

# MY STUDENT EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

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For many Zambian students, an opportunity to study in Europe or anywhere outside the continent of Africa is like a dream come true. Just like the many different students in my country, I was one of those students that had the dream of studying in Europe. After having completed my Bachelor's degree in 2017, I tried out for opportunities in other countries like Sweden, where I was admitted to the University but the scholarship was not awarded to me. Faced with this situation, I decided to enroll at the University of Zambia to do my Master's degree in Political Science in the year 2020. What I did not know is that a year later I would actually get an opportunity to study in Europe in the most unconventional and unorthodox (all the synonyms you can think of) way one could ever imagine.



Whilst studying at the University of Zambia, I heard about an exchange program that was being offered for Political Science students to study in the Czech Republic at the University of Hradec Králové, and in the year 2021, I got nominated for this program. But for me to get to the Czech Republic, I faced a lot of challenges and with the Corona Virus on the loose, the chances of me going to the Czech Republic were becoming vague and I thought just like Sweden, this opportunity was not meant for me. I had to reconcile my mind to the fact that I would not make it to this opportunity.

Following the relaxation of the Covid restrictions, the Czech Embassy in Zambia began processing my Visa, and thanks to my coordinator in the Czech Republic, I was put on a fast track and within one month my Visa was processed. But there was a problem, the term had already started and my colleagues on the program had already started learning and had the opportunity to interact and make new friends. This meant that I missed out on all the fun activities that the Erasmus Network had prepared for the foreign students and this made me sad.

But as fate would have it, I wasn't the only one that had delayed to arrive by a month, I met two Peruvians that had arrived a day before I arrived and we were quarantined in the same block. I remember feeling very lonely in quarantine and I missed home quite a lot, but the Peruvians made me feel at home and on several occasions invited me to share meals with them.



The beauty of the Erasmus exchange program is that it allows you to meet people from different countries and backgrounds. My interaction with the Latin Americans allowed me to appreciate their culture and helped me realize that there were so many parallels that could be drawn between African culture and Latin American culture.

Five days later, I was out of quarantine and I was moved to my new designated block where I met more Latin Americans. There were five different nationalities being represented in my flat. There were two people from Bolivia, one from Chile, one from Armenia, one from Colombia (the life of the party), and me from Zambia. We dubbed our flat, the flat of the story of the six immigrants in the Czech Republic. I didn't get to make a lot of friends when I was in the Czech Republic due to my late arrival and often times I was lonely. But my flatmates made sure that there was never a dull moment. I soon got to find out that partying was and is a Latin American tradition and that no one party's harder than the Latins in the world. A lot of parties were hosted in our flat and through these interactions, I got to meet people from different nationalities such as France, Germany, and Venezuela.





*Friends from Germany, Bolivia, and Venezuela came to our flat for New Year's Eve.*

I would have to say one of the best experiences I had was meeting my fellow countrymen from Zambia and also meeting other people from different African countries. Things are made super extra easy when you meet people that understand your culture and can speak your native language. I got to meet and make friends from Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Zambia as well. I met my longtime friend Moonga Mbozi whom I hadn't seen in seven years. Moonga and I went to high school together and it was nice to meet and reconnect after so many years. He got to introduce me to another Zambian person who also introduced me to another Zambian person and these people have become friends for life. Moonga has been studying in Prague for two years and he came all the way to Hradec Králové to come to visit me.

I also had beautiful experiences traveling to the beautiful city of Prague. There was so much to see and I was overwhelmed by the historical infrastructure and the multitudes of people that would flock to have a glimpse of the city.

In all this, my favorite experience was the learning experience during classes. I loved the way the lecturers taught. I was taught to question things and not just take them as they are. This meant asking why and analyzing things on a deeper level. Qualifying theories and in certain instances shooting them down and giving justifications as to why. You are allowed to be yourself during classes and the lecturers would in no way make you feel uncomfortable. They were really inquisitive and would want to learn about your experiences and your background. Two very particular lecturers who were very brilliant and intelligent stood out for me. These were my lecturers in the African Diaspora and Central European politics courses, Dr. Stephanie Rudwick Inge and Dr. Petra Vodova respectively. I learnt so much from them, they opened my mind to endless possibilities, and am sure that any student that interacts with these two powerful women will never leave their classes being the same.

My appreciation goes to Veronica who was the ESN Vice President at the time. She picked me up from the airport and gave me the necessary tools to survive. Without her, I wouldn't have made it in my early days in Hradec. Most important of all, I would also like to thank my coordinator Vera Kourimova for her tireless commitment in ensuring that I travel to the Czech Republic and for her timely communication.