all the support from ESN and their Buddy System (ESB) as well as from the University. I felt that although they had their hands tied by COVID restrictions, everyone was doing their best to organize numerous online events to better welcome us, foreign students. More specifically, I am especially grateful to two Brazilian members of ESN (Gabriel and Alexia) that made me feel more at home – and that now I have the honor to call friends.



Living at the dormitory during this pandemic situation was also another important feature of this exchange experience. I got to meet students from different parts of the world, therefore with different cultures, and all of them were happy to share their views with me, making me grow a lot as a person. From trying different types of food to learning greeting words in different languages, I can easily say that these things made my year so special.


As an International Relations student, this experience was especially meaningful for me because I had the chance to study several topics that I could not have in my home university. In this sense, I could mention, for instance, the courses I took on Central European studies, a region with a rich historical and political background that I had almost no previous knowledge of. Besides, the highly diverse staff and professors of UHK provided me with the opportunity to learn about my own region (Latin America) through different perspectives. Regarding that, my Latin American colleagues and I had the chance to share our views on the political issues of our region and contribute to fruitful discussions in those classes. And finally, if I am completely honest, I must mention, as part of my experience, my failed attempt to learn Czech; although I believe is a very interesting language, it was too difficult for me.

Regarding other experiences that I had here in Czechia, I can sum them up in a combination of "firsts". It was, for instance, my first time experiencing "proper seasons". Jokes aside, it was my first time watching the snowfall, as well as my first time seeing blossom trees. The spring was also the first time I got to go cherry picking and then to bake a pie with my friends – lovely memories that will stay in my heart forever.

And Hradec Králové, being mainly a plane city with many parks made it easier for me to learn how to ride a bike, as well as it also gave me the chance to see its Philharmonic play for free on a sunny day once COVID restrictions were eased and larger events were allowed.

Moreover, when the borders of the country were closed, I had the opportunity to travel within the Czech Republic and see amazing landscapes and historical cities – such as Adršpach, Český Krumlov, Karlovy Vary, Prague, and Plzeň – which made me fall in love with this country. Speaking about Plzeň, I got to overcome a fear that I had when coming to Czechia: since I am allergic to most beers in Brazil, I was afraid that it would not be possible for me to enjoy one of the most renowned products and traditions of the Czech Republic – its beer. Fortunately, I was happy to find out that most Czech beers do not cause me any allergies, and I even developed a taste for it... And later, when the borders opened, I had also the chance to travel abroad, which is easier and cheaper due to the location of the Czech Republic.





Overall, my time in the Czech Republic and in the UHK surpassed all the expectations I could have. It made me more open-minded to other realities, and it positively contributed to both my academic formation and my social abilities. However, I must admit that it is bittersweet to say all this in a year that was so harsh for so many families around the world, regarding the ongoing COVID pandemic.