

MY STUDENT EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

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A short email from the University of Ghana. That's how my Erasmus experience started. The rest is the most exciting experience so far of my student years. The city and its people were welcoming and lively. This program represents a number of things to me: meeting loads of new and different people, the excitement of new experiences, and the freedom to explore the world—even in the midst of a pandemic!

Erasmus Experience: the reality

I feel privileged to have been selected by my department to spend half a year as part of two people for the Summer Exchange program in the UHK, Czechia. The opportunity to experience a European education could only have been made possible by the Erasmus+ program.



Generally, the experience was positively encapsulating. This was due to the assistance of my capable coordinator, Věra, to whom I owe much gratitude for the swift assistance anytime I wrote to her. This was by no small measure great assistance as this was my first foreign travel and so much to leave with others who are different from me. To my friends from other European countries, this seemed like a holiday. But in reality, the cultural shock, combined with studying with a different education system in a setting of generally not familiar language, meant that it was not going to be easier much than I anticipated. I was so scared about all the workload and responsibilities!

Conversely, I had the opportunity to meet new cultures and people, to live in a new country enjoying its reality. This particular experience is also able to transmit feelings of hope, optimism, and union in a virtuous way to take care of each other.

Language:

The first major hurdle was language. As I realise, outside the dormitory, few people speak English. Although there was a Czech class I could register to be able to get the basics to enable me to move around easier, I did not take since prior to the program. This is due to the fact that I was and still am engaged in full-time remote employment, which takes a greater part of my time. I feel my comprehension of the Czechian language would have greatly influenced my stay here as it makes for easy integration with the indigenes. However, the majority of the people I encountered were always ready to extend a helping hand with the little vocabs of English they possessed.

Academics:

The experience of studying in Czechia gave me valuable insights into the diversity of Archaeology as it is taught and practiced elsewhere. Also, I got different perspectives in my study of philosophy. This was especially so because the lecturer who handled this course, Sylvie, really made the class as interactive as one could imagine. Consequently, I learned so much from colleagues from Venezuela and Bolivia who gave first-hand information on most news items. This helped me in writing my final term paper.

Weather:

The weather in Czechia couldn't be more different to the one I am used to. I was greeted with -12 Celsius in the first few weeks. Although it improved over time, that couldn't help as I developed frostbites in my fingers. I have since taken it upon myself to caution any person traveling to Europe to always wear their hand gloves in days of extreme weather 😞.

Dormitory:

Initially, I lived with 2 guys from Turkey, 1 from Armenia, a Ghanaian, and a Spanish in an apartment of two rooms—three people in each room. These guys are family even now. We had to separate to different rooms as that room was just for temporal quarantine due to the covid 19 pandemic.

In my permanent flat, I faced only one issue of a roomie who understandably is from a cold region and wanted to keep the windows fully opened at all times, even in the period of below zero weather. But after he completed

his studies and left (we are still in touch, though), that issue was resolved; the rest is all fun and jokes. The dormitory was in good condition, and I loved every bit of it, especially the maintenance guys who come knocking less than 24 hours after lodging a complaint.

The only downside is the noise emanating from the renovation works on the building.

Food:

Prior to this program, I was used to my heavy local foods. But here, I learned to eat light foods. Truthfully, food was an issue for me since I didn't have any cooking skills and had to resort to YouTube videos.



Conclusion:

European Union with the Erasmus program definitely changed my life. The 'foreign concept' disappears totally when you're abroad. Everything has another point of view: you gain new friends, a new taste of music, you try different food, new challenges, you fall in love, and road trips in your free time are the best way to discover and explore. Things will never be the same... "Once Erasmus, always Erasmus."

I will recommend to anyone to take this opportunity if it avails itself. I would also hop on this opportunity again if it's available. The fun, joy, thrill, food, weather, the people were really worth it.

