

ERASNEWS

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MAGAZINE

ERASMUS LIFE IN KRAKÓW

Experience

Challenge

Passion

People



The Pontifical University
of John Paul II
in Krakow

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Editor: Dawid Kaczmarczyk

ERASNEWS MAGAZINE

JOURNALISM IN THE
DIGITAL AGE

BEYOND PARTIES AND NETFLIX: UNVEILING THE VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES OF THE ERASMUS



Galicia Jewish Museum
Garden

The Erasmus+ student program is not only about partying, travelling, and spending your free time watching Netflix. It can be an opportunity to experience local culture and interests, through volunteering.

My name is Dominika, I'm an Erasmus+ student from Lithuania and I am a volunteer at Galicia Jewish Museum (Żydowskie Muzeum Galicja). In this article, I will share how I became a volunteer and what the experience has been like.

How did I become a volunteer?

I will start with a short story. **Professor Piotr Drąg** of The Pontifical University of John Paul II invited students to events related to the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Krakow. One of these events was held at **Galicia Jewish Museum** (Żydowskie Muzeum Galicja). We were invited to guide tours around the permanent and temporary exhibitions.

I was fascinated by the permanent exhibition called **“Traces of Memory: a contemporary look at the Jewish Past in Poland.”** At this exhibition, visitors could see photos taken by Chris Schwarz and Professor Jonathan Webber, which try to capture the remnants of the long and complicated Jewish history in Galicia.

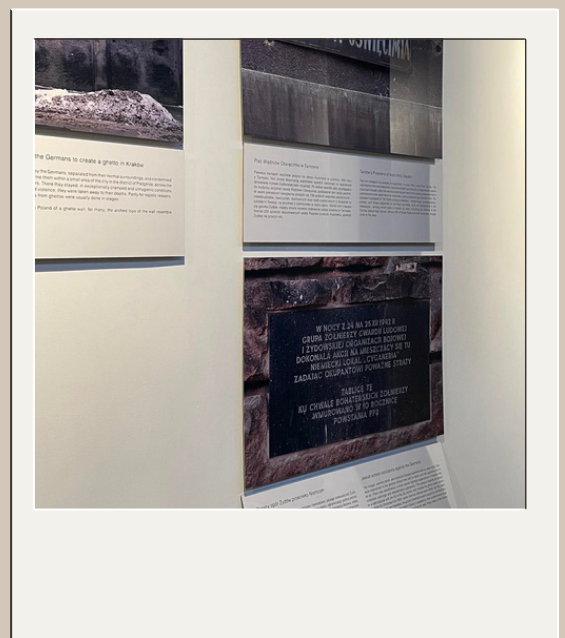
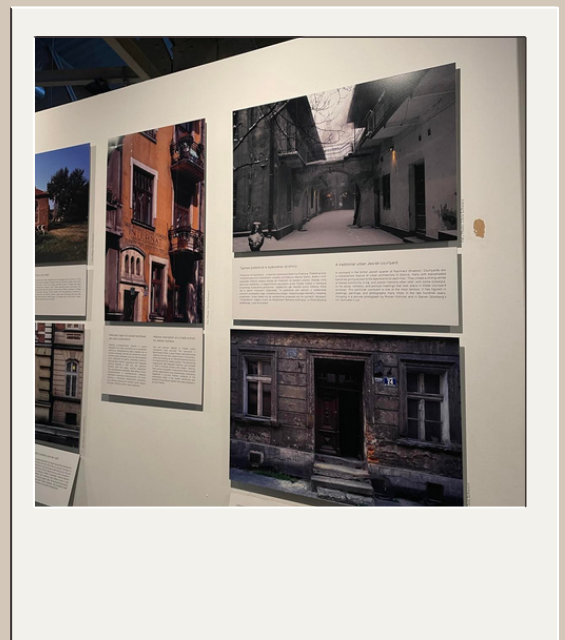
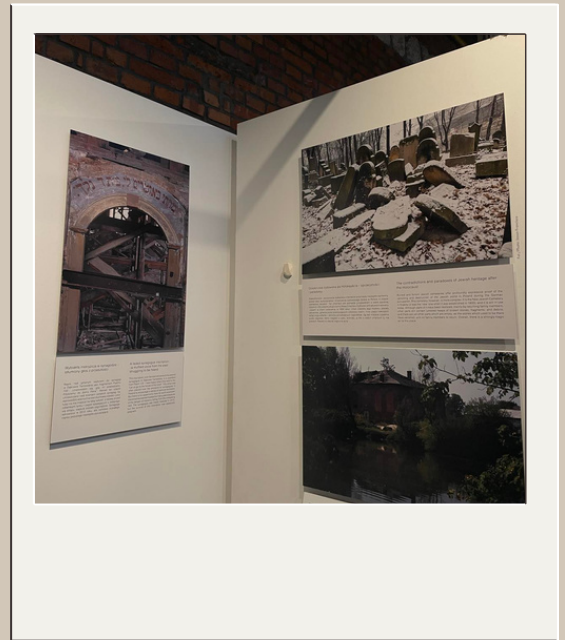
As a photographer myself, I was curious about the photographer who made this exhibition, why he chose this topic, and how he found all the places. I also wanted to know more about museums' work: their history, educational programs, and social communication.

As a Creative Communication student at Vilnius University, I am always interested in how museums and galleries use different forms of communication to better their institution. That's why I asked Professor Drąg about any volunteering or internship possibilities at Galicia Jewish Museum. I was introduced to the director **Jakub Nowakowski**, and he told me to search for information about volunteering on the museum's website. I had a meeting with **Katarzyna Suszkiewicz**, who is the head of the Education department at the Galicia Jewish Museum. Then, I started volunteering in the Museum.

Did my Polish language skills help me to become a volunteer?

A wide range of languages is always helpful in all fields. I speak four languages fluently: Lithuanian, Polish, English, and Russian (and I am still learning Ukrainian). In my case, it was good that I speak Polish and English because I can work with different visitor groups and on different tasks. The Galicia Jewish Museum is a very international place, and all people are welcome. If you know the Polish language, it will be easier to adapt, but most workers in this Museum speak English fluently.

"TRACES OF MEMORY"



How volunteering at Galicia Jewish Museum looks like?

Volunteers of the Galicia Jewish Museum take part mainly in the work of three departments – **the Department of Education, Visitor Service, and Operations**. All tasks for volunteers and trainees are written below.

Tasks for volunteers and trainees:

- Guiding visitors through Museum's exhibitions,
- Working at the reception desk of the Museum, welcoming visitors, selling tickets, and supplying information and guidance;
- Presentation in English for other interns and volunteers relating to the trainee's field of study;
- Researching for Museum's exhibitions and publications (if needed);
- Leading workshops in English;
- Helping in the everyday work of the Education and Operations Departments;
- Writing entries for the Interns' blog and Museum's social media;
- Helping in training new interns and volunteers.



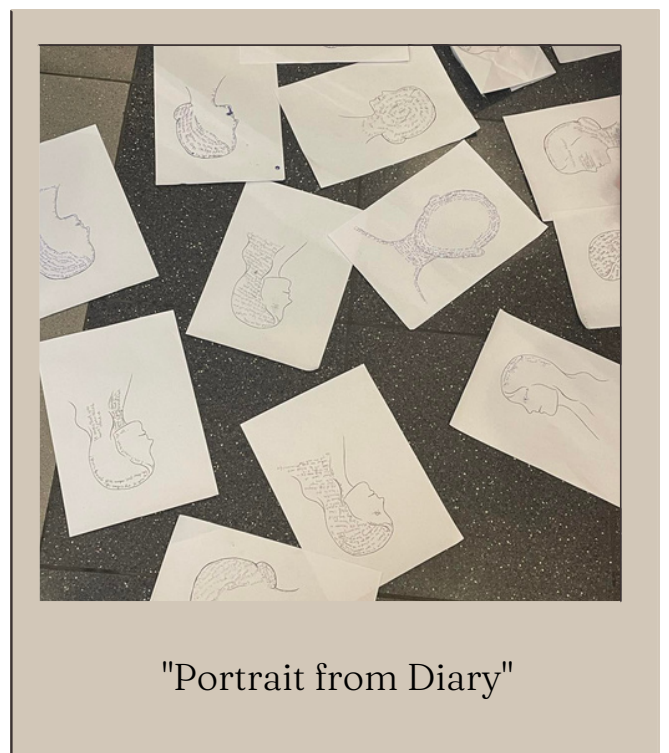
Work at the reception

What have I learned while volunteering?

I started volunteering in this museum two months ago and I have already learned a lot. One of my tasks was to run a workshop titled, "**Portrait from Diary**". This workshop was about Rywka Lipszyc and her diary, which she wrote in Łódź ghetto. For the workshop, I prepared fragments from her diary and learned information about life in the ghetto, such as her struggles with poverty and the way she was treated.

Volunteers in the Museum also create educational games, which can be used in workshops or sold in our bookshop. Currently, my main task is to make an educational game with photos from our permanent exhibition "Traces of Memory". While creating the game, my focus was to make sure it was original and entertaining, while still being educational and teaching children about Jewish heritage in Polish Galicia.

I have never given a guided tour, but I have worked on workshops and games and quizzes around Kazimierz for children. It was a wonderful experience because it allowed me to explore the city through the lens of Jewish heritage.



"Portrait from Diary"

Galicia Jewish Museum is not only the place where you can learn more about Jewish culture and history in Poland, but also a wonderful place to make new friends. I met awesome people in this place. All volunteers are from different countries, which makes this place an international institution. Now, I would like to introduce to you the people I met at Galicia Jewish Museum:

Sasha – a Ukrainian girl from Odesa. Sasha is an amazing person, who loves to say the word “amazing”. She is a sweet, very funny and stylish person, who has great music taste.

“

Volunteering is a very special experience because you get to know a lot about yourself, your do’s and don’ts and about people around you! I am really grateful for being here because this experience changes your perspective and opens your eyes!

Sasha



SASHA

Balduin – our German IT specialist and a very clever person. This man is the kindest person of all of us and he will always help you with Photoshop or any other app that you do not know how to use.

“

I am really enjoying my time at the Galicia Jewish Museum, there are several reasons for that. Firstly there is cultural enrichment as I feel that my knowledge about the Jewish history has broadened for me that's invaluable. Also, since I have to give tours to visiting groups I have to some extent overcome a fear of talking in front of people. Last but definitely not least important is the process of building connections and friendships with my colleagues and fellow volunteers. I am lucky to have met people from several different cultures and continents working at the Galicia Jewish Museum.

Balduin



BALDUIN

Lia – I would say she is a mix of nations. She speaks five languages and is the best tour guide I know. Lia is talented and an amazing person, who knows a lot about Jewish history. She is a future leader.



LIA

Shirah – she is our sunshine who came to Poland all the way from the Washington D.C. We all call her Sunshine because she can always brighten your day with her smile or a joke. She is also a very hardworking person.

“

Volunteering at the museum has been such a lovely experience! As an American Jew, it’s been super interesting and eye-opening to learn about Polish-Jewry and even get to experience it firsthand in Krakow.

Shirah



SHIRAH

EVERYTHING HAS PROS AND CONS

Pros of being a volunteer in Galicia Jewish Museum:

- Flexible working hours;
- You can visit all the exhibitions for free as a worker;
- You get discounts in Museum's kosher café "Lauder-Szancer Café". All workers get coffee for two zł and tea for one zł. Personally, this café has the best coffee I have tried in Krakow.
- As I mentioned, this place is very international, and you can meet people from various places around the world. This way, you can not only learn about Jewish history in Poland, but also pearls of various cultures, learn new languages and make new friends.
- You can go for free to meetings with survivors. In these meetings people can listen to stories of people who survived the Holocaust.
- Expand your knowledge not only in history, but also in working as a group member, creating educational games, giving tours to various age groups.

How can you become a volunteer?

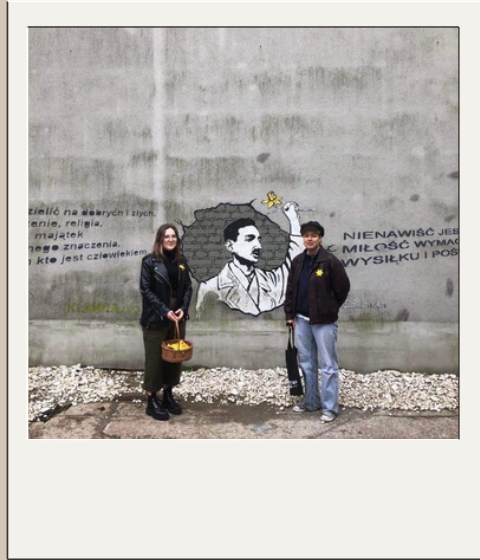
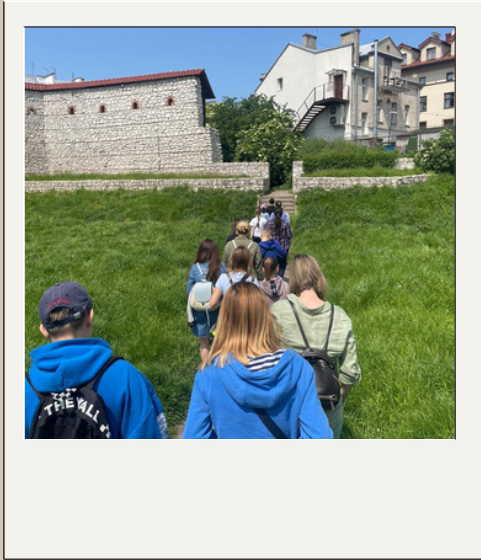
Every institution is specific: some of them are always looking for volunteers or interns and sometimes you can barely find any information about it. If you want to volunteer in a specific place, I recommend just sending an email to them. As I mentioned, Galicia Jewish Museum is a far-reaching institution, and every person is welcome here. There is an organization called Ogólnopolska Sieć Centrów Wolontariatu which supplies information about volunteering in Krakow. You can also find more volunteering projects on the European Youth Portal, which has tons of interesting opportunities for Erasmus+ students.

Cons of being a volunteer in Galicia Jewish Museum:

- Sometimes you need to work in reception. Volunteers do not like to work in reception because it is not fun: you welcome visitors, sell tickets, and give them directions. Emotionally, this work is also hard because there are many different visitors, sometimes genuinely nice and sweet, sometimes "nie sympatyczne".
- It can happen that you will need to work on the weekends. This does not happen often, but sometimes you need to give a tour or help arrange quizzes for kids.

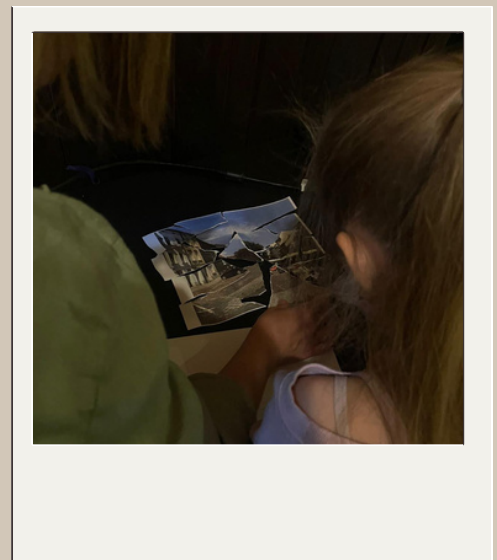
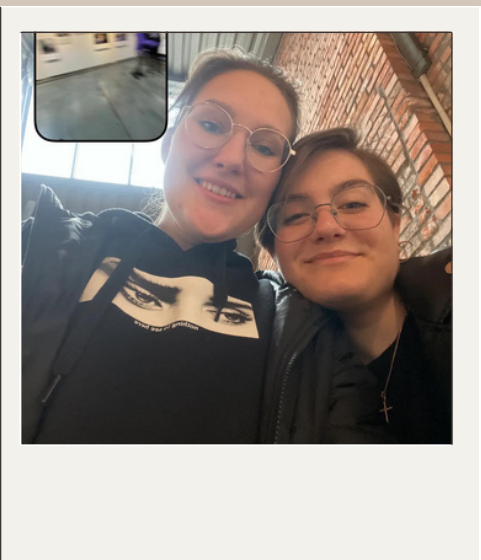


IS VOLUNTEERING WORTH IT?



It is up to you to choose to volunteer or not, but for me it was definitely worth it.

From my point of view, if you want to experience something other than parties and Netflix on Erasmus and you are into learning new things, volunteering would be an excellent choice. For me, it is not only about expanding my knowledge, but also figuring out what I want to do in my future. And as a bonus, volunteering looks great on your CV!



KRAKÓW UNVEILED

YOUR ULTIMATE ERASMUS+ ADVENTURE GUIDE

BY MAFALDA MATEUS

Recommended places + Reviews



Welcome to Kraków, a city full of grace, diversity, and endless opportunities for exploration. Whether you're a nature enthusiast, a nightlife lover, or a sightseeing aficionado, Kraków has something extraordinary to offer you.

As an Erasmus+ student who arrived in Kraków without any prior knowledge of this remarkable city, I found myself captivated by its charm. Now, as my time here draws to a close, I want to share my insights with you. Join me as I take you on a journey through Kraków, revealing the must-visit places and experiences that will leave an indelible mark on your own adventure.

Kraków effortlessly marries its rich history and iconic landmarks with the vibrancy of contemporary life. Prepare to be mesmerized by the intertwining of medieval charm and modern energy that permeates every corner of this small yet captivating world. From strolling through the enchanting streets of the Old Town to marvelling at the grandeur of Wawel Castle, you'll find yourself immersed in a time-honoured legacy.

But Kraków isn't simply a feast for the eyes; it's a culinary heaven as well. Delight your taste buds with the city's culinary specialties and explore the world of flavoured vodkas that distinguishes Kraków from other cities. Let the diverse flavours and aromas that await you at every turn feed your senses.

While your Erasmus+ experience may involve attending classes in a foreign country, it is so much more than that. It's an opportunity to connect with new people, embrace different cultures, and forge lifelong friendships.

While your Erasmus+ experience may involve attending classes in a foreign country, it is so much more than that. It's an opportunity to connect with new people, embrace different cultures, and forge lifelong friendships. Make the most of your time in Kraków by exploring as much as you can. Time has a way of flying by in this captivating city, and before you know it, your Erasmus+ adventure will come to an end, and it will be time to bid farewell.

But don't worry, for Kraków has a way of staying with you long after you leave. It becomes a part of your heart, a place you will always consider "home" in a broader sense. Home is not merely a physical space, but rather the people, memories, and experiences that shape your journey.

I'm Mafalda, and it's my pleasure to be your guide during your stay in this extraordinary city. Let this guide be your compass as you navigate the wonders of Kraków, creating memories that will last a lifetime.

First things first, this guide has five categories: Sightseeing, night lovers, food, one day trips and productivity.

In each category you will find some places that my friends and other Erasmus+ students here in Kraków think are the worthiest to see, visit or enjoy. In addition, each place is followed by some reviews and opinions, as well as a rating star, from 1 to 5.

I hope these places can help you during your stay and that, with them, you can take the most of your Erasmus+ experience and make it as perfect as mine was!!

Having set the stage for exploring Kraków, it's time to dive into the heart of this guide: the reviews.

Food

KEBAB KING

"Truly the king among kings with not only great Kebab but also a better playlist than any of the clubs. The recommended time to go would be 4-6 am for the full experience."

NAKIELNY

"It's a really cute shop with tasty pastries, homemade lemonade, and fresh smoothies but the real reason to go there is the ice cream! Do you love Kinder Bueno, Snickers or Oreo? Perfect! Because Nakielny offers all of these as ice cream flavours. Aside from this, it also doesn't break the bank, so it's perfect for broke students like me."

PIZZATOPIA

"Pizzatopia brings a new perspective to the regular pizza. The pizzas are designed as one of Krakow's traditional foods which is Zapiekanki. Also, you can choose the ingredients according to your wish. All of the shops have a great design that makes you spend more time inside."

HALA FORUM

"Hala Forum is a huge restaurant and bar at night. There is usually enough space to sit with an entire group of people which is great if you want a place to crash with all your new Erasmus friends. The food has great variety as there is a food court inside where you can choose different cuisines. But most importantly, the beer is cheap on Wednesdays so don't miss out."
– These are the words of Noa, an Erasmus+ student from The Netherlands.



Sightseeing



ZAKRZÓWEK

"Gorgeous lake good for picnics, as well as swimming and tanning in good weather."

"My friends from the first semester told me it was gorgeous, but I thought that maybe it would be just another lake. I was wrong! It is beautiful and it's a perfect place to combine a picnic with a beach afternoon."



KRAKUS MOUND

"Cute place for a picnic with friends, relaxing and tanning."

"Very close to Kraków, it's the most beautiful view of the city, the sunsets there are the best. I went there to run, and it was perfect also, so it's a great place to do some exercise."



WAWEL CASTLE (PARK BY THE RIVER)

"In front of Wawel castle, there is a lovely river with grass to chill on with your friends. It is a great meeting point as everyone knows it. Moreover, it is a central point if your friends live spread out through the city. Perfect for a chill sunny afternoon!"

Productivity

NATIONAL MUSEUM

"Superb, cheap museum (only 1pln for students). You can see Polish art throughout history. I visited two exhibitions, including one dedicated to sculptures using special techniques. I learned a lot."



ILUSION MUSEUM

"Great place to go with friends, it is different from the museums we're used to. We had a lot of fun!"

PLATINIUM GYM

"Platinum gym has several locations throughout Krakow, and they are great both for inexperienced and more serious gym people. A monthly pass costs around 22€. Many Erasmus students go to this gym. So, it is also a great place to meet a gym buddy or to watch your crush in secret."



POJNARÓWKA ART & COFFEE

"If you are looking for a place to chill and study, it is one of the best options. Also, they have the best handmade desserts."

One day trips



WIELICZKA SALT MINE

"Huge well conserved underground place that shows us how the salt mine worked in the past. It makes us feel like we went back in time to when it was operational."

"It's a beautiful place, the only downside is that we have to go down more than 600 steps. We took a tour in French and the guide was super nice, I recommend a lot!"

AUSCHWITZ - BIRKENAU

"We knew where we were going and how hard it would be, however we never thought we would be so deeply moved by this tour. If you are in Kraków, you must go there."

"It's a place full of history and meanings. It is one of the places you can't miss while in Kraków, especially because of what it represents and its importance in history." – Adrien Sailly, Erasmus+ student from France



WROCLAW

"Beautiful city not very far from Kraków. Full of cute buildings, history, and dwarfs around the city."

"I did a day trip to Wrocław, and it was probably one of the cutest trips I did. Took the train around 6am and came back around 11pm and it was so worthy. "

Night Lovers

BANIALUKA SZEWSKA

"Bania Luka is an international bar where you can meet people randomly. Also, it is known as its cheap drinks compared to other bars in Krakow. It is difficult to find places inside after 10pm, especially between Thursdays and Saturdays. However, this crowd is full of friendly people all the time."

"Always crowded, rude staff, and usually slow service BUT the beer is cheap and it's full of Erasmus students so we go there anyways."

"Most social place in Krakow with cheap drinks, food, and gossips!"



LA BODEGA DEL RON

"Great club, a lot of Erasmus people and the best part is that is free some days of the week."

"Great music and vibe! Sometimes is full, sometimes is almost empty, but it's the best club in Kraków. There are some days when the entry is free and sometimes, we have discounts at the bar. It's also a great place to dance with your Erasmus friends!" – Anna Georgieva, Erasmus+ student from Bulgaria, a true night lover.



MIKI VILLAR: A DOWN-TO-EARTH FOOTBALLER IN THE OTHER GALICIA

Wisla Krakow's player says he didn't acknowledge he was coming to "a big place" and he's learning with some things he "never knew how to deal with."

Rodrigo Cumbras

Most of the time we talk about footballers as if they were some kind of fallible gods capable of leading people to unknown feelings. Whether it is pure joy or inconsolable pain.



Photo: Miki's archive

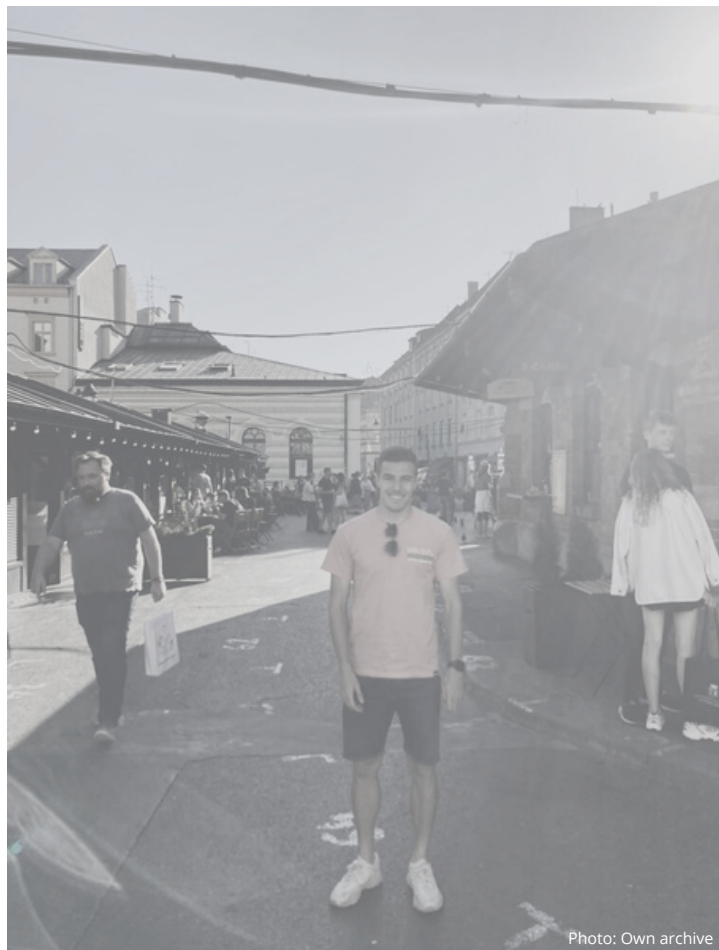


Photo: Own archive

Miki Villar (Nigrán, 1996) certainly does not want to get involved in all this nonsense. He describes himself as someone who's much more than a footballer. And he certainly is.

Having played football since a very young age, Miki is able to mix both his footballing duties with his non-ball related stuff. Currently he's finishing his final year dissertation in Business Administration and Management.

We met at Cytat Café on what we could both say, as foreigners in Krakow, was not a typical May day. Sun was burning outside; terraces were full and Polish people crowding the streets seemed nicer than what they are in reality.

But his last days have not been as Miki may have wanted. Just three days before our meeting, Wisla Krakow, the team he's now playing at for the last five months, lost at home to relegation-threatened Zagłębie Sosnowiec in what proved to be a major blow to their hopes of returning to the Ekstraklasa a year after being relegated.

Wisla Krakow, one of Poland's most successful clubs, fourteen times Polish champions, eight of them coming in the 21st century, was playing against Barcelona not so long ago.

Now, they will have to spend another year in the second division.

You've been in some of the most important teams in Galicia, and you've also played in LaLiga Smartbank with Ibiza. But to play for Wisla seems different. It must be a huge responsibility to play for a club that has won a lot in its history...

Miki Villar: *Something that strikes me is that everyone seems to recognize me in the street, something that very few people in Ibiza did. Right from the start. I came here without having much of an idea. As everything happened overnight, I didn't have time to get to know the team or the history. When I was already in the hotel, the first few days, I started to look around and I realized that I was coming to a big place.*

On the street I get stopped quite a lot, to be honest. It's always good because things have been going well so far. It's true that you feel it. People are more passionate. They are ultras. I know stories of a colleague who, last year after the relegation, they saw him in the street and wished him and his family death. If you do well, you are an idol. But, if it's the contrary...

When I wrote you by Instagram to arrange the meeting, you told me that you've deinstalled the app. Was it related to the defeat at home?

No, not really. It was because from time to time I just log off because otherwise I spend a lot of time on there.

But also, after the defeat, there was a guy who started writing to me and posted several comments. I deleted them, blocked him, and log off. But the next day (after the loss against Zagłębie Sosnowiec) as I was in a slump, I came back home in the car with my girlfriend and I started crying because it was really a big opportunity missed, I spent six hours on the sofa looking at my mobile, Instagram and Twitter, when I should have been finishing my dissertation.

Also, sometimes I fail to control myself and it's hard for me to see negative comments.

Do you usually check social media after matches to see what people are saying about you and the team? Must be something you've never done before...

Sometimes I do, and I shouldn't. But as it never happened to me, I never knew how to deal with it. I'm working with a sports psychologist, and I'll tell him about it, I haven't had the chance yet. But yes, it's a bit difficult for me.

Talking about difficult things, how do you get here?

My problem was that I've always been the underdog in all the teams I've played for. I always had to prove myself everywhere. In Ibiza I did it, but I was still a kid who got paid the minimum in the same changing room with people who get almost 400,000 euros gross per year.

In the same situation, if there is a small difference, who's the coach going to select? The one who earns more, because he has more responsibility. The coach also takes away the responsibility of putting a youngster instead of a veteran. That's what happened to me.

This year I was with Lucas Alcaraz at Ibiza and I was even playing as a full-back, doing really well but... from Christmas to January, he decided to change and I didn't play at all.



It was clear to me that I wanted to leave Spain because the level is so high with very little money in comparison. My career is going to last a determinate amount of time, until I'm thirty something at the most.

As I have on my Twitter biography, I play football because I'm more or less good at it, but I'm much more than a footballer. I wanted to live the experience of living abroad, to learn English well, to live experiences with my girlfriend, and my dog who is here too. This came up but I also had options in Greece and in the Dutch second division.

You said in Spain the level is so high. What about Poland?

I think there is less quality here but more pace. I get the feeling that the players here are worse, but they are so physically powerful that they make up for it.

It was very good for me because I understand football well. My understanding with Luis (Fernández, as Miki, another Galicia-born Wisła player) is great and we compensate each other,

we know how the other plays, so it's relatively simple. I am surprised for the better, I was told other things. They told me that the level was weak, bad. If you compare it with the Spanish second division, maybe it's worse, but because that could be Europe's best second division after the English Championship.

Let's leave football things aside. Let's talk about life here. What was your mental image of Poland before your arrival?

Not much, to be honest. I had the image of Nazism; I knew I was coming to a country that had suffered a lot and a society that was healing a little. And that leads to people of extremes, to more racism, to more closed-mindedness.

In the end I see that when people know that you are not Polish, the treatment changes. These are things that are not very cool.

You spent your first three weeks here alone, what was it like?

They put me in a hotel and gave me a week to look for a flat. In the end I spent two weeks in the hotel. But I really like being on my own, it's not a big deal for me.

To share changing room with another eight Spanish players must have his cons and pros. Have you made any non-Spanish friends?

Friends to do things in the afternoon or so, no, I didn't. Because in the end not all the players live in the center or nearby and it's a bit of a drag.

Besides, they are quite closed-minded. I go to the training ground, I smile, I say Dzień Dobry to everyone and they all have their heads down, looking at the ground, sad.

I have an anecdote in Alcampo (the supermarket) at eight o'clock in the evening. I had gone shopping and I wanted to get the discount card. I went to ask for information and the lady, who must have been in her sixties, started talking to me in Polish.

I said: Excuse me, English?

And she said, with a disgusted look on her face: Excuse me, Polish?

My girlfriend looked at me, and I froze, thinking about saying something to her, but we ended up leaving.

Having been in Ibiza and now here, where did you find it hardest to adapt?

Ibiza. The longest journey you have is 40 minutes. It's from one end of the island to the other. It's very different from Galicia and from Krakow. You don't have things to do. You think of Ibiza in July and you think of Ushuaia, Pachá (both night clubs) and the beach.

But it's not the reality. Being in pre-season there, I think of Ibiza and it's 38 degrees and a wind chill of 46, sitting on the sofa with the air conditioning on full blast because I'm dying. Going out to train at 8 o'clock in the morning because that's when it's cooler and at 6 o'clock in the evening because that's when the sun starts to go down. And you say: "wow! It's really crazy."

You've posted some photos of a trip... is it the only one or have you travelled more?

The photos are from Prague. I was given three days off and we took the car and went to Prague. In the end we are in a situation where we are five hours away from Prague, Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest...the city is great for that.

Miki finishes it off by saying he dreams of playing in the Premier League, something crazy as he puts it. Who knows what the future holds for Miki. He still has another year in his contract, and he will make all possible efforts to return Wisla Krakow to the place it belongs. Then, after that, he will allow himself every dream possible. We should never underestimate the power of a footballer who's down to earth.

RC



Photo: Miki's archive

PAKISTAN AND CROATIA CONVERGE IN KRAKOW: 2 DIFFERENT WORLDS, 2 SIMILAR EXPERIENCES BY LUKA GOJANOVIĆ

An average student years for traveling every so often and what better way to do it than through Erasmus, right? Well, apart from the financial support from the home college, the student is almost entirely on their own in whichever country they decided to roam in because they wanted to change their education pattern for at least a couple of weeks, party and meet a plethora of people from all around the world who came looking for the same thing. An immediate disadvantage of being on your own in a foreign country is the overwhelming feeling of alienation from certain customs. Another disadvantage might as well be finding a place to stay. Student dorms in general are the safest bet as they generally are the cheapest option, albeit somewhat of a letdown in regards to the quality of life there. As a Croatian living with a Pakistani roommate in one of the buildings of the AGH student dorms, let me assure the readers that we were not the most pleased with the presentation. However, for the measly 465 zloty a month, you do get almost everything that you would need.



Huzaifa wasi, a Pakistani student in Krakow

Living options are very likely the first thing an average student would be disappointed by, either in regards to the price, the quality or both. One of the Croatian Erasmus students I have met recently here have told me that they pay 300 euros a month for an apartment that they share with 5 more people. That can be rounded to up to 1342 zloty a month which is quite something by anybody's standards, even if they hail from a country that is expensive on its own. Granted, as soon as a student solves a problem of finding a place to stay and feels good enough about their choice, the learning process of everything else around them is to commence and so it had the moment my Pakistani roommate, Huzaifa Wasi got used to the pros and the cons the dorm he was staying at had to offer.



The Wawel castle

What are the things you have come to know about the cost and quality of living in Krakow over time as a student?

A: Well, before coming here I was already feeling somewhat confident about my dorm of choice since the college I have decided to enroll in, AGH, had its own dorm complex which is reasonably priced and so that one hurdle was out of the way. Krakow does have a relatively low cost of living and student accommodations, public transportation and daily expenses are generally affordable. There is a reason Zabka is considered a way of life here, (laughs). Krakow is also a very student-friendly city and it is in no way difficult to find student parties and similar events, especially those Erasmus parties every day of the week.

Another really convenient thing is the positioning of the country itself. It is located in the heart of Europe, making it an excellent base for exploring other countries. The transportation network is so well connected, you wouldn't be surprised hearing about student going to Berlin, Vienna or Budapest every now and then.



Ojcow park (above), Krakus mound (below)

What about the cultural exploration of the city itself?

A: It would be understatement to call Krakow a historically rich place. The Wawel castle and the Old Town are quite beautiful. I would very much recommend museums such as the National museum, the Aviation museum, the Museum of Contemporary art and Schindler's factory museum. Speaking of Schindler's factory, it is not the only museum that heavily concerns Jewish history but the only one such I have visited thus far. Galicia Jewish museum is another one on my list. Zakrzówek, the Krakus mound, the Kosciuszko mound and Ojcowski national park are places I would recommend every Krakow visitor to spend their time at.



In life, there are always ups and downs



What are the cons of Krakow from your perspective?

A: The language barrier is somewhat of a problem still. Both of us can really relate to this one, especially in regards to this dorm (laughs). Majority of population speaks Polish and the older the people are, the sparser their knowledge of the English language. Younger generations are vastly better in this regard so talking to them in English is generally the best course of action if you need help in certain situations e.g.

What are your favorite activities in Krakow?

A: So far, exploring the city and its museums and going to the gym. There is not much versatility there, I know, but apart from socializing and studying hell of a lot, I am pretty satisfied with my daily routine given that I also have a pretty exhausting job at a Kebab shop.

Schindler's factory, now a museum

CROATIAN PERSPECTIVE

.Many of the experiences Huzaifa has had so far in Krakow can be applied to me. However, as someone hailing from a country whose language is reasonably similar to mine, this creates a whole new level of enjoyment and appreciation for my Slavic brethren further up north.

As an Erasmus student from Zagreb, the capital city of Croatia, I have found Krakow to be most pleasant all around save for the language barrier problem that made me wish I was either fluent in Polish or that the Polish and Croatian were so similar that me and the Poles would understand each other relatively well each speaking in our own languages. Alas, not all wishes can come true sometimes. As the final number of courses I have enrolled in was 5, I decided to enroll in Polish classes within the same university to spice everything up a little and it was one of the best decisions I could have made here.



As for the culture itself, my primary focus was the exploration of the Jewish culture, especially visiting the Schindler's factory, now turned museum for remembrance of Schindler, the Holocaust and the Jews he had saved. Poland itself has had a rich Jewish history for many centuries and so to educate us Erasmus students further in such matter, our professor Piotr Drag had organized a visit to this museum to my delight and what I definitely need to do is to visit it again as it is by far the most incredible museum I have been to yet.

Krakow, a city with a lot to offer and the pros that far outweigh the cons, future Erasmus students would do well to at least place it highly on their list of countries to study in. I have never visited Poland before and taking into account everything I knew about its culture and the similarities of our languages was the propellant that landed me in Krakow. Would I come here again sometime? Absolutely! Przyjedz do Krakowa!

The real side of the Erasmus Experience

S. Otero

Going on Erasmus to a new country and discovering and enjoying the culture, the language, and the studies seems to be wonderful for the learning and the professional career of students, but the truth is that the great majority of people's Erasmus experiences are very different.

The Erasmus program was born in 1987 with the aim to improve the quality and strengthen the European dimension of higher education. It is oriented towards fostering transnational cooperation between universities, stimulating mobility within Europe, and improving full academic recognition of studies in the whole Union. The acronym "Erasmus" was chosen because it coincides with the Latin name of the philosopher, theologian, and humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam.



Erasmus Party in Krakow

It allows students to conduct part of their studies at a foreign institution for one or two semesters (4-8 months) to gain international experiences, improve their language and cultural skills, and broaden their academic and personal horizons. All students receive an Erasmus scholarship that helps to cover additional costs related to mobility, which ranges from 210 to 310 euros per month depending on the destination country.

International experiences

Living in a country different than yours is in fact an international experience. Having time with locals, living in a new place, and discovering a new culture and gastronomy is a good part of that international experience. Even though in a lot of cases, that experience is just living abroad and going to the supermarket, public transport, classes, etc. in that country, because students create their group of friends with more Erasmus students from their own country. They create a life in a foreign country that is unreal, and sometimes they get stuck in their group of friends without the need of knowing more people.



It is the case of the Spanish Marta Blanco, who lives in Krakow, Poland, and has been with the same group of Spanish students since the beginning of her mobility. From her point of view "Staying with Spaniards makes me feel safe and It makes me more bearable being away from home, there is no need to include more international students in our friends' group".

Improving the language

Most of the Erasmus destinations have a language very different from the student language, so learning it takes time they do not have or do not want to spend. "I was trying really hard to learn Czech for a semester and I barely know how to say good morning", Emeline Martin, a French student who lives in Prague, Czech Republic.

Besides, if you cannot learn the country's language, in some cases, locals and even professors have a lot of problems communicating themselves in English, so the improvement of the language is poor in some cases.

It could be a great solution to this problem to offer the students the possibility to get extra ECT if they attend English classes offered by their universities. At the end of the semester, they could do an exam to evaluate their improvement.

Classes



Erasmus Students in UPJPII, Krakow, Poland

Erasmus students find classes less demanding compared with their classes in their home countries. There are some students who go to classes with local students, so the level is better and the experience more immersive. But when the classes are exclusively for Erasmus students, professors used to be more comprehensive and taught in a more relaxed way and students used to skip most of them for going to trips or parties. It happened to the Danish Klaus Hansen who is on Erasmus in Munich, Germany: "The truth is that I spent far fewer hours studying than in Denmark, if I spent any. The subjects were very practical, so I had to do very little effort".

Trips

One of the most interesting things to do on Erasmus is to travel through Europe. It is a great opportunity to visit new places finding the best prices. However, the desire to travel a lot and take advantage of the time encourages students to visit new places like doing a checklist, going to as many places as possible, without spending good quality time there, and taking away the fun of traveling by pleasure.



Erasmus students from Spain in a trip to Budapest

"I like to travel, indeed, but during my Erasmus I am doing a lot of short trips with a large group of friends, so I am not taking advantage of them as much as I could if the situation was different". This is what **Monika Vilkas**, a Lithuanian student living in Athens, Greece, thinks about traveling on Erasmus.

Professional Impact

Nevertheless, in contrast to the personal experiences of Erasmus students, for companies, the fact that a job candidate has gone on Erasmus is an incentive to hire him. The Erasmus Impact Study, published in 2017 by the European Commission, confirms that the EU student exchange program improves employability and professional mobility. The study shows that graduates with international experience perform much better in the job market. They are half as likely to experience long-term unemployment compared to those who have studied or trained abroad, and five years after graduation, their unemployment rate is 23% lower.

In addition, 92% of employers look for some of the personality traits that the program promotes, such as tolerance, self-confidence, or the ability to solve problems. In analysis carried out before and after exchange periods abroad, Erasmus students present higher values in these personality traits. When they return, the difference in those values increases by 42% on average compared to other students.

So, although the Erasmus experience has a dark side, it has a very positive professional impact and 93% of Erasmus students would repeat the experience once again.

MY ERASMUS EXPERIENCE - LECTURER'S AND STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVES

Memories of participants

LIKA KOBALADZE
LL.M, PhD Candidate

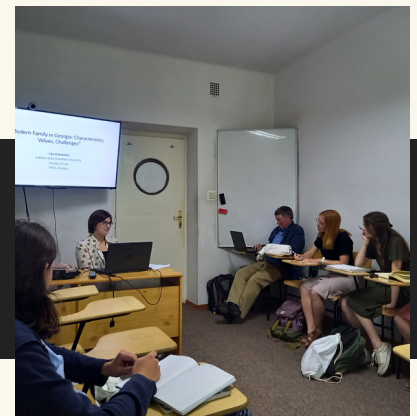
Affiliated Assistant, Faculty of Law, Sulkhani-Saba Orbeliani University (Tbilisi, Georgia)
Deputy Head of the Public Sector Oversight Department at Personal Data Protection Service of Georgia.

Erasmus + - The door to European lifestyle

First of all, I want to introduce myself, as it is very related to the story I am going to tell you. Well, I am 35, beloved wife and mother of two awesome boys, I am a practicing lawyer, PHD student of Law and beginner lecturer at Sulkhani-Saba University in Tbilisi, Georgia. The first time I have linked my life with Erasmus program was last year: I visited The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow on May 30 – June 3, in 2022 and gave lectures on topic “Modern Family in Georgia: Characteristics, Values, Challenges”. For me, as for a beginner lecturer, Erasmus + exchange program was really a great experience. Those public lectures were attended by local and The US students, whose questions and participation in the lectures made me very happy and gave me the opportunity to provide more information to them. I will never forget the interest students showed about the family life and marriage institution of Georgia and about the women rights of my country, their interest led us to discussions and made this process unforgettable for me. I value their opinion very much and try to transfer their ideas in my lectures to show my students other people’s view about the very well-known for them issues.

If anyone had asked me about the Erasmus+ program two years ago, I would have answered formally - that the program aims to offer students, apprentices, school pupils, vocational students, teachers, trainers, staff, job seekers, young persons, etc. the possibility to travel abroad (studies, internship) to develop their knowledge, skills and employability and that it also enables expertise to be shared and innovation to flourish in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. In other word, I would have answered the information I had got about it in a word or two. But the situation has changed last year when I got a great opportunity to participate in this program myself as a young lecturer and as for now, I am an international student, studying abroad, here in Krakow (the city I am in love with forever) and getting valuable experience of my life.

So, my goal is to tell my own story related to the Erasmus program, which will show you the advantages of this program from two different angles.



Not only I gained an experience as a beginner lecturer, but also Erasmus + gave me self-confidence, filled me with motivation and gave me the chance to get to know the way European universities work. I am very happy to have met wonderful people, young professionals in their field, I was very much surprised about the University staff attitude to their job responsibilities, about the enthusiasm and interest they showed in everything that finally leads to great affairs and I want to wish them success in the future. Glancing on them, I decided for myself to follow the working activity style I saw at UJPJ2 and take this experience as a must in my every day routine.

I had very interesting and busy meetings with the representatives of the university, who helped me in every way to organize the visit, shared their opinions, views and areas of interest. Not only did we exchange a lot of interesting information, but we also visited many sights, for what I am very grateful as well.

This visit became very much motivating for me and I decided to participate in such activities in the future too. Erasmus experience really lives up to the motto – “changing lives, opening minds” and I was so much excited about everything as a beginner lecturer and as the PHD student that I took part in the open competition of mobility for the international exchange studies at UJPJ2 in summer semester this year and succeeded. Now I am a busy student again and having the time of my life in Krakow and enjoying being here every day.

Living abroad, studying something different or in a different way is something you will never ever forget. The pleasure of Erasmus doesn't begin when you start your Erasmus: it starts earlier, on the very day you get notified of the fact that you were accepted into the program but in my case it was accompanied with the hard decision – leaving family for 4 months - but I tried my best and arranged all the private issues in the right order as soon as I could. And here begins my journey of a student again.

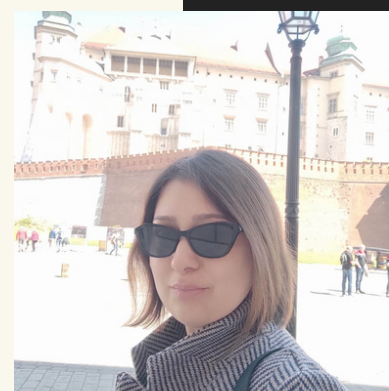
It's never too late to learn - the benefits of Erasmus

I have to start a little from a far: I spent my student years in Tbilisi, in 2005-2009 (BA) and then in 2009-2011 (MA), I studied at the Faculty of Law of Tbilisi State University and these were the years when the country, after passing through the difficult post-Soviet period, was entering an active phase to choose the European path towards European integration. Consequently, my student years were not as light, as easy and joyful as they should have been. I studied well, took various internships and tried my best to build a career in my chosen profession.

Before entering the master's degree, I already had the experience of working as a legal administrator in a bank and I was taking my first steps in the position of a clerk in the court system. I already had a family and a one-year-old son. participation in exchange programs was also less accessible. Therefore, students at that time, who wanted to achieve some status in their country, were all in my situation, and I was also burdened with the burden of my family. I am telling this so that you can see what experience I have of student life and what a radically different experience I had as a student in Europe, how full of positive impressions and future prospects I am.

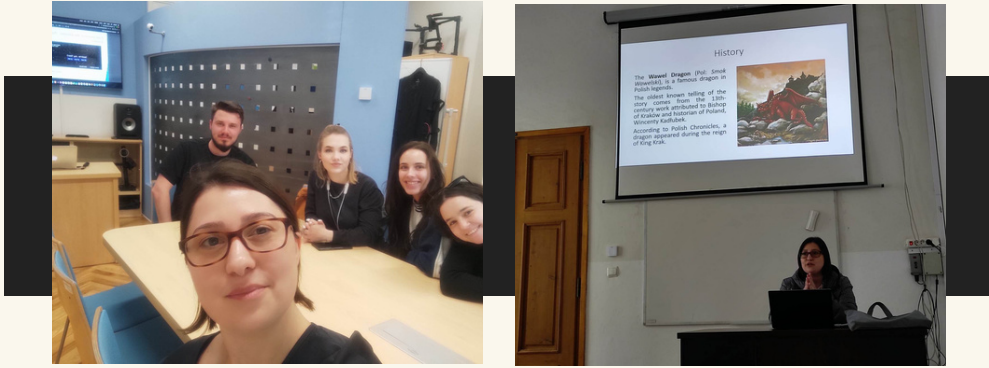
I am currently PHD student and I am constantly trying to learn something new, get to know something new, gain new experience and keep up with modern times. My main goal of participating in the exchange program was to return to an already familiar university and be in the circle of friends, as well as learn Polish language, attend lectures of other specialties close to my profession and, of course, doing research. I believe that there is no age for acquiring knowledge and for learning, there is even a saying in my country – studying is until death - and it really is. There is no age that is inappropriate for learning, especially in the case of exchange programs and international education. After all, people are more attracted to what is different, foreign, and the desire for adventure becomes even stronger in such an environment,.

There is no specific age or time in your life that you need to further your studies. It's entirely up to you to decide when you are ready. From a historical point of view Erasmus was founded by the European Commission in 1987 and it is gaining more and more popularity every year, it is the most commonly known of the many international student exchange programs which give students from all over Europe the opportunity not only to obtain an education but also to experience real life in a foreign country. So, no wonder that Erasmus has become the best platform for acquiring knowledge at any age after being in operation for so many years.

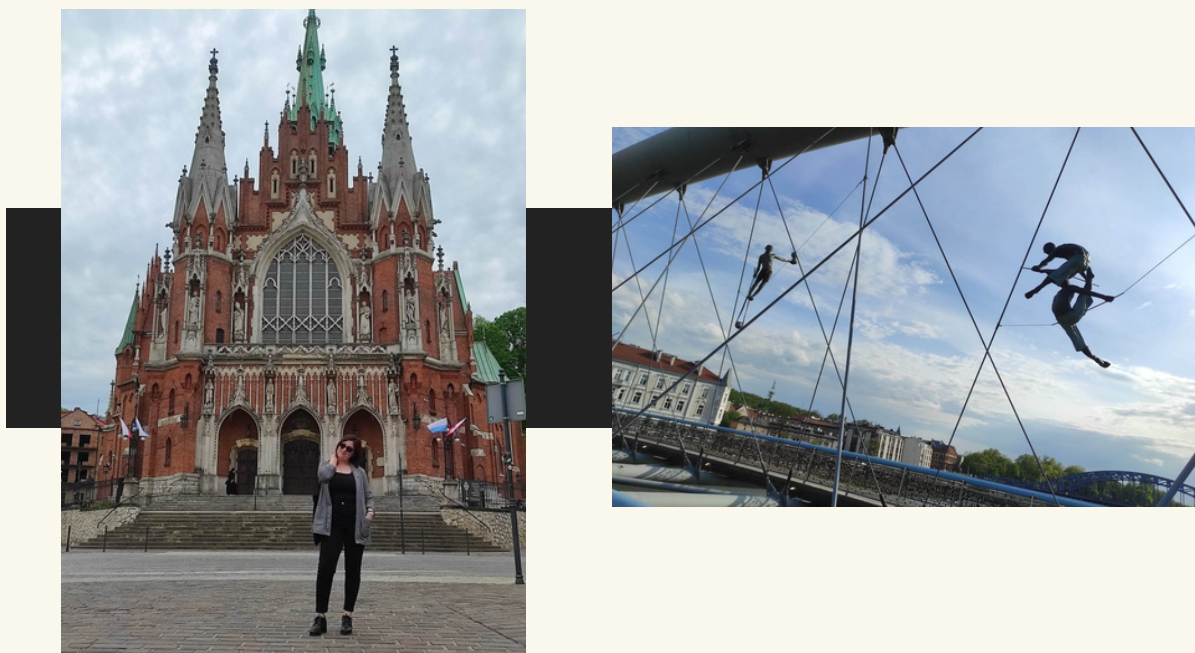


The main reasons, why to choose Erasmus dealing with the studying issue at elder age is:

- >> Improving your education by getting qualified or finishing a short course that can help boost your self-confidence;
- >> Regardless of your age, Erasmus exchange program will make you feel a sense of accomplishment.
- >> Adding a new qualification to your name can be great at increasing your career prospects.
- >> Want to study further, but you have a full time job? You don't have to choose one or the other. Studying a course in the field you are working in can improve your chances of moving up the career ladder. It can add to your current skills and allow you to explore other options. Erasmus really gives you the flexible opportunity to do those two things at the same time and I am the living example.

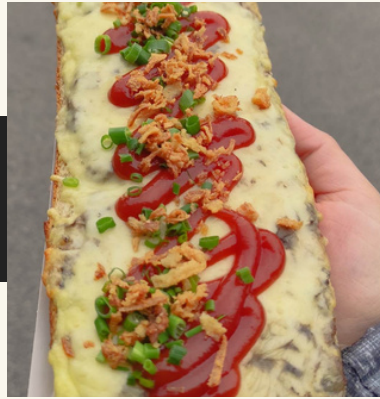


- >> Feeling being student again is great, also it is obvious that life experience will make you be a better student, as it gives you an edge over others to catch up with the big capacity of materials, knowing what and how to read and analyze.
- >> You'll be a role model for your children – As working mom, it was hard for me to leave family and kids for 4 months, worrying that returning to study will leave them feeling neglected. But then I realized that in reality, they will probably admire my motivation, I'll lead by example and show them it's never too late to follow your dreams. Who knows, I might even inspire them to study too.
- >> It is a process of self-discovery – people can find out their goals, get to know themselves when starting new studies at any age, it is the best way of being independent and recognizing yourself.
- >> Personal fulfillment made me happier - Learning is an ongoing process and the feeling that you have overcome all the issues and graduated is just marvelous, there are no words to express the feeling of satisfaction I've got now, being the Erasmus post-graduate student at my age, when everything seems stable and already done.
- >> And finally - it is never too late to live abroad and experience a foreign culture, meet new people and learn a foreign language. It is true that life won't be the same after Erasmus.



Feeling like a student again - the Erasmus possibilities are endless

As we all know, there are many benefits of studying abroad and it offers students many unique advantages. Participating in a study abroad program exposes you to a new culture as you have the opportunity to travel around the world. Erasmus offers us not only studying a new language and developing your worldview views, increasing professional skills and meeting other people, but there are many other activities that are worth to experience, e.x. It is a chance to relax and benefit from anything the other country has to offer: student parties, local food, amusement parks, trips, evening events, team-building days etc. The programs like Erasmus exchange can be good for long life learning idea because you learn not only from the University classes but (what is maybe even more important) by doing things, solving problems, working together with others, relaxing, having the time of your life and so on.



As I have already mentioned, I am a beginner lecturer and not only I have participated in such exchange programs, but my students too: Otia Kimeridze, the student of mine, has finished the last semester of his studies with the Erasmus exchange program - Erasmus+ KA107 - International Semester in European, International and Comparative Law. His words assured me of coming back to University of John Paul II in Krakow as a student and I tried successfully.

The other student I asked to share her thoughts about Erasmus and studying process is Salome Tvildiani from the faculty of Social Sciences of Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani Univeristy (I must mention that Salome and I both came to Krakow at the same time for summer semester, but she is doing her mobility at Ignatianum University of Krakow). Salome says that her experience in education in Europe through the exchange program was transformative.

“I spent the best 6 months of my life with the most wonderful people, new people, everything is the beginning of something new and good! Erasmus gave me education, getting to know a foreign culture, new people, happiness, living in another world. Erasmus is a project that everyone should try and become a kind of routine in everyone's life”- Otia says.

“Erasmus provided me with the opportunity to immerse myself in a new culture, interact with diverse students, and broaden my horizons. The quality of education exceeded my expectations, with knowledgeable and supportive professors fostering critical thinking and independent research. Student life in Europe offered a vibrant and inclusive community, allowing me to engage in extracurricular activities and develop essential skills. The emphasis on work-life balance allowed me to explore picturesque cities and landscapes. Exposure to different languages and cultures enhanced my linguistic abilities and intercultural competence. Overall, this educational experience in Europe shaped me into a more well-rounded individual with lifelong friendships and a broader perspective on the world”- Salome says.



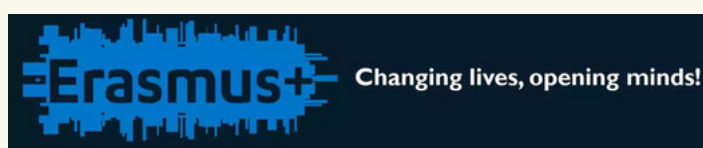
I (as the second time participant of Erasmus, both for academic and for learning exchange program) can clearly say that Erasmus is for everyone – for students who are interested people in periodic education programs not only to learn about the subjects of their choice but also widen their horizons and for Academic teachers for those who would like to broaden their competencies and exchange experiences with fellow academics from abroad, as one can teach, take part in research, or simply observe the academic life outside of their native university. Erasmus+ is one of the most exciting experiences anyone can have as a teenager or a young person but yet the definition of youth and life-long studying is much wider in the academic world.

I have gained valuable experience and new skills as a researcher and as a student again, made friends with new people among young academics and my classmates, the program provided me with the opportunity to step outside my comfort zone, leave family and become more independent and self-confident as a person, while also teaching me the value of collaboration and co-dependence. I learned how to be more active, sociable, understanding, and empathetic by travelling alone, I attempted to fit in with an international group of teenagers and youth at my age, sharing my culture, and discovering more about others. My favourite memories of my Erasmus experiences consist of wandering through the city, trying delicious dishes, visiting museums, learning the basics of Polish language (Spelling of which was the hardest quest to overcome) and having fun doing everything, even the grocery shopping. Through my Erasmus experience, I have developed, enhanced, and demonstrated abilities and skills that have benefited me in my academic and professional life.



There are some sentimental naratives in my words and I've been told about the so-called post-Erasmus depression that everyone goes through as soon as they return home, but I had no idea it was so rough, something like a shock of returning back to reality. It feels sad returning home and sinking in everyday routine again, despite being close to the beloved and very much missed members of your family, but the worst feeling is that no one around can understand your emotional condition. I really enjoyed my visit and gathered many pleasant memories and to overcome my "Erasmus-sickness" I have to think about these days frequently, also it will be a honor for me to host my new friends in Georgia and provide them with the unforgettable memories too.

A constant desire to learn new things, to develop professional skills and acquire different experiences - all this can be easily obtained through the Erasmus. This program is the best way for people of any age to broaden their horizons, make friends with international people, travel, study, live abroad and simultaneously fulfill all of their pre-Erasmus aspirations. I appeared to be extremely lucky having an opportunity to become the Erasmus participant twice and these impressions will certainly follow me for the rest of my life.





A few months ago, I agreed to become a member of the Erasmus program ... This is how my way began.



BIG CHANCE



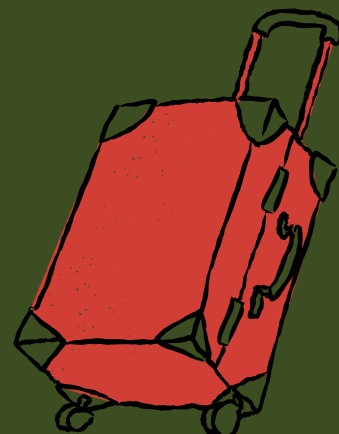
I went to Poland, to a country where I once lived for a whole year. I have visited many cities before: Zakopane, Plock, Krakow, Lodz, Warsaw, Gdansk, Katowice, but this time I returned to Krakow to start writing my story from scratch.

After I decided to take a different path in life, the most difficult part lay ahead - paperwork, a lot of paperwork: reopening a Polish bank account, getting insurance, finding alternative subjects at a new university, getting a Polish visa, solving problems with housing and my bank in my native city and 10 other points.



Photo from private author's collection

"Every day of your life, you make a decision that changes the rest of your life forever"





“What did Erasmus give me?”

First of all, a new experience. I have become more independent and responsible.

Secondly, the ability to get out of any unpredictable situation. Erasmus allows you to grow up and know yourself, and this is perhaps the most important legacy.

Thirdly, it helped to overcome the stereotype that traveling alone is very difficult and boring. Thanks to being in Europe, I managed to discover new islands of knowledge and impressions. I managed to visit not only the cities of Poland, but also Oslo, Copenhagen, Milan, Amsterdam, Rimini.

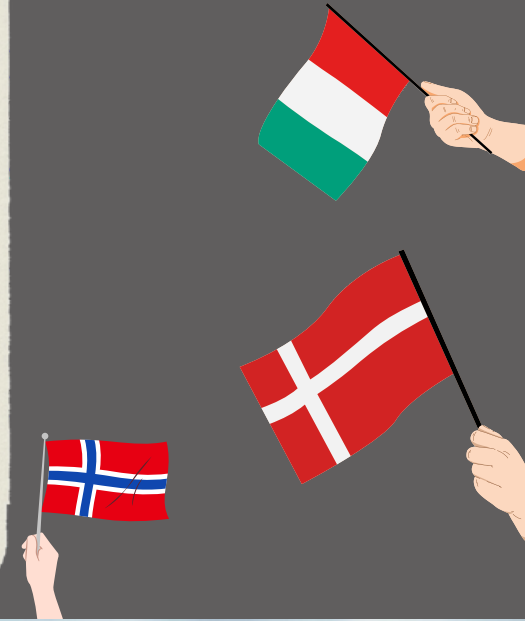


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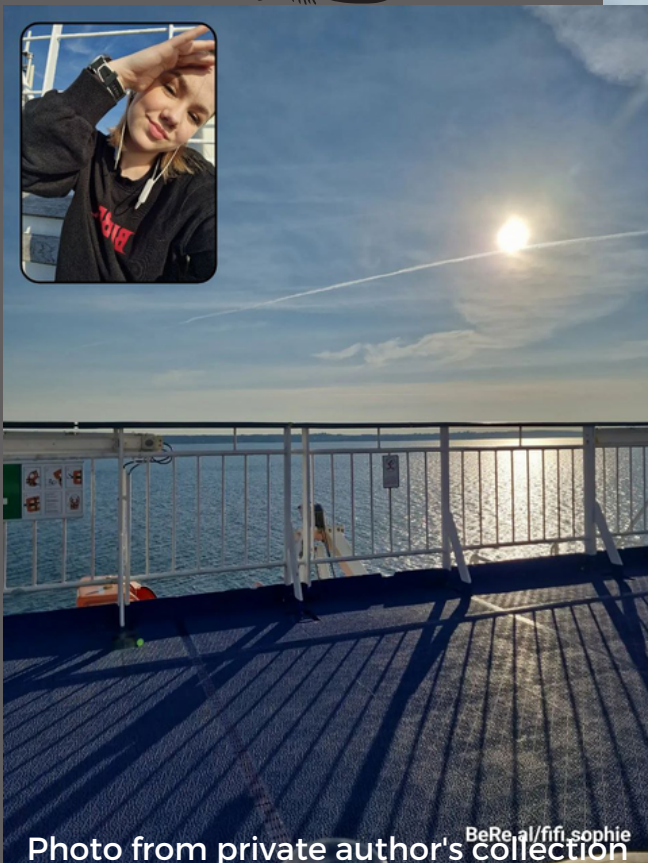
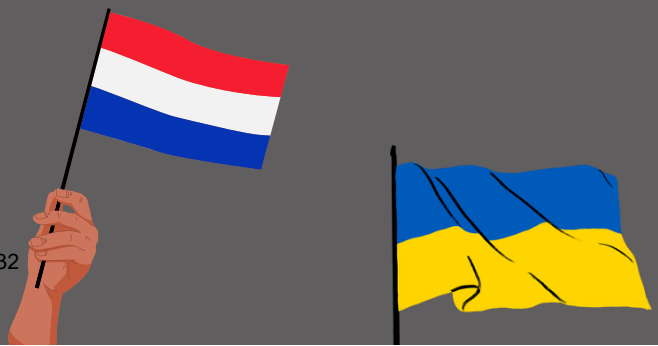
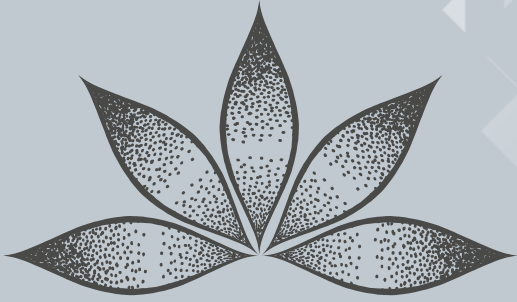


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It was thanks to Erasmus that I met new people who gave me impressions, emotions and thoughts that I had not experienced before. This directly affected me, because I realized that I began to move towards these opportunities and saw the result personally.

Do not be afraid of the unknown, you can always find a way out of any situation, overcome fear, become a little bolder. Life is too short not to take risks and then regret what you didn't do all the time tormenting the soul. There will be many different chances, but there is only one such chance while you are a student. Adult life will have its own entertainment and experiments.



And this is just the beginning, because the most important thing that I understood while living here is that I am not particularly eager to return to my native corners. I am glad that I finally realized what path I want to go on, at least for the next few years of my life. And this road leads me to Warsaw, where I will continue my studies from autumn. If I had not taken the risk to come here in the past, I would not have fully felt that possibilities exist, you just need to get a little closer, and they will appear.




Photo from private author's collection

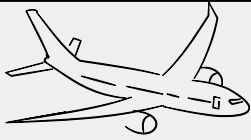


All's well that ends well. It was a good time that I will remember with a smile on my face, I will proudly tell the children the funniest stories that happened to me here.





May 2023



PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTIONS.

To be honest, the biggest problem for me was that I had to make a decision literally in one evening: do I want to go or not. Since time was running out, and for the next six months I had plans worse than Napoleon. But after weighing all the pros and cons, after consulting with experienced people, I decided to accept the outstretched hand of fate and did not regret it.

I also had a little difficulty in obtaining a visa, as my documents were delayed for 2 days. But it was my personal problem, and thank God it was quickly resolved.



I was faced with the task of finding an apartment or a student's house in Krakow, but since I do not speak Polish perfectly and did not really know how to approach the solution, I asked the curator for help and he gladly agreed to help me. Thanks to him, I chose housing, contacted the administration, and it was all literally within two days.

The conclusion can be drawn such that there were no problems as such. There were only small troubles that were easily solved, as in any other undertaking.



EXPECTATIONS AND

REALITIES



EXPECTATIONS

I knew what was waiting for me physically, but I did not know what to expect mentally: what kind of teachers would be, how they would treat us, how much homework would be, how much free time I would have. But these are all logical things. Only time can solve them. That is, when you arrive and come to the university for the first time, you will realize everything yourself.

REALITIES

In my case, it was a little easier, because I knew what to expect from the country itself, since I lived there for more than half a year, I understood the language a little, it was easy for me to answer strangers. I knew all the delights of Poland, such as: how to buy a travel card, how to pay, what applications can help me and make my life easier, how to renew a bank account, how to top up my phone account and the like.



ADVICE

In the end, I realized that it's not worth rushing things, everything will come as usual, being nervous again is a waste of time. You need to relax, act according to the situation, delve into the circumstances. That is just to live among people.

Erasmus

Fears and the path to self-discovery

Looking for information about Erasmus student exchange, you can find a lot of interesting things. Most of the articles are about cool experiences, new friends and great opportunities for your future. But how much is written about difficulties and the mental component? Is everything really that easy?

In this post, I want to share my fears about Erasmus, which may resonate with many, and talk about the impact of this program specifically on my mental health.

Part 1. The beginning

December 5, 2022. Lviv University of Trade and Economics. A conversation between a curator and a student in the corridor:

- "Toma, you are a smart girl, you should go to this program"
- "But I don't speak English well"
- "You must do it, I submit your application!"
- "But I'm afraid, don't do it..."
- "I registered you, I believe in your strength!"



From this conversation began the adventure of a girl who dared to take a step forward. I didn't know much about this program, but at least I understood that it was, but never thought to participate. I was afraid. Leaving my comfort zone was not my character trait, but thanks to the support around me, I took this step.

On February 18, at 6 a.m. after the arrival of the Lviv-Krakow Ecoline bus, I began to get to know this city. Kraków is similar to Lviv, so I quickly fell in love with it, and at times even felt like I was at home.

Part 2. Language is important

The first meetings with future classmates, the first classes have begun...

My biggest problem was the language barrier. I studied English, but I was afraid to practice. It seemed to me people around me will think what a bad accent I have if I start talking, so I just always was holding phone with Google Translate open and was afraid to answer something wrong. If I look like as a fool? What will they think of me?

Before classes, I wrote down answers to probable questions, it was already a habit. At the university, I understood 50-60% of the lectures, and at certain moments the whole thing not understanding what they want from me, I felt how difficult everything was.

The people in my university group and the teachers treated me very well and with understanding. They always said after my words "my english is bad, sorry" that it's not a problem and I have to try to speak at least a little. Do you think I spoke more after that? No, I was ashamed, so nothing changed for a long time.

Part 3. Is it scary to be alone?

The second problem that befell me on the road was loneliness. I think people who moved in another country understands what I'm talking about.



I'm used to always being surrounded by friends, being close to my family, and it was in Krakow that I caught myself thinking that I was alone with my problems.

In fact, the first time you may not have friends, walking alone may become routine. You might even like it, or not. The main thing is that you should understand in time that this is a new stage in life, and treat it correctly.

Over time, I got used to this atmosphere. At times I went to Ukraine, where I received support and strength to get back up and take control of your life.

During the time when I lived alone, I began to look for new hobbies and develop. I used walks alone as an opportunity to talk to myself and think about the future.

I studied English and over time I began to notice that I understand the language better and stopped afraid to speak I started to make new friends and travel. Over time I even joined another Erasmus program that gave me the opportunity to live with a group American students and get to know oneself spiritually.

These were the first steps to something big...



The last part. Now or never

Summing up, what is Erasmus?

"Erasmus is a program of international exchange of students abroad" That's what Google says. **But what do I think?**

For me, Erasmus is not only cool opportunities.

He changed me, it's true. I understood which one this world is cool, and the people around me wish me well.

I'm not anymore afraid to be alone with myself, now on the contrary I appreciate it. And the main thing - **all fears are only in my head.**

This is a good one the opportunity to take responsibility for your life and get an incredible experience. Here, my main advice coincides with the title: "**Now or Never!**"

And finally, **don't be afraid to walk through the corridors, maybe your story will start in one of them.**

TO BE CONTINUED...

WHY YOU SHOULD AVOID GOING ON ERASMUS

A guide to making the right choice

Around a year ago, I had the misfortune of being selected for an Erasmus in Krakow, Poland and, against my better judgement, I decided to go for it: little did I know it would have been the absolute worst experience of my life. In order for you not to repeat my mistakes, in this article I'll give you a few of the many reasons why you should keep away from the Erasmus experience. Believe me, it's for your own good.



When embarking on a life-changing experience such as Erasmus, you're exposing yourself to multiple risks, first of which, as implied, coming back a changed person. It is in fact common, while being on Erasmus, to discover things about yourself you never would have, if you simply decided to stay home, like reasonable people do. Living abroad on your own makes you realise you're capable of much more than you thought and this realisation often leads to a scary increase of self-confidence.

Take my friend Matilde for example: the first time I met her here in Krakow, she was really struggling with being independent; she was so used to being surrounded by people all the time, that it was weird for her to go somewhere on her own or to simply spend some time alone. A few days ago, four months into Erasmus, she was just telling me how she's come to really enjoy her own company, to the point that she no more needs people to do things with: if she wants to go to a café or a concert or pretty much anything else and no one's available, she'll just do it on her own without giving it a second thought. You can imagine my disappointment in hearing something like this: the thought of my good friend outside enjoying herself instead of at home waiting for someone to be available made me sick.

As if this was not bad enough, she went on telling me how this being independent thing also helped her connect with the people around her in a much healthier way: realising you don't have to rely on others for everything takes a lot of pressure off your relationships and lowers your expectations to an actually reachable point, or so she says. My friend is living proof of how Erasmus might induce you in terrible errors such as stepping out of your comfort zone: why would you ever give up something that has the word comfort in it?



Something else you should be aware of when considering going on Erasmus is its irreversible mind opening effects. Living in a multicultural environment can really unfold new worlds for you, it can show you there's hundreds ways of living

which make as much sense as yours, if not more. It makes you question whether you know as much about life as you think you do. It keeps you humble, because you realise there's so much outside of your bubble and you still have a lot of learning to do. Lame isn't it?

So, as it turns out, what you often hear about experiences abroad, that they 'widen your horizons', is not just some catchphrase people like to say to sound enlightened, it's actually a true thing. As pathetic as that sounds, it's inevitable. That's because, before experiencing life in another country, your perspective on the world is more or less limited, you're used to only looking at your own backyard and you assume that what you've always known to be normal or right, just is. By stepping outside national borders, you're zooming out on your life, having a chance to see yourself from afar; now that you have the "bigger picture" in front of you, it's easy to wonder about so many things you never questioned before.

And let me tell you, this way of thinking will lead you down a slippery slope to nothing less than ruin and damnation: one day you wake up and you're one of those people who call themselves 'citizens of the world'. The day after you're dreaming of life as an expat. And you know, one thing leads to another, so now you're the kind of person who spends their money on travelling rather than possessions: clearly there has been a mix up in your priorities.



At this point, you might think it couldn't possibly get any worse. Well, you've got another thing coming. I thought you should know that Erasmus also naturally

improves many of your skills, first of all language-wise.

I lost count of all the times I've heard that knowing English is vital nowadays, that it's the key to a bright future and blah blah blah. Honestly I don't understand what all the fuzz is about, after all it's only the most spoken language in the world, the language of international communication, of science, diplomacy, tourism and computers. Why bother learning it when you can just stick to your native language and live in a bubble? Movies are better dubbed anyways.

Your social skills are also a target. On Erasmus you'll always be surrounded by people. There's no way to escape them. So at some point, if you have any issues with socialising, you'll have no choice but to get over them. It will quickly come so natural to meet new people every day, have random conversations and hang out with complete strangers. You'll even become friends with that one person you really didn't expect to like, but that turns out to be a great fit. Erasmus friendships really are effortless, because everyone wants the same thing, which is simply to be together and have a good time. I know it doesn't sound very appealing, you'd probably wish for a life of solitude and silence, and I don't blame you. If you ask me, human interaction is overrated.

Last but not least, Erasmus is a good chance to get a little closer to being an adult. You'll have to face the snares of living alone, you'll be the only one responsible for your own survival. No one will buy toilet paper if you don't (can't count on your roommates, they're as lost in life as you are). No one will do the grocery shopping so, again, it has to be you -unless you fancy starving to death. No one will wash your clothes for you, so make yourself comfortable, the washing machine is the hardest code to crack. It's a lot of weight on your poor shoulders, but you do have a choice. You could also stay home and be mama's boy forever. Peter Pan once said "all children, except one, grow up". Think about it: you could be that one child. It's only fair to be forever young.





If I still haven't managed to convince you, I'll give you one last reason why Erasmus really is despicable. Erasmus represents one of the few times in your life where you can afford living with no big responsibilities, and who likes that right?

When you're on Erasmus no one expects much of you: your teachers, your parents, everyone knows you're having a once-in-a-lifetime experience, so you're kind of excused for everything. And believe me when I say, this can have disastrous consequences: you soon start waking up without a thought on your mind, all your energy goes into planning how to have the most fun and time goes by without you even noticing. You could even forget what day it is and that's all well and good, except it's not the summer holidays and you're not 10 years old. What kind of person are you?

From personal experience I can tell you that sometimes you feel like enjoying yourself so much can't be right. You start feeling guilty, wondering if you're doing something wrong, and the worst part is that you're not. The truth is, while you're on Erasmus there's really nothing else you're supposed to do if not having the time of your life. How can you look yourself in the mirror knowing that? You need to do some soul-searching, my friend.

So, the bottom line is, going on Erasmus equals auto sabotaging yourself. If, God forbid, you decide to stick to this destructive plan of yours, expect being under attack for five months straight. There will be stimuli coming at you from everywhere, multiple attempts on your life everyday (alarming amounts of enjoyment, extreme levels of peacefulness, a quite disturbing deal of gratitude to life etc). Your safety will never be guaranteed - never underestimate the dangers of great friendships, cool new experiences and self-growth.

With this being said, it's your choice to make. Just make the right one.

P.S: don't come crying to me when it all blows up in your face, I'd hate to say I told you so

by: Anna La Rocca

"I recommend 100% Krakow"

The university exchanges are coming to an end, for the occasion three French students give their feelings about their year spent in Krakow.

Why did you decide to go to Erasmus in Krakow ? Was that your first choice ?

Hugo : My engineering school (UTBM) offered destinations in most European countries.

Not mastering German or Spanish very well my choice quickly turned to the countries of Eastern Europe because they offer almost all courses in English.

I was also very interested in the Scandinavian countries, but the lack of available places and the very high cost of living quickly pushed me away.

Krakow was my second choice.

My number one wish being Bucharest, Romania. However 3 of my friends were accepted in Krakow, so I decided to join them, telling me that it would be easier to leave with a group of friends than alone.

"the best experience"

Angelique : I had little choice of Erasmus destination, and if I went to Italy or Spain I had to speak the language. This was not the case in Poland, where I went to take all my courses in English. So it wasn't really a choice, but it turned out to be the best experience.

Lou : I decided to go to Erasmus in Krakow because I didn't know Eastern Europe at all and I wanted to discover this culture. I had heard a lot of good things about this city and I was eager to discover it. I was also more interested in courses than in Western Europe. This city was my first choice in my Erasmus destinations to which I had applied.

What are your best addresses in Krakow ?

Hugo : Krakow has a very large concentration of bars where it is very nice to stop for a coffee/ a beer: the Klub re with its super nice terrace, the Busz, The Hala Forum is very nice in the evening when it starts to get hot, with a beautiful view along the Vistula. The Alchemia, the oldest bar in the city, also has a rather atypical nightclub on the lower floor. At the restaurant level, here are the best addresses I could try: the "tomasza" milkbar, do not trust the name, this restaurant does not offer milk. It is a typical type of restaurant/canteen in Poland. You will find very good Polish dishes (and not that) for a more than reasonable price. Georgian restaurant "Khachapuri", simply excellent. And for a brunch I recommend the Mo-ja café.



Concerning night life, here are some of the nightclubs that have allowed me to spend good evenings: the Bracka 4 is an Erasmus evening that takes place every Monday evening. The Klub studio is box in the AGH Campus, the largest and best box in the city in my opinion (than Thursday night). I also advise you to go and admire the sunset at the top of the Krakus Tumulus, which offers a beautiful view of the entire city. Krakow is lucky to have a lake that of Zakrówec. It is accessible on foot and very friendly to walk there. The "Wyspa na piaskach", also very nice, and above all has a well-appointed beach (but please note the entrance fee).

"There are a lot of good places in Krakow."

Lou : There are a lot of good places in Krakow. In terms of bars and nightspots, I would recommend Re, Eszeweria and Mleczarnia. For coffee I will say Metrum but also Tociekawa and Lisboa. And for restaurants the Mo-Ja for brunches, Mila for the milk bar and Gruzinskie Chaczapuri for the discovery of Georgian food and finally for a cool place until late at night to eat I will say Plac Nowy for eating kebabs or zapiekanki.

Angelique : The best addresses in Krakow are the Strefa Jazz Bar: every first Sunday of



the month, they organize an open mic where everyone comes with his guitar his piano or his voice to present his talent. What don't can just enjoy a good time around a beer listening to nice things ! I also recommend all the lakes around Krakow, beautiful in winter and summer. You can swim there and enjoy the sun, and they're perfectly clean. Finally, I recommend the green café Nero in the center of the old town. It looks like a living room and the music is very cool.

Do you recommend Krakow to future Erasmus students ?

Hugo : I can only recommend Krakow to future Erasmus students. The city is very warm and full of history. Night and day life are very pleasant. Indeed it has plenty of monument to visit for history lovers, but also many bars/ nightclubs very friendly for the most partygoers. I also find that the city has the advantages of a large city but without its disadvantages. There are many greenery, parks or lakes near the centre of Krakow. The city is not overcrowded, it is a good place to live. Almost everything is possible on foot and the public transit system is relatively well done. The cost of living being very low, you will be able to carry out many activities without breaking the bank.

Angelique : I recommend 100% Krakow to future students. Poland is a beautiful country, affordable, one can perform thousand and one activities.

Lou : I highly recommend this city for several reasons. First of all, it is a city that is not too big, in which you can quickly find your bearings, but which nevertheless contains a lot of cultural opportunities such as museums, historical monuments but also places or go out for both day and night. It is also a very green city which is very nice to walk or spend time outside. In addition, the fact that it was almost not destroyed during the war allowed it to keep many historical monuments which makes it very beautiful in winter as well as in summer. And finally, it is a very student city where it is very simple to meet quickly.