

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ACTION FOR ADAPTING CROSS-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

WELCOME GUIDE FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS



Erasmus+



I03: Practical guide for university exchange students

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CHAPTER 1

Planning the study abroad

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1.1. WHY STUDY ABROAD?

We live in an increasingly changing international world. The ability to step out of one's comfort zone, to get to know other realities, traditions, cultures and even languages are practically essential skills for today's working and even personal life. The academic exchange experience or moving to another country or even continent for a longer period (studies, work) is the perfect opportunity to develop these skills, see the world and broaden horizons. It is an experience whose advantages go beyond the merely academic.

This guide provides the student with useful tools for his or her international experience, considering not only the general aspects associated with mobility, but also issues related to the psychological preparation for cultural changes.

Clearly stating the objectives and expectations of a study experience in a foreign country can be very useful when choosing the country of destination, the host university, the best time to study, etc. In addition, the use of indicators to measure the achievement of objectives will help to get more out of the experience.

Furthermore, this guidebook presents stories of students who have already experienced moving to another country to study. Their opinions and shared information can be additional inspiration for those interested in studying abroad or even going for the short-term exchange, an internship abroad.

TIP: Establish your goals

Make a list with your main goals to study abroad and assess your priorities:

- ☐ Learning a language (possible indicator: getting a B2 in Spanish)
- ☐ Enjoying a country culture
- ☐ Studying at one of the best universities in the field of my studies
- ☐ Getting a degree from a specific university
- ☐ Thinking about a future job in another country
- ☐ Having an international experience for growing up and making new friends
- ☐ ...

Take this analysis into account for your decisions related to your plan of studying.

A chance for a better life

I decided to go abroad to study because of the deteriorating economic situation in my home country of Zimbabwe. I had been an English language learner all my life, so I wanted to go to an English-speaking country. But this was not possible due to the high cost of living. My next option was to move to Europe, but the question was: where in Europe? I decided to check the cost of living in European countries with accredited universities. My short-list included: Germany, Poland, Sweden and the Netherlands. Eventually, I decided to go to Poland, as the cost of living in this country appeared to be the most affordable.

Never knew about it!

I came to study in Poland in October 2019 from Africa. I had not heard or read much about Poland before which made me research more about it before making my decision. Generally, I searched for information about the economy, security and also about natural disasters. I gathered all the basic information that I needed and I was now expecting to be in Europe. It helped me a lot in preparation for the trip and making the final decision about the university.

Cultural immersion

My main motivation for doing an academic exchange was cultural immersion. I have always wanted to learn more about other cultures and societies, and there is no better way to do that than to live abroad for a while. In addition, I considered it an ideal way to enhance my English and social skills.

International experience and a strong CV

Ever since I was a child I have been interested in different cultures. When the opportunity presented itself to spend a semester abroad in Belgium, I took it with some encouragement from my parents. At first, I was very nervous about leaving my country and my friends behind. I felt that my life at home was well established. However, there were also many reasons that attracted me to study abroad. I was curious about students and educators from different places and about working in an international environment. I liked the vision of learning and collaborating in a foreign language, making new friends and hearing new stories. On the other hand, an academic experience abroad is always very useful to build a strong CV with the aim to continue studying at graduate level abroad.

Lived experience is your best inspiration

I'm Olivia from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. My hometown has a breakneck pace, so does my school. I often asked myself: does it have to be like this? Is it like this, this way everywhere? How will it be in other countries? How do other humans live in other cities? How do my colleagues study in other universities in other countries?

I am in a course called "Creative Communication Design" and I often thought how I can improve my creativity.

One day, I was in the Institute's bar and I saw a notice for mobility applications. I decided to see how it was, what the processes were, the possible destinations. I went! At the International Relations Office they introduced me to all the possibilities: institutions, countries, conditions... I spoke to my Dean and he encouraged me! He told me: "nobody can give what he doesn't have... lived experience is the best friend of artistic creation"!

Pursuing my interests

I have always wanted to study abroad as someone who loves technology and anything tech-related. The Western countries are better equipped with technology than my country, Zimbabwe. I have the advantage that I easily adapt to new places and cultures. I also have a flair for studying new languages. An important factor I had to consider when choosing a university abroad was the tuition for the programme I desired.

Advancing my studies

I had been meticulously planning to study abroad for my master's degree. It is not easy to choose the right country and the right university. I contacted an agency that connects with some universities in Europe and they gave me some brochures and catalogues to check universities that they partnered and cooperated with.

It is easier this way, you can immediately check universities and choose which one you prefer. Of course, I need to study, research and check online to know the necessary information, requirements for applications and registration processes.

1.2. WHAT'S THE BEST COUNTRY TO STUDY ABROAD?

Place the map in front of you or use the online map (e.g. the map from the website thetruesize.com, which reflects the actual size of a given country). If you are considering several countries, create a list for and against a given destination, which will help you choose the more desirable one. Take some time to read about the country you would like to go to avoid surprises and “cultural shock”. There are 195 countries in the world with very different cultures, lifestyles, customs and beliefs. Investing time in reading about the ones that mostly interest you will surely help you to avoid stress and disappointments.

The “right” country is the destination that will give you exactly what you’re looking for, be it longer course duration, research opportunities, jobs, or an easy transition to Permanent Residency. Choosing a destination that fits your needs perfectly will shape your career and life abroad. That’s why it is important to select the best country in the world for your education.

TIP: List of issues to be taken into consideration

When it comes to the issues to be considered, you can follow this list:

- ☐ Knowing the language of the destination country
- ☐ Availability of the language classes of local language
- ☐ Costs of living in specific country
- ☐ Weather conditions in the destination country
- ☐ Features of culture, customs, religion
- ☐ Perspectives of future employment
- ☐ Friends and relatives in the destination country

Deep university traditions allured me

Poland’s university traditions are among the oldest in Europe. In 1364, King Casimir the Great established the Cracow Academy, known today as Jagiellonian University. Poland’s higher education system is stunningly well developed and Poland is fourth in Europe in terms of the number of people studying at university. Polish universities offer a wide range of courses in English with fees considerably lower than in other EU countries. Foreigners studying in Poland can easily continue their education elsewhere in the European Union. That’s why I selected Poland as my destination country. Academic opportunities seemed immense!

After some further research I made initially unexpected choice

I would never have considered a country in Asia as an exchange destination. However, when the opportunity presented itself I decided not to reject it outright. Among the countries where I could do my exchange was Japan. When I started researching and investigating, I realised that it was a cosmopolitan, well-developed country with incredible cultural roots. It also came to my attention that there are some of the most powerful development cooperation services in the world, just the area in which I want to specialise in the future.

Many factors to consider

In my case the criteria for selecting a country were numerous. Very important factor I considered was the perspective of continuing my education after graduation in a particular country and potentially pursuing a professional career there for a few years. Another element was the reputation of the universities in my field of study, namely engineering. Obviously, I also wanted to practise a foreign language. And finally, I wanted to visit a place that seemed to be attractive to live in, experience its culture, sightsee, meet its people and to have a fun, memorable experience.

Appealing lifestyle and attractions to keep you occupied

The best country to study abroad is Spain if you ask me. If you feel attracted to the vision of daily siestas, sipping sangria and exploring never-ending tapas bars, Spain might be the place for you. There are plenty of unique markets and museums to keep you occupied in the capital, Madrid. Or you can explore architectural masterpieces like La Sagrada Familia and elements of Catalan culture in vibrant Barcelona. You can also catch a train to discover Basque culture in the north, with surfing in San Sebastián and hikers following the legendary Camino de Santiago. I was impressed by Spain!

A short list helped me to make a great choice

The hardest part was choosing the destination country for my experience abroad. All the countries seemed to have so much to offer, the list was so long and in academic terms a large part of them met my goals. Before preparing my application, I talked to some colleagues who told me about their experiences in different countries. It didn't fully satisfy me though, so I decided to make a list to help me reflect and answer my most pertinent question: Where do I want to live for 6 months? Hot/cold, sunny/cloudy, sea/mountains, nearby/distant, closed/open to the world, modern/historical, big/small. After answering all these questions - I chose Portugal! I am very happy here: I love my surf lessons, sunny weather and the great history of this little old country ("à beira mar plantado" as the Portuguese say). The food is extraordinary. I am in love with FADO (Portuguese traditional music) and I am already suffering from SAUDADE (a Portuguese word used to refer to how much they miss someone/something), two months before leaving Portugal.

Hard to decide

Choosing a country to study is a long and yet stressful process. There are a lot of factors to consider such as which university, the tuition fees, living conditions, cost of living, accommodations, security, entertainment, job opportunities, climate and so many to mention. I searched and decided to study in Lublin, Poland. It fits my criteria and offers the degree that I wanted to take. I am bound to a place that is new and putting myself back to basics. Poland, here I come.

1.3. CHECK CAREFULLY THE UNIVERSITY

Taking part in the student exchange is a new chapter of life and investment for years to come. Hosting university is a huge part of this experience. To choose the university wisely you can follow the universities rankings, ask for advice from your friends or family. Remember that there are also companies helping students to go through this process, especially if the destination country is on a different continent and requires a lot of additional formalities.

TIP: Consider different aspects

Students can choose between long- and short-term study programmes. Regardless of the length of the programme and its duration there a lot of things to be considered e.g.:

- ☐ Costs of the tuition fees
- ☐ Additional costs related to studies
- ☐ Ranking lists of the universities in the specific country
- ☐ World wide ranking lists
- ☐ Opinion about university or specific field of study
- ☐ Additional activities offered by the university
- ☐ Opinion of my colleagues, relatives who studied there
- ☐ Programmes and subjects available in my native language
- ☐ Support for foreign students like orientation weeks, welcome days, mentors, buddies
- ☐ Easy contact with the university staff
- ☐ Availability of the programmes linked with the labour market

TIP: Do your homework

Do not count solely on somebody else's opinion. This is your decision so do your homework! When selecting possible countries and universities for your academic exchange, it is always a good idea to contact the International Relations Office (IRO) or Admission Office and ask for information and counselling according to your preferences and goals.

In case of having more than one preferable option, search for further information about the potential hosting universities and assess their pros and cons. You can also ask the proper office for examples of previous learning agreements with a specific university in order to check courses and required language competences.

TIP: Dream, but be consistent with your experience

We all have our hopes and dreams, but some of us also constantly have new ideas. Students, for example, sometimes suddenly want to radically change their field of study. This is not necessarily a good idea. Firstly, it may not be possible for formal reasons. Secondly, students often do not do well in studies that are completely incompatible with their previous education.

My choice was simple!

How did I select the university? I asked friends who live in Poland and compared the offers before I finally made my decision. It was quite simple: WSEI in Lublin offers scholarship programmes, internships and does a lot in terms of international projects. A good organisation of studies and a practical education profile make it easier for students of WSEI to combine their studies, work and personal life. As a result, working people most often prefer to study at WSEI and non-working students do not hesitate to undertake a job while studying.

The satisfied expectations

Loyola University Chicago is one of the best universities in the United States (top 100). It is a Jesuit institution, so it matches my personal values. It is also a leading university in many areas of business administration such as supply chain management. I considered these factors while I was looking for the proper study programme for me.

I wanted a university environment to stimulate my creativity

Selecting a hosting university is a process that is also related to selecting a country. The selection process for me was heavily based on the location of the university, namely the city and country of its location. I selected a location that I always wanted to visit. In addition, I considered whether the university is located in a city that is a strong academic and technological hub, which would allow me to be exposed to new ideas not only within the university but also beyond. On the other hand, I selected a university that offered an academic programme in my area of study, namely engineering. On top of that, I considered the selection of courses available to foreign students, and the language in which these courses are available to participants. Finally, I took into account whether I would be able to pursue a professional engagement after graduating in the country and city where the university is located, which would allow me to develop a strong resume that would support my future career choices.

Considering projects and alliances

I come from Murcia and I am studying cinema! For me, it was very easy to choose the university.

I checked what were the priorities of the European Commission for higher education and main goals for this sector. When I chose the country (I wanted Portugal because it was close to home), I evaluated which universities were responding to the European Commission's goals. I realised that Lusophone University is the leader of a European University Alliance - FilmEU (the new EU project for European Higher Education) and I decided to apply! Now I am benefiting from all this university's innovation, development, pedagogies and internationalisation. I also have already done short term mobility programmes in Estonia and Ireland.

1.4.ADMISSION PROCESS

Sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's a battle with the stack of documents, but when the decision is made – don't get discouraged! Use the checklist to make sure that you have everything required and remember about the deadlines – put the final date in your calendar. Planning in advance means less stress and no negative surprises.

TIP: Don't forget to...

- Make sure you have the right contact details to the admission office or IRO
- Use official communication like email – written form is the safest way to make sure that both sides understand the process
- Solve any doubts in advance if there is something not clear
- Follow the admission procedures, this is a plan to follow not only for you but also from the admission office staff
- Remember that at the beginning you are the “stranger” and nobody knows you: always write your name in e-mail or on the files you deliver to the admission office. First impressions are important!
- Make a list of documents: What I need to send before the arrival? What do I have to deliver after the arrival? E.g.:
 - Identification document/Passport (pay attention to the validity period)
 - Study VISA (for non-EU citizens), even for a short period of just 3 months
 - Acceptance letter from the university/institute you are going to be studying at
 - Motivation letters, personal statements...
 - Reference of recommendation letters (They might be demanded by some universities. Make sure you contact good referees in advance)
- Check the admission fees, the currency and deadlines and how long the bank transfer can take

Sometimes it is not as easy as expected...

My personal experience of coming to study in Poland was not as smooth as I thought. I faced many obstacles along the way. The application process was longer than I expected. I have started working on documentation as soon as I got it to avoid the last minute pressure. I remember vividly submitting my application through my agent on the 14th of May 2019 and it took me more than 6 weeks to get an “offer letter” which I received on the 3rd of July 2019. When I got a communication with all requirements for admission with a list of all documents required, I immediately started looking for these documents, submitted them on time and made a payment for tuition fee. It took almost 3 weeks to get a response. In my case I had to obtain a visa to enter a new country, so it was a lot to deal with. But what is important - to have contact with the admission office due to the fact that the visa process or some other procedures may require some new documents in a short notice.

Prioritise letters of recommendation!

I remember the admission process for my exchange to Japan as tedious and, at times, complicated. That's why I have come to the conclusion that the most important thing in the admittance procedure is to organise your time well and not wait until the end of the deadlines to complete the formalities.

I had to write motivation letters, send a health certificate, apply for different housing options, fill out documents for the foreign ministry and request letters of recommendation from different teachers.

The most important thing is the latter, since professors are usually busy and do not have time to write and send a letter of recommendation overnight. I always recommend prioritising letters of recommendation in the organisation of the admission process.

Make sure everything is in order before you apply

Before applying, I identified the courses that I wished to take at the foreign university and made sure that I fulfilled all the prerequisites in terms of prior necessary knowledge and language skills. Then, I contacted professors at my department to ensure that the courses of my choice correspond to courses in my department's curriculum, which would enable me to collect ECTS points. Once I completed this process, I applied stating my choice of universities. The only thing left was to wait for a decision!

In my case it was easy

I am Tom and I come from the United States. I'm studying in Portugal because my girlfriend is Portuguese. I met her in the US, since she was there for her secondary education. As I was going back home to Lisbon, I decided to accompany her! My admission process was quick and clear. I was in Lisbon, I went to the University and the academic services helped me to prepare my application. I had to hand in my secondary school certificates -- certificates with The Hague Apostille. I also undertook a B2 level test of Portuguese, as well as a Maths exam. With the result of the Maths exam combined with my final average from Secondary School I was admitted!

After that, all that was missing was the residence permit because I entered Portugal with a tourist visa. As a result, the University issued a Declaration of Enrolment, which I presented to the authorities proving the reason for my stay.

Today, I have a residence permit and I am almost finishing my degree in Video Games. Soon I will apply for a Master's! In the meantime, I am close to my girlfriend and learning and apprehending Portuguese culture. Maybe I'll stay here ...who knows?

Scam free

Cooperating with an agency (recruitment services) is essential, specifically in communication and while processing paperwork for my university's entrance application. They advise you on what documents are needed and what actions must be taken when problems come up. It is stress free and prevents you from panicking or being scammed. The thing is, you have to pay for their services, but I don't regret it.

1.5. WHICH CLASSES TO TAKE?

One of the most important academic aspects of your exchange is choosing good classes to enrol in. To make a good selection you should take at least these aspects into account:

- Language of the classes and language of the exams
- Reputation of the lecturers
- Schedule of the lessons
- Learning Agreement. The selection of classes is always conditioned by the Learning Agreement, that is, it depends on whether or not the classes can be validated at your home university. Often there are already lists of subjects for different host universities that have already been validated in the past, this can help you
- Number of ECTS points
- Recognition of the programme at national or international level

TIP: Balance your courses selection

Course selection can provide opportunities for enriching educational experience as well as your academic resume. Some tips to consider:

- Select courses that you find interesting and help you enrich your scientific background.
- Select courses that are original, to which you would not necessarily find easy access to in other contexts and broaden your experiences.
- Ensure that you can get credit for the courses you select.

Some ideas to consider before choosing an educational path

Most students select courses based on their interests, educational, or career goals. You are encouraged to:

- Read course descriptions included in the class schedule to get a good idea about the content of the class. Doing so, can help you determine whether you will enjoy the topic being taught.
- Often, students use the general education lists as a guide, especially if earning an associate's degree or planning to transfer to a four-year institution are part of your educational goals.
- Counsellors can also review your guided self-placement, high school and college records, as a means to help identify some courses that would be beneficial for you to enrol in during your first semester of attendance. Students are encouraged to consider their unit load.

Pursuing my interests

As I am hooked on economics, I was delighted to discover that a macroeconomics course at my hosting university is taught by a professor with a spectacular academic profile. Moreover, his main line of interest turned out to be the use of scholastic processes in the dynamic analysis of the economy which is also one of my main scientific interests. I decided to take his classes and although they were quite demanding, I ended up gaining a great deal of knowledge.

Something old, something new...

My choice of courses was based on several factors. Firstly, I took into account which courses would be accepted by my faculty and for which courses I would receive ECTS credits. Secondly, I was guided by my personal academic interests and wanted to take courses that complemented my previous learning experience. In addition, I wanted to choose subjects that were new to me in order to initially familiarise myself with them, with the prospect of continuing them at a later stage of my studies. In the end, I chose courses in software and game design and development, as well as in business process management. Some of these topics are relevant from the perspective of my further study programme, while others are original and allow me to explore a new academic and professional area.

You are not limited by the subjects in your department only!

I am Maria from Spain and I study architecture at Lusófona University. In Spain the programs of Architecture have a high component of Civil Engineering, unlike Portugal, where the Programs are based on projects (now I'm also an expert in models).

The architecture programme did not include all the subjects I needed to get 60 ECTS - 12 ECTS were missing. I decided that I would do them when I returned to Spain. I told my dean about this. He smiled in response and then said "We have a Faculty of Engineering and you can do these subjects there". And so it happened!

I found out that day that all incoming students can, in consultation with their dean, choose subjects from other faculties to complete their study contract and even take additional subjects such as photography or surfing. My advice is: don't hesitate to talk to your dean!

CHAPTER 2

Preparing the Journey

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2.1. MENTALIZE YOURSELF

Leaping to study abroad is a unique opportunity that many do not have the privilege to pursue. “DO IT!” Part of the mental preparation is permitting yourself to have this experience in the first place.

You are about to embark on a once in a lifetime experience. You may feel a sense of excitement, a desire for change, for something new, but you may also be filled with doubts, insecurities, anxiety, and stress. This experience is probably very different from any other you have ever had. These are normal feelings; you should not be frightened of them.

In such circumstances, it becomes necessary to take care and maintain your wellbeing to make the most out of your study abroad experience. Being separated from familiar activities can be one of the most difficult things about studying abroad.

Keep in mind that you will be spending several months in a different country. This implies a different culture, people who think and act according to different social norms, potentially a different language and a situation where you are starting from scratch (you may only know a small group of students travelling to the same destination or you may even be going alone).

You should not see this as a threat but as an opportunity. An opportunity to adapt to a new culture, borrow and learn from it without losing sight of your personality and your home culture and country.

You must get in this mindset, “it is not going to be an easy task, but the advantages that you can extract from it are immeasurable.”

TIP: Identify barriers and address them

It is great to only think about the positive aspects of living abroad. However, in order for your experience to be the best, you should also think about possible barriers that might make your experience not so pleasant.

Some examples:

- ☐ Language barrier: Start learning the language before you go
- ☐ Complicated procedures in public offices: Research the country beforehand
- ☐ Living alone or with foreign people: Talk with former program participants to hear about their experiences
- ☐ Lack of integration activities: Explore the local culture

Was I ready?

Yes, I was prepared before travelling to the US. At all times I was aware that there were going to be cultural shocks, situations that would be confusing and aspects of society that would be new to me.

Fortunately, I did. Certainly the cultural and social differences were evident from the very first moment, although one is not able to imagine it until experiencing it. From food to interpersonal relationships, to a conception of reality and history are completely different from what a European might have. The previous mentalization, in that sense, was key.

2.2. ENTERING A FOREIGN COUNTRY

Once admission has been confirmed, the second important step is to know how to enter the country in question. It is not only the flight ticket and the identity document in your wallet that will allow you to enter your new place of stay.

First of all, look for up-to-date information on the website of your country's ministry of foreign affairs. Read it all carefully, there you will find information that you need to know and that you must comply with when crossing the border. You should know if you need to apply for a visa or residence card, what kind of documents you have to submit and deadlines to respect.

Before arriving in the host country, you should make sure you know about any legal requirements, such as getting a residence permit or a VAT number, if mandatory. Make sure you have a list of required documents to apply for any of the above, and that you know where to apply.

TIP: Time management is the clue

Take an agenda or calendar and organise all due dates and deadlines (insurances, accommodation, travel tickets and further logistics). Some of these bureaucratic procedures take time, so make sure to plan ahead.

- ☐ Make sure that you are aware of any formal documents that you need to have with you before arriving in the country
- ☐ Establish some contacts before arriving, which will help you adapt in the new environment
- ☐ Make some inquiries for accommodation, the cost of living, or other aspects of daily life before you arrive

Always detect and investigate about eligibility

“Upon arrival in Cyprus, I had a problem related to my stay. The fact is that before travelling, each candidate must independently check the possibility of entering the territory of a particular country. There are situations when citizens of some countries need to make special national visas. Not knowing this information, I had a big problem at passport control and was threatened with deportation. After lengthy persuasion and explanation, I was issued a visa, but only for 30 days. I thought that my traineeship was over and I was in a lot of stress, since the practice was supposed to be for 3 months.”

Help of an agent

The formalities related to coming to another country or even continent can be difficult, especially if you have never had to deal with this type of formalities. The Agent who assisted me was very helpful in preparing me for the visa process. I had all the required documents when I went for my visa appointment date in South Africa which took 2 weeks to get my visa. In most cases you only become certain about your journey when you get your visa. I was happy to have this kind of support. But always remember to have enough information about the person or organisation which is helping you.

Getting used to the country

Coming from Loyola University, I remember the day I landed in Chicago. Fortunately, I already had friends there who welcomed me very well, which made things much easier. However, the main challenge was to get used to a culture so different from mine, with different customs and values. In addition to the pace of life and the cold climate. The first weeks were oriented to get used to all that, to prepare myself for the classes and to meet new people. The help of my classmates and the international relations office was key in this regard.

Arriving in a new environment

My arrival in Belgium was smooth. There was no requirement for a visa or other document for my entrance. Other Erasmus+ students had arranged to pick me up from the airport and help me find accommodation. In addition, they helped me get oriented in the new academic environment, introduced me to the Erasmus+ student community and to professors, and helped me adapt into my project and academic work. In all, no problems or unexpected events.

2.3. FINDING AN ACCOMMODATION

Finding accommodation in a foreign country can be quite a challenge, so don't put it off until later. While filling in any formal documents regarding your studies you have to have the address of stay in the new country.

Try to find someone who has already been in this place. For this you can use the thematic groups on the internet and social media. Remember about online safety, check the websites you use carefully and try to find information about tenants. On the market you can find agencies that check places before signing a contract, it is worth using them especially if you are going to a large city. Agencies can also be helpful when looking for accommodation. Ask the university staff for the recommendations or the contact details of the dormitory, if available. Some universities offer their own dorms, which tend to be closer to the University. Make sure you consider that option if it is available.

Remember about the formalities; if you can sign the agreement of renting the flat in advance ask for it. If you will be asked to pay the fee in advance, take with you the confirmation of payment.

TIP: What kind of accommodation do you need?

This will be your new place for probably longer period, so take a while to ask yourself what kind of accommodation you would need:

- ☐ Do I need my own room or flat?
- ☐ Is the shared bedroom in the student's dormitory suitable for me?
- ☐ Is the location important for you: quiet suburb or noisy city centre?
- ☐ Do I need a place close to the university to avoid traffic and use public transport?

Multiple choices

Tokyo is a huge city and the residency options were very disparate when I started the application process. It was clear to me that I wanted a student residence, but I didn't know which of the options I was being offered.

Finally, I organised in an Excel sheet the different options and ranked them according to various criteria such as price, distance from campus, whether Japanese or not, shared bathrooms or not, or the different dining options. I weighted each of those characteristics and got my result. In the end I also applied some of my gut feeling and managed to find the perfect housing option.

A place to call 'home'

I had to look for accommodation which is very close to the university and this was quite important to me because I did not want to waste most of my time travelling to and from university. Safe and secure student accommodation is a must so that you can live in peace and enjoy your life. I also looked at onsite amenities like furniture, kitchen equipment, Wi-Fi/internet, and more are usually asked by many students as they want a hassle-free stay.

I would also not want to pay any hidden charges over and above the rent, I was looking for accommodations which have all utility bills included in the rent with no hidden charges.

2.4. HEALTH INSURANCE

When you have overcome all administrative processes related to the admission process as well as visas, place to stay, ... sometimes you think – all is done! I need a ticket and I'm ready to go! However, there are other important questions you must address concerning health insurance:

- ☐ Where to go if I get a toothache?
- ☐ I need specific medicines and I must buy it every month? How will I take care of that?
- ☐ Where should I go when I get ill?
- ☐ Well... Do I know anything about the health system of the country I'm going to?

It seems like another homework assignment, but it's about your health and safety. You have to know these things in advance!

Medical treatment in many countries is not free. Without sufficient health insurance, you run the risk of facing huge bills if you become ill or unwell. Figuring out the perfect insurance plan before you go is essential. Health insurance saves you from some unnecessary financial stress and struggle.

Most study abroad programs will require you to participate in a student health insurance program or in a health benefit plan while you are abroad. But travelling to a foreign country can also pose unexpected challenges.

TIP: Research about the health system

Before you arrive in the country where you will be studying, do some research on that country's healthcare system and the benefits for international students. Make sure you:

- ☐ Know how to get health Insurance for International Students
- ☐ Understand what health insurance for an international student typically covers
- ☐ Know where to go if you have a health problem
- ☐ Understand where and how you can take the necessary medication
- ☐ Determine whether your host university has a student health centre

Illness

I arrived in Poland in October 2019 from Zimbabwe. I started to feel very weak and sweaty, I was catching a cold and did not have any idea where to get medical attention. I had a problem with my medical insurance, because it is a foreign based insurance and it was not easy accessing medical assistance. However, the Polish health system is extremely remarkable. First, they assist you and later require clearance for the insurance. It was also very difficult to communicate because it was my first week. Fortunately, Polish people are patient enough to wait while translating from English to Polish on the phone. I was treated at a local medical facility and got medication. Quickly I rushed to the pharmacies because it was getting late, with great surprise I found that pharmacies open for longer hours. Having health insurance for the country in which you are travelling to will help avoid inconveniences.

Medical exam

My experience with health insurance and my exchanges has been quite asymmetrical depending on the country I was travelling to. When I was in Rome everything was much simpler. Belonging to the European Union, it was enough to apply for the European Health Card and go to the health system as if I were in Spain. For the United States I had to go through more formalities. I bought with my companions who were also travelling to Chicago a fairly inexpensive health insurance plan that covered almost everything. In the admission process for my exchange to Japan, I remember that they asked me for an exhaustive medical report for which I had to go to my doctor plenty of times for medical exams.

2.5. CURRENCY

Imagine yourself landing in the destination country, after a few hours in a bus, train or plane. You have already drunk your water, eaten the food which you had taken with you. What's the problem? I'll go and buy something to eat! You enter the supermarket or restaurant and what can happen there?

- ☐ The place to not take cards – cash only!
- ☐ Cash? Well. What is the currency here?
- ☐ Talk to your bank, some financial institutions, some banks make it easy to withdraw money, make transfers, etc., especially in currency areas like the euro area
- ☐ Exchange office? Where can I find it?
- ☐ Payment by card – if my card will be accepted in this country?

You arrive in a foreign country and one of the challenges you face is how and where to exchange money. Some countries only work with their currencies so there is a possibility that you cannot buy anything if you have not exchanged money.

Make sure that you are prepared. Check the information about the currency, how to exchange the money, and what kind of payments, what kind of cards are the most popular in the foreign country. Especially if you travel on your own, there will be nobody to support you there.

TIP: Check how to access your money

Before the adventure actually begins in the new country, check this:

- ☐ Will the system accept my card type?
- ☐ Will I be able to receive money on my card?
- ☐ Will I be able to get a card at a bank?
- ☐ Where can I exchange money?
- ☐ Which currency is used in a foreign country and what is its value in relation to the currency in your own country?

Adapting to local currency

When I arrived in Poland it was very easy to adapt to the Polish currency (zlotys). It was not difficult to exchange United States dollars (USD) to Polish zlotys because there are exchange bureaus within the country. It was a bit difficult to name the small Polish coins (grosz) because of language barriers though it was also interesting to learn the language. Poland is by far the most cost-adaptable country in Europe because the currency can buy more as compared to other European countries. This might be because Poland is an agriculturally based country and it produces most of its food. With the Polish currency I had not much difficulty in using and understanding the denomination.

Our common currency

Given the use of the Euro in a broad range of European countries, I faced no difficulties with the currency. The Euro is in effect in both my country of origin, namely Greece, and my country of study, namely Belgium. The only thing that I needed to adapt to is the difference in the cost of living. To address this, I needed to effectively manage my budget throughout my stay in the new country. Furthermore, the broad use of credit cards allowed me to minimise my need for cash in all transactions, from the supermarket to a café or public transport.

Not so easy to understand the currency

Before arriving in the Republic of North Macedonia, I did research on their currency. I must admit it was a bit difficult to understand their currency denar but when I arrived it was easy because there are exchange offices almost everywhere, and also currencies can be exchanged in banks. The Republic of North Macedonia is not an expensive country to live or study and the prices are quite affordable unlike some European countries.

As a foreign student, I found great help from the locals and the university students to learn the values of prices and currency.

Also, there is no issue to sending or receiving money on your card because the banks are equipped with modern ATMs that work 24 hours a day and are located all over the city.

2.6. TIME TO GO! - PACKING DILEMMAS

There is not a single unified set of tips! This part you need to develop on your own! Some people prepare section by section for weeks while others need just one hour to pack all what they need.

The following list of categories can help you to organize your package:

- ☐ Documents and money/cards
- ☐ Electronic devices
- ☐ Clothes – remember to check the weather in the destination country!
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Food – check what you can and cannot take with you while crossing the border
- ☐ Maps, locations, contact details

There are many useful videos on YouTube with tips on how to pack wisely, such as making sure all your documents are in an accessible and safe place, packing inside a bag or even checking the weight of your suitcase to avoid extra fees at the airport.

TIP: Don't forget to...

- ☐ Identification document/Passport with you (pay attention to the validity period)
- ☐ For non-EU citizen, study VISA ready, even if for a small period of just 3 months
- ☐ Acceptance letter from the University / Institute you are going to be studying at
- ☐ A place to stay for the first few days in case you do not have housing yet
- ☐ Make sure you have the official confirmation of the acceptance before you will start packing!
- ☐ Make sure you have the right contact to the admission office
- ☐ Use official communication like email – written form is the safest way to make sure that both sides understand the process
- ☐ Follow the rules of the admission procedures, this is a plan to follow not only for you but also from the admission office staff
- ☐ Remember that at the beginning you are the “stranger” and nobody knows you: always add your name in communication or files identification. Good first impression is a good start!
- ☐ Check for motivation letters, personal statements, ...
- ☐ Some universities might ask for reference or recommendation letters; make sure you contact good referees in advance

What am I going to carry?

Moving to a new country as a student is not easy. It is very difficult to think of what to carry. I decided to make a packing list. The list involved my school certificates, warm clothes, study material and some home-made products which will not interfere with immigration regulations. I was fortunate that I had booked a flight that allowed me to carry bags weighing not more than 38kgs. I then carried a few bags with the idea to buy clothing in Poland. Most of the items seemed relatively cheaper in Poland so I just thought to myself why give myself a burden to Carry a lot of things when I might need to buy in Poland because of the different weather which requires special clothes. Poland was a whole new environment and experience, but I got all my things in two bags ready to depart.

Too much or too little

I always have the same kind of problems when it comes to packing my bags for academic exchanges. I never know when it is too much and when it is too little. I usually always have to leave things behind because of airline weight restrictions. For example, I always want to bring my acoustic guitar, but it is impossible.

I have also had complications choosing the right clothes for the type of weather in the destination country. When I have had to move to countries with a colder climate, I try to bring warm underwear and boots suitable for snow, but I have always had to buy extra upon arrival because sometimes it is not enough.

2.7. AT THE AIRPORT

The most important thing for any type of traveller is – all the most essential things should be easy to reach and find! Remember that you will have to pass security control so select your clothes wisely to avoid stress or wasting of the time. Make sure that you are prepared for the following scenarios:

- ☐ Security guard will ask you about the confirmation from the university
- ☐ Security guard will ask you about the place of stay
- ☐ Security guard would like to call the university to confirm your arrival – do you have the contact details of the admission office?
- ☐ Maybe you will have to have the invitation letter from the university

The rules of travelling to the European Union or even Schengen Zone can be different from in your country. Read about it in advance!

Make sure that you have all documents printed with you; it will speed up any control and make your travel easier. Remember that you can meet people who do not speak in the same language as you, spelling your name or any other details can be difficult for them. Therefore, it will be easier to show them documents than share your private mobile to check the details.

In case you will get lost, the security control will take longer....

TIP: Do not be late

It is better to have some time more, in case of any delay! Here are some useful tips at the airport:

- ☐ Remember that liquid contents (bottles of water, beverages, shampoos, etc.) are prohibited at the security control. Nevertheless, you can purchase products with liquid contents inside the airport once you surpass the control zone.
- ☐ Make sure you do the online check in if your airline allows it.

Always have hard copies

I had a terrible experience in South Africa the very day I was supposed to depart for Poland. My flight was departing in the evening around 18:00. I had decided to travel from Zimbabwe to South Africa by road, so that I could do my extra shopping. I was in South Africa by 09:00 with the hope of carrying out my shopping then resting afterwards whilst I will be waiting for my check in time.

The well-planned day quickly turned sour, I got robbed in South Africa, lost all cash and my cell phone. Prior to the robbery incident I had printed my air ticket and other documents and converted these documents into hard copies and this really helped me. I then learnt a lesson that it is always best to do hard copies of all your important documents whenever you are travelling.

After losing my phone, I had no access to my documents on the phone and I had to use the hard copies. The hard copies of essential documents really saved my life and I used them to get contact details of my agent who was to pick me up at the Chopin airport in Warsaw upon my arrival the next day in Poland. I never enjoyed my first longest flight as I was stressed. I was well received at the airport and my agent was already at the airport by the time I landed. After being robbed and losing my mobile, it was a relief when I saw a friendly face at the airport. Since I had lost communication, I was worried whether my agent was going to be by the airport in time. I was wondering the whole journey since I had only communicated whilst I was in South Africa and him being there on time brought a sigh of relief. It is after my personal experience that I realised it is important to have someone to come and pick you up at the airport if you are new.

Lesson learned

My first trip to Europe was the lifetime experience. I knew that Europe is colder than Africa, but it was not so obvious to me to check the weather conditions more precisely, especially just before the trip. And my ignorance led me to getting off the plane in autumn in Poland in summer clothes in rainy weather!

Good communication

My friend and I arrived at the airport in the Republic of North Macedonia - Skopje in the late hours of the night. We were tired but also a little emotional because we left our country, and the fear of the unknown made us even more scared. However, at the airport, which was not very big, we were greeted by friendly people who helped us to manage and pass the control quickly and easily.

Young employees, most of them spoke English and we easily understood the procedures we had to go through before leaving the airport. Since we had to wait for our transport to the university, we decided to sit in the cafe at the airport where we were greeted by a nice and pleasant lady.

Our fear has already subsided because we realised that the people here are really nice and friendly and always ready to help.

2.8. TRANSPORT OPTIONS

It is always a good idea to check the transport possibilities for the airport to your final destination in advance. In big airports, for sure there are many possibilities, while in smaller ones the situation can be different. Make sure that you have links to the train, bus or public transport schedules and you know which is the latest travel option in case of any delay. It is also wise to check the taxi corporations and read opinions on the Internet, especially about the communication in English. Some airlines have special packs for transport to and from the airport, you may also want to check for those, especially if you are travelling with other students you know.

Write down all important addresses and telephone numbers, in case you need any details, you will not have to look for it on the Internet.

Remember to be prepared to the following scenarios:

- ☐ How will I get there if my plane is late?
- ☐ How does the local transport work?
- ☐ How will I explain to the taxi driver where I would like to go?

Airport name tag

When I got outside the airport one of the students from my university was waiting for me with a sign written my name and it was easy to identify her though I had her phone number, but I guess it was just a way to make the event memorable. There is Wi-Fi at the airport where you are able to communicate with anyone through WhatsApp. I guess long back it used to be very difficult. Something came to my mind that I needed bus fare and I was very hungry and needed some food, but I had no Polish currency. We looked for a forex exchange point so that I could exchange money for food and transport, but fortunately my school mate offered to help me with the money. We then got onto a bus straight to the train station heading to Lublin.

Well arrangement of transport

When I got outside the airport one of the students from my university was waiting for me with a sign written my name and it was easy to identify her though I had her phone number, but I guess it was just a way to make the event memorable. There is Wi-Fi at the airport

2.9. REACHING THE NEW PLACE OF STAY

You did it! Getting off the bus/taxi and you almost have a new place to live. If you decide to live in the student's dormitory for sure there will be somebody at the reception to welcome you. In case you selected the private accommodation – make sure to inform your landlord in advance about the hour of your arrival to make sure that you will not spend extra time waiting for somebody to open the door for you. If you are staying in the university's own residence hall, the process should be rather simple. Go to an information desk or to the University reception to ask where your residence is located. Once there, they will usually show you to your room and give you a key and may also give you an ID card. Keep a close eye on them, because if you lose them you can get into trouble, and they are usually quite expensive to replace.

If you were not able to sign the agreement with your landlord in advance, now it's the time to take care of it.

- ❑ You are a newcomer, so be careful! Ask the owner about his ID and proof of ownership of the apartment
- ❑ Make sure that the agreement is in the language you know and, if there are any doubts, ask before signing
- ❑ Make sure that you will have keys to your room and all your stuff will be safe there.
- ❑ Check the equipment while the landlord is there with you. If something doesn't work, discuss this issue immediately
- ❑ Make sure that you understand the payment rules. Check if all bills are included in your final fee. If not, make sure you understand the rules for additional payments
- ❑ Make sure you keep your landlord's contact (phone number, email, or similar) so you can reach out to him in case anything happens

Getting accommodation

The arrival at the residence in Rome was also very quiet. As soon as we arrived at the University, we had our picture taken and were given our IDs and room key. On the first day we had floor meetings where they explained to us how the facilities work, the quiet hours and other issues relevant to our stay.

Finding accommodation online

I came to Lublin with my colleague for an internship. Before our trip, I had booked the room (double room in a shared flat) via Facebook, by answering to the announcement. The lady was nice, speaking English, sending the photos of the room and replying very fast to any questions we had. She asked us to pay 2 months' rent in advance, which we did, as everything was going very well. However, when we came it turned out that.... the room was smaller than in the description and there was an extra person living in the apartment. Besides, the nice lady from Facebook disappeared and there was another person taking care of the flat but not speaking English! The worst thing was that she came unannounced to "control" what was going on in the apartment. The atmosphere was not good, so we decided to change the flat with the 1st month going to end, but the owner of the apartment refused to give us back the money, which we paid in advance and paid for the 3rd one! She told us that she would not find anybody to rent the room, so we have to pay for it! Luckily, we shared this problem with the University staff and they helped us to change the apartment and not to lose any money.

Reaching my accommodation

Other Erasmus+ students helped me select accommodation and get settled. I had a room in a house. Other Erasmus+ students stayed in other rooms of the house. This was good because immediately I had a small community to connect to and make friends. The students that stayed in the same house as me broadened my network of contacts and helped me explore my new environment, including the academic life and the city around me. I used public transport to commute between my place of stay and the university. Public transport was very effective and allowed me freedom in moving around the city. I had little contact with the owner of the house. My experience with her was that she was strict and formal.

2.10. GET TO KNOW THE CITY

When you finally reach the apartment or the dormitory and organise your living space you should plan how to get to the University or where is the nearest supermarket, pharmacy, gym, cinema, etc..... YES! I need a city map. While some people use the mobile phone to find the spot they need, others need the map to walk around and get to know the city. If possible, come a few days before the University classes will start and spend some time getting to know your new place.

Visit the Tourist Information Office, for sure you will find the city maps there, recommendations of the places to visit and friendly people who know a lot!

You may also want to remember the names of the street of the place where you will stay and of the University, in case you don't have access to a map and you are somewhere you don't know.

TIP: Make sure you...

- ☐ Get a city map
- ☐ Know which are the best transportation to my street
- ☐ Know which supermarkets have the best prices
- ☐ Know where the health centre and the hospital are in my area
- ☐ Know where the nearest pharmacy is
- ☐ Know where the university is and what the best transportation to get there is
- ☐ Know the location of the museums I want to visit
- ☐ Know how to get to the best cafes and bars

Helping friends

The Agent had secured a nice apartment for me and I enjoyed my stay. The day after I had arrived my friends, I was sharing accommodation with those who had arrived in Poland before me and assisted me with moving around the Lublin city. Moving around the city at first was a nightmare and I never thought I was going to master how the transport system works, it was worse when I had to connect. I remember getting lost more than once when I first tried to move around alone but within a few days I had adjusted and begun to understand the transport system. I was impressed by the way they manage time and being efficient. The transport model system is different from Africa.

Around The City

One of my favourite activities during my stay in Rome was taking long walks around the city with my friend María. We would usually leave after breakfast, take the bus, get off near Piazza Navona and stroll around until lunchtime. We used to go looking for the less frequented corners of the city, the most hidden and less touristic ones.

We visited churches and usually made a stop at the Vatican and sometimes even saw the Pope at Angelus time. We also took the opportunity to eat and visit different restaurants in the city. It is certainly something unforgettable that marked my exchange experience.

Did a research before I travelled

Before arriving in Skopje, I did a little research on the country I come to, the culture, the sights and the interesting things that can be done and seen in Skopje. Upon arrival and accommodation, I used the first few days to explore the area where I am staying and the directions on how to get to university. Fortunately, the map worked well for me and I was able to do very well. The locals were friendly to show me the way or the direction I wanted to get. Skopje is the largest and capital city of the Republic of North Macedonia and offers many sights to explore.

There is an old town that has retained its authenticity, as well as a new modern part that abounds in many monuments from the history of the Republic of North Macedonia. Skopje is an ethnically diverse city, and its urban sociology primarily depends on ethnic and religious belonging. As the capital and largest city of North Macedonia, Skopje has many major sporting facilities. Skopje is a city that is always in motion, and there is no lack of nightlife, especially among young people.

2.11. LOCAL LANGUAGE

Learning a new language is one of the benefits of studying abroad because you immerse yourself in it. In school, we meet new people at the grocery store so it is useful to learn a few words before arriving in the country. No matter how difficult the local language is – it is worth knowing at least the basic words. In case you will meet the shop assistant who does not speak English or your language or you would like to make a good impression, you should prepare your “survival kit” and learn the basics of the local language.

Part of studying abroad is entering the unknown, overcoming differences and dealing with challenges. Learning a new language is one of those challenges, and every new language you learn makes you a more experienced person.

TIP: Find your way to learn a language

- ❑ Make research whether there are language classes for international students at the faculty. For sure you can look for language classes at the University or local NGOs
- ❑ Ask for help from college friends to master the language more easily
- ❑ Meeting local students and people is probably the best way to practice
- ❑ Learn a few words in the language of the host country. You can check for the Duolingo app. It can help you learn some basic language for everyday activities

I speak a little Polish (“MOWIE TROCHE PO POSKU”)

My major worry and concern was about the language. The issue of language became a hindrance for some time, whenever you want to communicate. The introduction of Polish lessons at the university was really helpful as it gave me some basic understanding of the language and more confidence when communicating although in most cases I still use the Google translator for communication.

Tranquil interaction

Fortunately, I already had a good level of English before I started my exchange in Chicago. However, living there not only made me strive to speak it on a daily basis, but also made me learn a lot of terms and expressions that I would have never learned if I had not done my exchange there.

Many of them I learned from my American friends, but others from professors and fellow students in the various student organisations I attended.

A multilingual environment

There are two formal languages in Belgium, the country in which I spent my Erasmus+ days, French and Flemish. I speak no Flemish. At the time of my Erasmus+ experience I spoke only limited French. However, my stay in Belgium provided me with an excellent opportunity to enrich my knowledge in French by speaking the language in its natural environment in everyday activities. Given the importance of being able to communicate in foreign languages in professional contexts, this was a very positive side effect of my engineering studies. On the other hand, students and teachers at the university spoke English, and this allowed smooth communication. I particularly enjoyed working and communicating in a language other than my native. It allowed me to enrich my English language skills, which up until then I had not used in a professional environment.

Snag linguistic

The official language in the Republic of North Macedonia is Macedonian. Macedonian language is very difficult to learn because it is completely different from English, and also people in The Republic of North Macedonia write in Cyrillic so it's very difficult to read it. I tried to learn a few words before arriving in the country. The friends I met at university helped me understand the Macedonian language, words and their meaning and encouraged me to continue and speak Macedonian. Although it was a big challenge, now I can write and read in Cyrillic and I can understand the inscriptions and texts more easily.

CHAPTER 3

Landing at your Host University

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3.1. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' OFFICE / ADMISSION OFFICE

Your best ally on the day of arrival and during most of the exchange will probably be the international relations office. They are in charge of managing all the logistics of the incoming students and making sure that their experience is the best possible. While getting ready for the first visit at the universities check the website to make sure that you know where to go. Do you know the room number or the names of the employees responsible for the international office? If there is no proper information on the website – for sure you will find the contact details of the people contacting you via email. Write it all down in case you have to explain your situation.

Nowadays most universities offer virtual visits! This is also a great option. Take a little time to discover the space that is welcoming you. Ask questions when you have doubts. The staff is there to help you!

Talk to other colleagues who have already been there. Look for social networks of former exchange students, get informed about their shared experiences and reach out.

Find out in advance about the opening hours of the International Office!

Remember to introduce yourself ☐

TIP: Remember to...

- ☐ Make sure that you have with you all documents requested by the admission office needed after your arrival.
- ☐ Make sure that you have your ID with you.
- ☐ Take ID photos with you; it is always needed for a student's ID card.
- ☐ Prepare yourself as well: make a list of questions you would like to ask! You can be a little bit nervous, so this will help you not to forget what you need.
- ☐ Check the availability of orientation and cultural events supporting the integration of new students into academic and social life in new places.
- ☐ Ask about the international students communities, volunteer works, extracurricular activities or students' organizations. Maybe you will find interesting ideas how to spend free time and meet new people!

I got a lot of useful information

My first day at university was very interesting. I got to school by bus, using an app called “jakdojade”, which I downloaded with the help of my agent who helped me settle in Poland. I arrived at the university at eight in the morning. I then went to the office for English-speaking students. There, I was introduced to the staff and given information on who to contact if I needed anything. I was also given toll-free emergency numbers. I was then introduced to the university's guidelines and rules. I also took part in a tour of the university. Unfortunately, a lot of the signage at the uni is written in Polish, but we were told what it meant.

Do a checklist!

The first thing I did when I arrived at the university on the first day was to register. The process didn't take long, and after registration I was given my timetable and shown how to access the online platform for students. Everything went well as I made a checklist and planned all my questions so that all my concerns could be addressed. The deanery staff seemed very friendly but also busy so my list was a good support.

Nicely treated

Although I did not have to visit the International Relations Office at my host university very often, whenever I did they were very helpful. My contact with the office was mainly in the first few days after my arrival and before I returned to Spain. On the first day, I remember that they told us about the key places on campus and invited us to a welcome week where we got to know not only the campus but also Chicago as a whole.

Significant contribution to a smooth adaptation

The Erasmus+ Office at the university was very friendly and well organized. They welcomed students, offered an orientation day, and helped with practical everyday aspects, such as finding accommodation, information about the health system in Greece in case of an emergency, and providing information on the town and extracurricular activities, such as culture, sports, excursions, history, and others. They significantly contributed to a smooth adaptation.

Caution induction

My first day at the university was very interesting. I got up early that morning due to an improper sleep during the previous night. It was due to the anxiety of starting fresh with my new life. I was determined to be the best in whatever it is that I do, so that I would have something to be proud of in the pages of my life. I was hoping that time would move a lot faster because I wanted to find out about what was going to happen next. But it is a common fact that if we are anxiously waiting for something, time would seem to crawl a lot slower. When it was finally the time to head back to the campus, I hoped for everything to go on smoothly, just as I expected.

Saying 'no' is impossible

I came from East Timor to do my PhD in Education Sciences. I've been exchanging a lot of emails with the International Office - always in Portuguese (the official language of East Timor). When I arrived, on my first guided tour of the campus, I was introduced to the services, the buildings, the classrooms and the common spaces. I got the campus map and I was explained the numbering of the rooms.

At the end of my visit in IRO the staff member, my guide, asked if I was comfortable with the information. I said yes, but at the same time shook my head, like we do in our country.... but I didn't know that in Europe my "yes" is "no" ! There are 15 national languages in East Timor, none of them has the word "no" -- in Ximenes' culture saying "no" is an impossibility. Now I know that words are important, but our gestures and body language are also important!

Difficult registration process

The registration process was not as smooth as I expected, I have to get our legalized documents translated into Polish. I was surprised, all of my documents were in English, thinking it would not be a problem. I was wrong, however, the admission office has given me time to find somebody to translate the documents which was comforting but disappointing. I wished that somebody from the university could guide us through this kind of process. It was not just me, but a group of students from Zimbabwe. Their faces couldn't be painted, complaining and wondering what to do. While we have been trying to explain our concerns and disappointment one of the university staff shared with us contact details of different services in the city, including sworn translators. It helped a lot!

3.2. FIRST DAYS IN THE CAMPUS

The first challenge to overcome is getting to know the university campus. Check the university website looking for “virtual walk”, map of the university or videos presenting places for newcomers. Do not be afraid to ask the university staff if you cannot find any information on the Internet. Maybe you will find friendly people there or flat mates from the same university who will explain to you how to reach specific places. Nevertheless, it will take time to get to know the place.

Your first few days on campus will probably include freshmen orientation and welcome events. Though some of these may sound a little boring, go to all of them! Even if they are optional, you will learn things that you may find to be valuable. If not, these are the days and the experiences that everyone goes through, and they bond the class for the next years. Don't miss out; you'll regret it later on.

Try to plan what you will need in the following days, but don't stress too much if any unforeseeable obstacles come about. It will all be easier once you find your people and places and start relying on a community.

Meet as many people as you can. Everyone is new, so walk up to someone and introduce yourself! Get to know your roommate and everyone on your floor, too. This is not the time to be shy. Sit down with someone new in the dining hall, join someone sitting alone in one of your classes, or stop and say hello to someone you recognize from orientation. They could become your best friend; you never know!

TIP: Seek answers to the "where"

- ☐ Where to get the student's ID card?
- ☐ Where is my Dean's Office?
- ☐ Where is the library situated?
- ☐ Where can I buy something to eat?
- ☐ Where is the nearest bank or a cash point?
- ☐ Where can I find information about the Students' Union?
- ☐ Where can I find information about student organizations?
- ☐ Where can I find information about social networks for mobility students?
- ☐ Where are leisure facilities (gym, pubs or bars, swimming pool, etc.)?
- ☐ Where can I get a public transport card?
- ☐ Where can I find useful information like: bus diagrams and schedules; metro diagrams and schedules; train diagrams and schedules; offers including pricing and types of the tickets...

A job well done

On my first day on the university campus I went on a tour of the school. I was shown around the buildings and the emergency exits, as well as walked through most of the university staff offices, including the project office for Erasmus. I also noticed a lot of food and drink stalls around the school. It is very cold in Poland so a place where you can buy yourself a coffee will certainly come in handy more than once. I got to know where sports facilities for indoor games such as volleyball and basketball are. We were also introduced to the public transport system. Finally, I received a small booklet called "your way around the school" with a map of the school. This trip made my life easier from day one and I would like to commend the university for a job well done.

Don't miss out on orientation days!

I came two days after the semester had started so I missed orientation days. Because of that during the first months it was a struggle to move around the university. To make things worse I didn't have any colleagues here, so I was alone during the first days. The administration office was helpful in giving me necessary information I needed as a new student but I had to ask them and my peer students. My advice for new students – be on time for orientation days, it will make your student life easier.

Immense campus

The day I arrived at the Chicago campus I couldn't believe it. It seemed huge to me. My university in Spain was not even a tenth of that campus. I must admit that at the beginning it was a little difficult for me to find my way around and get from one place to another, however, in just a week I was able to move around the campus and the city with more agility. On the first day I remember that we went to buy the basics for the first few days and to pick up the dorm supplies. Fortunately, I had friends who helped me at all times.

A place of wonders

The first days in the new campus were wonderful. Everything was new and exciting. I met a lot of students, both Erasmus+ and local, including graduate and PhD. I was exposed to very interesting projects, a lot of which were very different from my so far academic experiences. The challenge was to communicate with administration and local students if they couldn't speak English. I felt helpless not understanding anything in the local language. If I could do things all over again - I would learn some basic vocabulary before the arrival.

3.3. GETTING TO KNOW THE UNIVERSITY

Heading to university for the first time can be a little overwhelming. There are so many things to do, events to go to, and people to meet. Take your time and enjoy every second, but don't forget about your obligations.

If you have survived your first days at university and know the basic places, you will need to make sure you also know the key people at the university. If you are asked to meet your dean or are invited to a meeting with the rector, need something from a particular office or unit, do you know who is who? Check the website, look around, ask colleagues.

Make sure you know where to find a list of all the university's departments, as well as administrative units and their responsibilities. It would be good to memorize the names of the staff working in your Dean's Office, but it will certainly take some time.

TIP: Don't forget to...

- ❑ Introduce yourself while entering the office, have the ID and the students' ID number with you
- ❑ Check your email, you may receive important emails during the first days/weeks of your mobility
- ❑ You should have received the information about the welcome and integration activities. Make sure you participate! The introduction weeks are meant to show you everything you need to know, to help you get to know the people, to network with your new colleagues - take part!
- ❑ Be friendly and patient - it will take a while to understand the new place and its customs

Come earlier if you are nervous!

Due to the fear of being late on my first day, I arrived an hour earlier than necessary and decided to spend some time at a restaurant just next to the university. When it was finally time to head to campus, I hoped everything would go smoothly. I took the plunge and went to meet the staff at the International Relations Office, who were responsible for new students, to ask about the hall I should go to. Once I had this information, I started walking towards the hall, simultaneously gloated and nervous. But having more time helped me to walk around and feel more confident in the area.

Start your great journey in a group

The first days at the university went by very quickly. They started with the so-called freshers week, during which many surprises were waiting for me. People in my country are very shy, mostly without a smile and do not organize many events like here. The freshers week schedule had something for everyone. From events in the city centre to outdoor cinema. If you don't want to feel lonely in your new room, you need to go outside and breathe a different air. This is the beginning of a new journey.

3.4. MY DEANS' OFFICE

The Dean's Office is responsible for a variety of administrative activities involving faculty, staff and students. Most importantly for you, it is a place to get an info pack on the study programme. The office also handles college governance policies, the faculty/student award reception, student dismissals, suspensions and probations, the Fresh Start programme for returning students and many more administrative functions.

Some universities offer the Virtual Dean's Office, available on the university website. Virtual Dean's Office is a complex system, which allows online communication between students, academic faculty and administration of the university. Virtual Dean's Office stakeholders can be divided into three main groups - students, academic faculty and administration. Each group has different goals and expectations while using the tool. You can also take part in your social networking groups. It's the easiest way to always be informed and to share information!

Surprisingly fruitful meeting

Usually all deans are geniuses, and all geniuses are a bit crazy! I study Fashion Design at the University of Lusófona. I met my Dean during welcome week. We agreed then to meet in the afternoon of the following day, in his office. When I arrived, I found him 'lost' at his desk, among scissors and fabrics. I thought: does he know what to do with me in this chaos?

Apparently he does! He invited me to look for a solution to the colour combination he was working on at the time. As he worked, he told me about each of the other lecturers, the colleagues I would be working with, the subjects I had chosen and the parallel projects I was working on.

When we finally got the colour combination sorted out, I realised that I now had a much better idea of who my colleagues and teachers were and what our faculty was working on. As a result, I rewrote my Learning Agreement during the meeting.

Virtual Dean's Office

Already on the first day of using Virtual Dean's Office, everything seemed simple and understandable to me. Communication through the platform was very smooth and information was provided in a timely manner. I like this tool a lot!

Ask where to go

When I arrived, I was sure that I had to go to the Dean's Office. But it seems that there was almost no communication with the Dean's Office, as all Erasmus students are supported by Erasmus + office. At the beginning I was lost and I thought it would be a problem with passing the exams and knowing all the stuff. Luckily, I was wrong! Erasmus + staff helped with everything! Communication with the professors was also very nice. They made lots of effort to help me and other Erasmus+ students adapt and become integrated into the classroom. In addition, the professors often adapted the language in which courses were taught to accommodate Erasmus+ students.

3.5. UNIVERSITY ONLINE

Once you find your way to your Dean's Office, make sure that you know where to find all types of announcements for students e.g. in case of any changes in the schedule. Nowadays universities offer blended learning schemes, so double check if you have stationary or online classes. When it comes to the former ones – check on what communication platform they take place, for sure you will need logins, passwords, and time to check how it works.

Through online courses, students can gain the knowledge they need to earn their degree or grow in their profession. Online courses allow you to earn essentially the same range of different degrees that can be earned from a traditional educational environment. While there are many pros to online learning, there are also cons to consider. Focusing on a task and being self-motivated can be challenging when you study online; which is part of the reason why online learning isn't right for everyone. By understanding more about the advantages and disadvantages of online learning, you can get a better idea of whether it might be suitable for you and your educational and career goals. Among the many benefits of online learning, you'll find that virtual education allows you to enjoy a more flexible schedule, can reduce the cost of your degree, and can allow you to more easily develop your career alongside furthering your education. Not having to commute to campus can help you save on transportation costs.

Every year, the average student spends more than a thousand dollars on textbooks and course materials. Virtual coursework often takes advantage of virtual resources, which translates into less money spent on textbooks.

TIP: Don't forget to...

- ❑ Create regular study space and keep it organised
- ❑ Consider eliminating distractions e.g. using programmes blocking the apps or websites that tend to compete for your attention
- ❑ Actively participate e.g. by commenting on a classmate's paper on a discussion board, don't hesitate to ask your professor a question
- ❑ Think about the safety in the Internet, do not share your login or passwords with anyone!

Online classes

Online classes fit my lifestyle, because I am not a traditional student. If given a choice I would take all of my classes through the Internet. This system helped me to save money and time. Also, online classes allowed me to work, and it allowed me to be a full-time student. Online classes assisted me to manage myself better and Poland is a very cold country. It also reduces time taken moving to and from school under the cold weather. I'm happy that my university supports students with online classes. Classes are never missed online without proper communication through email. We have all the materials to use during our studies. We are given time to work in groups even if we are online. It was very good during the COVID-19 pandemics.

Trouble using the online platform

I admit that the virtual portal of my host university was not very user friendly. I had a lot of trouble figuring out how to access the different sites before my arrival. Once there I got help from the students, but they all admitted that it was very counter-intuitive.

Eventually I managed to master it, as it was necessary to access it for any academic, payment, documentation, etc. In the end it was never a big problem for me, other than the discomfort of using it the first few times. I also realized how important it was to check the virtual portal regularly, since many notifications were made directly from there.

Students' online repositories and services

What I have learned during my 2 semesters here is to look for the information and check online services. At the beginning I didn't pay any attention to the messages being sent by uni. I was busy with other staff and I thought I knew everything because I've got colleagues here. But sometimes my colleagues are not interested in the same things to learn, see, explore... When I started to monitor what the university offers, like online courses for free, libraries with the materials I needed for my studies, I discovered announcements about the conferences or events for students! Now I'm an intern in one of the university departments and I'm excited to explore more!

Work and study

One of the biggest advantages of being at Lusófona University is being in Portugal. The sun, the sea, the balcony of my house, the terraces and the gardens are all amazing! Online classes offer me the chance to be almost anywhere. I get to study and work in several places, either at home, in the city I live in or in the ones I'm visiting.

By attending online classes I'm also acquiring new digital skills and learning about new methods of collaborative work, either with teachers or with colleagues.

Classes were held online during these months of confinement and the University provided the necessary response to the transition from face-to-face to virtual. There are ups and downs when it comes to blended learning, but we can choose to focus on the positive aspects of it!

3.6. STUDENTS' SUPPORT SERVICES

Student services, sometimes also called student affairs, are all the services provided to the students to facilitate their success at the learning institution. The list of possible support depends on the organization and its structure and can include: information about grants and scholarships like mobility programmes, psychological consultations in critical situations or study advice, supporting measures in entering labour market: providing access to tailor-made career advice, organizing and conducting training for job seekers, providing information about jobs and educational market, services of special need students, different types of scholarships, additional language classes, healthcare centers, faith and spirituality services and others.... Those measures should help students to deal with numerous and different situations, particularly if you're abroad for the first time and don't know the languages and local bureaucratic procedures.

This is another package of information to discover and find out what can be useful for you. Ask your peers or Dean's Office where to find this information if you need it. It can be useful if you lose an item, are struggling financially, feel homesick or just found out about a new career path and are struggling to make a decision!

TIP: Some ideas you may consider...

- ❑ Sometimes the easiest solution is in front of you. If you face any problems, instead of worrying, talk with people - your peers or university administration. This is a new place for you, there is no shame in asking
- ❑ Checking the university website is a priority - for sure you will find some tips and guidance there. At least you will learn where to go and who is the right person to ask
- ❑ If you find the proper information on your own - make a use of it and be prepared, check the rules or instructions to fully understand the process. If you will find people ready to help you - you will be ready as well
- ❑ Ask yourself what you really need - to avoid misunderstanding. Nobody is a "mind reader" if you do not know precisely what kind of support you are liking for - take a while to consider what is your goal

Scholarship opportunity

My story has a very happy ending. I came to Poland to study nursing, but I was already a graduate for an undergraduate degree. I attended one year of studies as a nursing student, but it never felt like it was the thing for me, but I was doing it because it's a professional course and I thought I could get a job very easily. As time went on a European scholarship was flagged at the school's online platform and I immediately applied and I was accepted. This was a very difficult decision, but it was for the best. I decided to stop my nursing programme and pursue my master's programme since it was a scholarship, but full paid scholarships are not easily available, unless you are fortunate enough. I also noticed that scholarships are difficult to get for international students due to the lack of confidence in the system of awarding the scholarships, but this master's class had a lot of international students. Which shows a lot of hard work was done to promote this course internationally. As I continued with my masters' studies, I was even given an opportunity to study abroad on my internship which is not easily accessible in most African countries. We are actually surprised with how education is treasured in Europe because back home if you don't have money, you will not go to school.

Special needs

I was very surprised in Chicago at the number of offices and services open at the university for student health support, whether they were mental health or physical health related. There were certainly resources within the university for any ailments students might have.

I personally never had to make use of these services beyond the accreditation of a vaccination that was required for entry into the country at the university health office. I felt that they had sufficient means to support the students and they were very agile and good with the management.

A friendly secretariat

My experience of the mobility exchange was very good and I feel I was lucky to have all the support I needed back then. Students had support in several ways. First the department secretariat was always available for students to ask any question related to their academic work or everyday life. The Erasmus+ office, which is university wide, was also available for any type of support, including accommodation, recognizing ECTS points, any health issues, networking, recommendations for activities beyond the university, and more. Finally, the department Erasmus+ mentor helped students mostly with challenges they faced in their academic efforts. To this, it is important to mention professors, who were also available to help students with academic work or provide insight in any questions related to life in the host country.

Social Action Services

I came from Cape Verde to study Law in Portugal. Cape Verde is a country with few resources and my family is humble. I left Cape Verde full of hope, to return one day with my diploma and help my family.

I arrived in Lisbon in September and at that time the temperature was 32°C which was not very different from Cape Verde. But in October it started to get cold and the following months the weather was even colder. My clothes were no longer suitable and I struggled. I didn't have much money, but I had enough to live on. I contacted the Social Action Service and, as a result, the Commerce Course (of one of the schools of the university) solved the situation. They created a working group which collected clothes and prepared them for selling. The prices were rather “symbolic” between 0.50€ and 1.50€. So I was able to buy my new winter clothes and so did other colleagues in the same situation as me.

3.7. STUDENTS ORGANISATIONS

Are you interested in volunteering? Or personal development in the scientific area? Are you looking for new colleagues to spend free time together? There are different students' organizations at each university, you just have to find them and contact them. These are usually structured around specific interests and hobbies and are thus a great place to find people with whom to share exciting experiences. Many universities have some sort of Student Organizations Office, where all student organizations have a representation, you may want to look for it and find organizations that interest you. Including some form of collaboration with student organizations in your exchange experience will greatly enrich it. It is also a great way to meet people who share your interests and hobbies. Students with more experience in these associations are usually very welcoming to newcomers and are happy to have you onboard! It's a win-win situation for all involved. Reach out and find your people by pursuing your interests.

In addition to the university structure of students' organizations there are also international associations like:

- **ESN** - Erasmus Student Network
- **ESU** - European Students' Union
- **EFPSA** - European Federation of Psychology Students' Association
- **EESA** - Eastern European Students Association
- **AEGEE** - Association des états généraux des étudiants de l'Europe
- **AIESEC** International Association of Students in Business and Commerce
- **EGEA** - European Geography Association
- **ELSA** - European Law Students' Association
- **BEST** - Board of European Students of Technology
- **IAAS** - International Association of Students in Agriculture and Related Sciences
- **IADS** - International Association of Dental Students
- **IAPSSA** - International Association for Political Science Students
- **IEEE** - Student Body of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
- **IFMSA** - International Federation of Medical Students' Associations
- **IFSA** - International Forestry Students' Association
- **IMCS/MIEC** - International Movement of Catholic Students
- **IPSF** - International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation
- **ISHA** - International Students of History Association
- **IVSA** - International Veterinary Students' Association
- **WUJS** - World Union of Jewish Students

TIP: Worth to consider...

- ❑ Student's organisations are usually based on volunteering works, so if you have a lot of free time check which one operates in your area
- ❑ Not all student's organisations cooperate with specific university, if you would like to join it, it should not be a barrier

Volunteering groups

As a nursing student to me nursing is not just a profession but a calling. I love taking care of people and making them feel better. I feel the need to help emotionally and physically, so I decided to follow a nursing volunteer group. We manage our time and make space for volunteer work which is organized by our university. Whenever we feel there is not too much work load on a particular day we take our time to take care of the sick and comfort them in their most difficult times although sometimes very difficult, but I would like to encourage such programmes they assist in terms of skills and even your own sense of worth in the society.

Activities fair

One of our first days at the university, we attended a club fair where all of the university's student clubs and organizations were represented. There I joined a Christian Life Community group, a Model United Nations club, and visited several others. In fact, I became president of the Spanish club at the university. We organized different activities and events during the school year, and as a result, we won the award for best cultural/ethnic club that year. It was quite an experience.

Online and offline

The host university has a social media page for Erasmus+ students. It is used by both current and past students and has 700 members. The social media page is a great place for networking, asking for advice, getting answers to practical questions, being informed about activities, and a lot more. In addition, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), which has branches in many countries as well as in my host country, allows students to get to know each other and provides support. ESN is designed to connect locals with international students and foster cultural exchange. Finally, other student organizations exist that are related to specific academic and scientific interests, such as IEEE, Women in Engineering, and more.

Growing beyond academics

One of the best things is the many wonderful student organisations. Student organisations are an important part of campus life. They ensure students grow beyond just academics. They are a fabulous place to unwind, meet like-minded students, and have a better outlook on life. These student organisations also actually have a positive impact on academia and the students' resume as well. They acquire skills that will help them once they enter the professional world. Here are some of the student organisations and clubs that will help you grow.

Find what you need

At my University I met several students' associations and I ended up joining the African Students' Association. It was an incredible experience. The main activity of this association was the discussion of several issues the continent is currently facing, regarding conflicts, governance, health, tolerance, human and women's rights, among many others. These were extraordinary hours of sharing, debating and learning about the realities in Africa, often with real stories told in the first person. As a result of this experience, I have already been in Mozambique, as a volunteer working with hospitalized children. It was the starting point for a new life path!

CHAPTER 4

Living the Experience Abroad

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4.1. EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

How do you call an emergency when abroad? In case of an emergency, you should first try to stay calm and call the free emergency number 112, which is usually operated in both the local language and English.

In case of an emergency, injury, childbirth, sudden disease or health deterioration, patients should either call an ambulance or go directly to a hospital, to the A&E department.

Some important information when calling for an emergency is your name, ID, nationality, and location. If you call for somebody else's emergency it would be useful to provide emergency services with their name, ID and nationality as well.

Concealed tragedy

One of our students was involved in a tragic heart attack. He was staying with another student, but no-one knew any background information of his illness. It was unfortunate that we lost him. I would like to strongly advise that this situation taught me that even if it is not avoidable. If emergency procedures are taken in time, it can save a life. If any students happen to develop any illness or have any medical complication or history. I advise that someone close to you know how you can be assisted and to also timeously check on you to make sure that you are safe and you must always keep emergency contact details on speed dial. Including all the emergency hotlines which include 112 and 911.

Traffic accident

During our stay in Rome a colleague was involved in a traffic accident and broke her nose. She was accompanied, so her colleagues rushed her to the nearest hospital emergency room. She was treated in English and the situation was resolved quickly and without much complication, thanks in part to the fact that she had a European Health Insurance Card. It was a major scare, but the situation was handled well and the problem was not aggravated.

Share your problems

I am Hana and I come from the Czech Republic. My mobility took place at Lusófona University, in the sunny city of Lisbon. When I prepared for my mobility period, I did not inform anyone about my health problem: I suffer from epilepsy. The reason for this is that my condition is normally under control and very rarely do I have a seizure. I was confident that nothing would happen. Unfortunately, that was not the case. During the integration activities, I was excited to take part in an afternoon dedicated to photography. The idea was to go around the city centre and take photographs of "what attracts my eye". We had a basic lesson on photography, still on campus, and we went by subway to the city centre, accompanied by the Professor responsible for the activity and by two monitors. It was amazing to capture the city through my own lens. After about two hours, we decided to return to the campus. While still on the subway, underground, it happened. I had an epilepsy attack. This was frightening because nobody was prepared as they weren't aware of my situation. Luckily, one of the monitors suffered from the same disease as me. He immediately understood what was happening and helped me get through it until medical help arrived. It is never a burden to tell others what you are going through when it comes to either physical or mental health.

4.2. HEALTH CARE IN THE CITY

It is important that you know the hospitals and health centres near where you are staying and, if you can, throughout the city.

Remember that if you go with private medical insurance and there is no public health care you can only use the insurance in certain health centres, have them well controlled before arriving and write them down in a visible or accessible place.

If you are traveling to a country within the European Union, remember that you can apply for the European Health Insurance Card, with which you can access the public health systems of the host country as if you were in your own country.

Health system

When I got to Lublin in Poland to study, I decided to research the city's health system. Most of the hospitals in Lublin have some form of specialisation except for Luxmed, which is a highly efficient private healthcare organisation. I also looked into the city's health systems in terms of service delivery and emergency response is overwhelmingly good. I once worked for a chicken factory during the course of my studies unfortunately one day during my work. I got injured at work. It was quite an unpleasant scene. I was badly cut by an industrial machine. I had to immediately leave for the hospital luckily all my medical insurance was up to date so they were not much needed. I received immediate medical care which is a lesson to everyone moving to study abroad to have valid health insurance.

Effective services

Generally, Poland is far much better in providing emergency services like fire brigade, ambulance and the police. The service in Poland is more effective in handling emergency situations. Poland also has an advantage of more resources as well, for international students it is always best to have medical insurance so that it will be able to cover costs in cases of emergency. In general Poland is the country where you can live and feel safe.

Treated on time

When we were in Chicago, a colleague suffered quite serious food poisoning. I remember he spent a whole day in the hospital. The first crucial thing he did was to check which hospitals he could go to with his medical insurance. Thanks to that, he didn't have to worry about paying a large sum of money as he was charged directly to the insurance agency.

Forms of health-care systems

Healthcare in Macedonia utilizes a mixture of a public and private healthcare system. All residents are eligible to receive free state-funded healthcare and have the option of receiving private healthcare for treatments that the public system does not cover. Public healthcare in Macedonia often comes with long wait times and although public hospitals have basic medical supplies, they do not have specialised treatments. For these specialized treatments, residents typically seek private treatment where they must pay out of pocket or buy private insurance on top of their free healthcare.

4.3. CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Make sure that your mobility is a time for studying, finding friends, and getting to know a new country, but also a time for discovering a new culture and enriching yourself as a human being. Culture is an important element of the traveling experience, especially for young people who are looking for different ways of spending free time. Concerts, festivals, exhibitions in museums, fairs, movies each country offers a vast range of opportunities. Don't miss them! These activities bring people together, foster social solidarity and inclusion and integration of the communities.

One of the best ways to take advantage of leisure time during your exchange is to attend local cultural events. Participation in local events can give a lot of information and understanding of the national customs, traditions to foreigners. Not only can you learn a lot about your host country's culture, but it is also a great way to make new friends and meet new people.

You can either plan them ahead or be spontaneous! Some of these activities are promoted, organised or publicised by the University... stay tuned!
Remember that you can ask local people for good, traditional places to visit.
Gather a group of colleagues and friends and explore these other worlds you don't know yet.

TIP: Don't forget to...

- ☐ Mark your classes and evaluation timetable in your diary
- ☐ Mark your free time on your calendar
- ☐ Check the list of museums in your city and country
- ☐ Check the festivities of your host country
- ☐ Check the list of concerts and festivals
- ☐ Network with local and international students.
- ☐ Don't miss opportunities to visit sites of interest
- ☐ Try the local cuisine
- ☐ Make a list of everything you don't want to miss...but also be open!

Social goings-on in Lublin

Lublin has a full roster of festivals that take place in the city throughout the year. The themes run the gamut from typical fare like music and dance to carnival arts to documentaries to alternative culture. The Neo-Gothic Royal Castle is one of the city's top tourist attractions and it's easy to see. I have been to main local events, very interesting cultural activities and awesome presentations. I learnt that Polish people are so particular about their culture and historical background. They treasure their culture and stand for what they represent. There is one of my special events called (Tłusty Czwartek) Fat Thursday you surely get fat on this day everything will be cheap buns and rolls and in Poland there are many events that emanate from the history of their cities.

Plenty of activities

Living in Rome for four months was culturally exciting. I remember taking advantage of literally every free moment to visit the city, the neighbourhoods, the churches, the museums. One day I would go to see the Pope at the Vatican during the Angelus hour and another day I could be having a cappuccino in the most famous coffee shop in the city. It is impossible to pass through Rome and not soak up its culture and history. Other classmates preferred to skip all this, travel to other countries or stay at the University. I really think I made the most of the experience this way. By the end of my stay, I considered myself half-Roman.

The centre of Europe

Brussels is in the heart of Europe. While there I enjoyed going to Grande Place, eating ice cream Dame Blanche, eating donuts, and trying the local rich collection of beer. I enjoyed learning the local languages. I also enjoyed visiting sites of interest, such as the Atomium and Waterloo. The most important cultural experience, however, was talking to students from many different backgrounds and hearing their stories and learning about their everyday life, families, dreams, and hopes. This cultural exchange is in my opinion one of the most valuable aspects of the Erasmus+ program and its international nature.

4.4. SPORT

Most universities organize sports events and have a sports department. Remember to check those out.

When visiting your host University for the first time, make sure you get to know where the sports facilities are located and how you can access them (courts, gym, swimming pool, etc.).

Sport is a great way to get to know people that share your interests, take advantage of it.

New sporting experience

I loved sporting activities in Lublin. Some activities are not found in my country like skirting and ice hockey. Anyone who's in for some waterside relaxation and enjoyment might try the Zemborzyce Artificial Lake—the venue has enough sandy space and summertime facilities to accommodate your vacationing needs. Situated nearby is also the “Słoneczny Wrotków” center, a complex of modern swimming pools, slides and a pirate island for children. Water-sport equipment, beach gear and mountain bikes are readily available from the rentals that operate here. From the Zemborzyce Artificial Lake you can embark on a canoeing trip down the Bystrzyca River or take a biking tour to and around Lublin down a cycling path that runs along the river. There you can also use the water ski lift, take a stroll along picturesque trails as well as enjoy horse riding along the bridleways (specially prepared horse-riding routes). The enthusiasts of winter sports can use the artificial ice rink Ice-mania or the ski lift near the state-of-the-art “Globus” sports and entertainment arena.

At the lake

Summer time is the best time to do more outdoor activities in Poland. I had an opportunity to visit the lake in Lublin and I never got enough of it. I always enjoy every moment when I visit the lake during summer holidays. I also enjoy the traditional way they lay out tables outside restaurants during summer holidays. Polish food is nice and people are friendly. Spending days and evenings outdoors at the restaurant's summer garden is a very unusual experience.

Social involvement

During my stay in Chicago, I joined a co-ed soccer team with some friends I made there for intramurals. The university organized games every week on Sundays and I have very funny memories of that experience. Another group of Spaniards formed a soccer team and actually won the competition.

I also took the opportunity to improve my fitness and started going to the university gym four times a week with a friend. We had a strict plan and by the end of my stay I had improved a lot. Also, I was able to meet people at the gym.

The sea!

One of the most interesting parts of my host country of Greece is that everything is close to the sea. I enjoyed walking along the seafront, swimming in the warmer months, and skiing in the winter. In the spring I enjoyed walking on the numerous mountain trails. I also enjoyed jogging in the afternoons when the sun was not too strong. The city offers a lot of other opportunities for sports, such as tennis, sailing, track and field, climbing, and badminton among others.

Water sports

Each summer, lovers of water sports and people who have come on vacation to Ohrid witness the incredible endurance and art of the best marathon swimmers from all around the world, competing in the waters of Ohrid Lake.

This international sporting event – the biggest in Macedonia – has many male and female participants. The first three finishers in both categories are awarded with a medal and a cash prize.

4.5. USEFUL PLACES IN THE CITY

When arriving in a new city it is necessary to know several key sites. Beyond the most touristy places, you will need to know where the nearest supermarkets are, the most affordable ones for students, the neighbourhoods or areas that are best not to frequent. It is also important to know the location of public administration offices, police stations, places of worship where you can exercise your particular faith, the embassy or consulate of your country if it is in that city, the train station, airport (if it has one), etc.

Ideally, you should know as many useful places as possible. Remember that locals are your best allies, ask them about the hot spots in your city.

The old town

Lublin is one of the most important places in Polish history and that's already a good reason to put the city in your Poland itinerary. First settlements in the area of Lublin were established already in the 6th century and already in the 8th century. The Old Town in Lublin is just stunning and so charming! Cobbled streets, winding lanes, beautiful corners, and colorful townhouses with many details – you can find them all in Lublin.

Entering one of the gates leading to the Old Town is like stepping back in time and stepping into a colorful and vibrant wonderland. It's easy to lose track of time there and numerous cafes and pubs don't make it any easier. I'm impressed by how great Lublin is on the culinary scene. You can find there so many great restaurants, cafes and bars that making a choice where to eat or drink might be a bit challenging.

What surprised me even more was how big the portions are served – I recently visited three different restaurants and it was impossible to finish the meal!

Cultural differences

Spirituality is a very important dimension of my life. During my stay in the United States, a mostly Protestant country, it was very important for me to find Catholic churches where I could celebrate the Eucharist on Sundays. That is why I looked for the location of several of them around the areas where I used to move around and where I attended on Sundays. In the end, being able to celebrate my faith in community with people from another culture but who shared my religious convictions made all the difference. It gave the impression that, even within our cultural differences, we were the same.

A must visit place

The Archaeological Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia is situated on the left bank of Vardar River, next to Skopje's landmark the old Stone Bridge. This museum institution is the oldest of its kind in the Republic of North Macedonia existing for almost a century. Its permanent exhibition presents over 7000 artifacts of extraordinary historical, cultural, and art values. These artifacts tell stories of the local inhabitants, their material and spiritual cultures from early prehistory to the end of the Ottoman period.

4.6. LOCAL FOOD AND TRADITIONS

Experiencing the local festivities and cuisine of the host country during your stay is another of the great advantages of an exchange program. Knowing the traditions of a country, and participating in them, is the best way to understand a culture and its people. The gastronomy of each country is also very important, it says a lot about the culture, the habits of the people, the natural resources, and, of course, its history. Participating in traditions and tasting the country's food is "being a part of it".

Ask your local friends where to go as you may want to avoid the more touristy places and get a feel of the real deal. Nowadays, you may even get to try different types of food in the same city as most of them are increasingly cosmopolitan and traditions are mixing up in wonderful and expected ways.

You may sometimes miss your own gastronomy and that is normal. Most likely there is a small restaurant somewhere where expats from your country get together to feel at home again.

TIP: Don't forget to...

- ☐ Locals are also experts in this
- ☐ Try to become as familiar with the culture as possible
- ☐ Check for traditional festivals throughout your stay
- ☐ Check the main foodstuffs in the cuisine
- ☐ Make friends in your host country
- ☐ Ask a local where to eat traditional dishes
- ☐ Make sure you tried to know and understand the traditions
- ☐ Don't forget to check if you have any allergies that prevent you from eating any of the typical foods

Polish dishes

In Lublin, you can taste a lot of interesting dishes that are not common in other Polish cities. A great example is Cebularz, a wheat dough pancake with onions and poppy seeds. This dish became popular at the beginning of the 20th century when a large Jewish community lived in Lublin. Local restaurants and cafes prepare the pancakes with a wide variety of fillings. They can also be bought at some local supermarkets. Such a simple and tasty dish is one of the tourists' favorite meals. In restaurants, you can try cebularz with cheese, ham, various vegetables, and other interesting fillings. Besides wonderful pastries, the regional cuisine is also distinguished by a variety of first courses that remain relevant at any time of the year. A very unusual soup is Forszmak, the name of which coincides with the name of the famous fish snack. This meat soup is cooked with salted vegetables so the taste turns out to be very interesting.

Prospects

In my imagination Europe was like a paradise and a well decorated place with fancy buildings. The imagination I had for Europe distorted even my purchasing behavior. When I was getting ready to study, I had to buy the most expensive clothes so that it would be easier for me to suit well in the European environment.

Passionate about pasta

Italian food is one of the best I have ever tasted. Coming from a Mediterranean diet like the Spanish one, one finds similarities, but there are certainly aspects that are unique to the country and the region.

Although it has been generalized, Italian food from Italy has little to do with some reinterpretations that are made around the world. My passion is pasta and living in Rome for four months gave me the opportunity to try a huge variety of pasta and sauces, many of them from the Lazio region. I highly recommend any student going on exchange to Italy to jump at the chance and take advantage of the gastronomic experience.

4.7. PLANNING YOUR BUDGET

Planning average costs of living in a specific country is also key. It provides good information of what you will spend during your stay, especially if your family is financing you for it.

Make sure you plan a monthly budget with which you can estimate the costs of your stay.

Consider that some costs are fixed (they are the same every month, like rent) and others are variable (they vary depending on the month, like traveling costs or even food).

TIP: Don't forget to...

- ❑ Check with your home country bank before going abroad to find out if they have a partnership with any banks abroad, which could help you with your international transaction fees
- ❑ If you plan on using an ATM, try to take out enough money to last you for a while in order to avoid racking up withdrawal fees. Of course, be sure to safely stash away large sums of money in a safe or other secure area
- ❑ Emergency money: While it's important to have an outline of expected costs abroad and money allotted for such expenses, it is also important to have extra money available for emergencies
- ❑ Consider getting a credit card that doesn't charge foreign transaction fees.
- ❑ Revisit your budget while you're abroad. Determine if you have stayed on track or will need to make adjustments to your budget going forward
- ❑ Make sure to notify your bank and/or credit card company that you will be accessing money abroad so as not to set off a fraud alert

Planning your budget

I looked into three aspects (1) financial stability: how is my finance- My family helped to support my studies with most of the things I needed. (2) tuition fees-are you covered on tuition for the whole period of your stay? Luckily, I was given a scholarship and my entire tuition fee was covered. (3) money for personal use is covered by pocket money? Pocket money is that which you can use on a daily basis. When I was planning my budget, I had to do an actual document on excel to cover every aspect of my study to come up with the total cost and put a 10 % increase in your expenses for the purposes of uncertainties and incidental cost.

Why budgeting is important

During my stay in Rotterdam, I was pretty clueless about my finances. By making all payments with my debit card, my cost planning consisted of spending as long as it would let me keep paying, as that would mean there were still funds.

What I didn't take into account was that the debit card would leave me owing for all the purchases I made once it was all spent. So, when I finished my stay, I found that I owed 500 euros because I had planned my costs in this way and had not checked my account. Now I think about it and shake my head. I recommend to all students who are going to do an exchange to plan their costs well and check what is left in their bank accounts.

Always know your spending parameters

First up, you need to work out a lot of money you've got to play with. This will set the parameters of your spending, so think carefully about every possible source of revenue.

Next up you need to figure out where all your money is going. You can either look back at your bank statement to top up all your previous purchases or simply input a rough estimate of how much you think you spend on each category.

Once you've got all your expenses laid out before you, it's time to break it down into a weekly budget.

4.8. PUBLIC DO'S and DON'TS

Smoking, alcohol, shops opening hours, getting on the bus with food, museum, taking photos, requirements regarding clothing in specific places. Take all these into account during your exchange.

Some things you might consider as “normal” in your country may be frowned upon in your host country.

Review how to approach people, how to greet them, what kind of actions are considered inappropriate.

TIP: Remember to...

- ❑ Be informed: Gather and access all information about the university that you are going to attend. Inquire all necessary requirements and documents needed. Curiosity wins!
- ❑ Be optimistic: When a problem occurs, look into the bright side and believe that everything is in your control. Giving up is not an option. Be Positive!
- ❑ Be resourceful: Find ways to solve or resolve your problems, work it and face it with optimism that everything will be alright. Ask me!
- ❑ Be friendly: Put a smile on that face and make friends. It will make your life colourful and meaningful. Join social groups and be open minded. Smile until your ear!
- ❑ Study hard: Don't forget your first goal is to study. Aced it!
- ❑ Discover: Discover the culture, people, traditions, places and language. It is the best way to adapt and for a smooth transition. Travel to discover!
- ❑ Love yourself: Stay healthy, self-love, treat yourself and be in love. It is not good if you are mentally, socially, physically and emotionally unfit
- ❑ Have fun: Have fun, make time, no worries and have fun. REPEAT!

Making others uncomfortable

We Spaniards tend to speak very loudly. In other countries like the United States that is frowned upon. I remember the bus rides from class to campus, with the whole group of Spaniards packed in. We were, by far, the ones who always spoke the most and the loudest, and in a language that the local students generally did not understand. This was until one day people started to look at us a bit annoyed, we realized it and the following times we were more subtle. I also remember the startled faces of some of the locals when, to say hello, we were going to give them two kisses. There that is not even contemplated. The way to greet people is always by shaking hands.

Don't do

Poland is very strict on law abiding. These are some of the things I know I should never do. Crossing the Road on a red light, never cross on a red light and wait for the green light. I have seen many people being fined for crossing the road on a cell phone. No matter what, don't cross the Road on a cell phone. Be very careful not to talk much about religion; it is a very sensitive issue.

I had to be very careful when drinking alcohol. Alcohol is very cheap and if taken in excess it might ruin your plans. Do not get carried away in drinking a lot and there is a great fine for drinking in public.

Be careful when you use public transport to delay buying a ticket. The fine is so huge you would wish you had bought tickets for the whole month.

You are allowed to move around in recreational facilities with friend and also try not to be noisy or disturb other citizens.

Always consider...

DO'S

- ☐ Visit tourist attractions
- ☐ Try Macedonian food. Macedonian specialties are offered in traditional restaurants such as those in Stara Carsija in Skopje
- ☐ Get fresh foods including fruit and vegetables from the Pazars that can be found in every Macedonian city or town
- ☐ Tap water is safe to drink as are public drinking water fountains that can be found in most public places

DON'TS

- ☐ Do not get involved in political rallies, demonstrations and avoid large crowds as they may turn violent
- ☐ Do not take pictures or recordings of government buildings or anything that could be of military or security interest. Comply with "no photography" signs and ask for permission before taking photographs if you are in doubt
- ☐ Do not drive at night in rural mountainous areas due to poor or non-existent lighting

Know what to carry

The Erasmus mobility taught me, besides everything else, that you have to be attentive and discreet when you arrive in a city that is not yours and where, by your behaviour (at least in the first days) you are easily identified as a foreigner.

I'll tell you what happened to me in my first week in Lisbon:

I arrived on the 2pm flight, went to my "new house", talked to the residents, organized the room, we all ate together and the next morning I decided to go alone and explore a little bit of the city streets... I had heard about the "streetcar" and decided to go in -- backpack on my back, everything inside the backpack (wallet, camera...) when I got out... the backpack was empty... I heard at the police office that the streetcar is the main place in the city where we need to be careful... They gave me more advice: never inform on social networks that we are leaving home; never bring very expensive objects with us and if so, do not show them, the backpack in public transport always comes in front; at night when going out, always be accompanied when returning home... very useful advice for a student outside his country.

They recovered my camera and my wallet... but it was a big challenge to start in such a troubled way...

4.9. EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Many universities offer extracurricular activities for international students such as cultural visits around the city or other cities, activities to meet local or international students, gastronomic experiences, and so on. But you don't have to limit yourself to just that, international students usually organize events on their own, be it parties, trips, tours and more. You can also sign up for activities organized by local organizations in your destination city.

A different college lifestyle

During my exchange I realized how different university life is outside my university. In the U.S., extracurriculars are a fundamental part of college, almost on the same level as academics.

During my stay I participated in different activities of student organizations, visits around the city, I even organized some of them. I also fondly remember a retreat I attended in the winter where I met many good people, some of whom have become lifelong friends.

4.10. MAKE LOCAL FRIENDS

It is very common for exchange students to tend to stick together and, above all, among students from the same country or university. This results in many students spending their international experience in small ghettos and missing out on much of the richness of socializing with local students.

The best way to take advantage of your exchange and to acquire a good level of acculturation is to get to know students from the country where you will be living during those months. No one knows better than them the best way to get the most out of the city and the country, adding to the most famous or touristic experiences much less known but equally or more typical activities.

They will give you the opportunity to practice the language and you will have good friends in a new place in the world. But you must be the one to take the initiative and make the effort to get to know them. Keep in mind that they often have already formed their groups and it is difficult for them to get the impulse to meet international students (although there are some who do).

To do this, it is best to get involved in a student organization or go to activities where you know you can meet local students.

You should also take care of the relationship with your group of exchange students, as they are the ones who are likely to accompany you most closely in your first days/weeks of exchange. Returning to a circle that brings you closer to your place of origin is also important in your exchange experience. You must find a balance or equilibrium to make the most of your stay on a social level.

Social interaction to get friends

One of my main objectives when I arrived in the United States was to meet people from there. I knew beforehand that there were important differences between Americans and Spaniards, but I felt that the best way to take advantage of the experience was to hang out with them and become their friend. I put a lot of effort into it and, to be honest, it was not easy, especially at the beginning. However, in the end I managed to make a pretty good group of friends. One of them, with whom I still keep in touch, invited me to their fraternity activities and towards the end of my stay they even suggested that I become a member. Making American friends enriched my exchange in a differential way.

New people

When I arrived in Lisbon the only Portuguese people I had spoken to were the International Office staff. I didn't know anyone in the country, apart from an Irish colleague who was also coming to Portugal, but who wasn't going to stay in Lisbon since mobility was in Oporto.

Fortunately, on the very first day, when I arrived at the house where I had rented a room, I realized that I would never be alone. I had two colleagues from Spain and three others from Hungary. Still, we missed a Portuguese local connection.

The next day someone knocked at our door and Maria, my Spanish roommate, went to open it. There were two people downstairs, our neighbors Pedro and Clara, both students of Veterinary Medicine at Lusófona University. Realising we were Erasmus students, they came to introduce themselves and invited us to have dinner with them.

They showed us the city, and the country and since then we have already been on vacation in Dublin together! It is a lifetime friendship.

Good social skills

Being optimistic, resourceful and friendly are my positive qualities that I possess and am proud of. I find ways to solve such an occurring dilemma. In a blink of an eye, my face brightens, my smile goes sweet, and my eyes twinkling. I comfortably found myself talking to different kinds of people, curiously asking for advice and instructions which ended up exchanging numbers and gradually making friends in an instant. What happened there was magic, A master stroke of the art of communication. I was mesmerized and in the same way very grateful.

4.11. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CLASSES AND PROFESSORS

You will have the opportunity to meet professors from a new institution. Among them may be great professionals or researchers in an area that interests you. Approach them, get involved in their classes and, if you want to go a step further, offer yourself as an assistant.

Many professors are looking for research assistants for active projects. All of this will help you stand out beyond your academic performance in their classes. If in the future you will need a letter of recommendation for a job, course, or graduate program, having met good professors at your host university and having been involved with them in a project may be your most effective avenue.

Getting connected

One of my main objectives when I arrived in the United States was to meet people from there. I knew beforehand that there were important differences between Americans and Spaniards, but I felt that the best way to take advantage of the experience was to hang out with them and become their friend. I put a lot of effort into it and, to be honest, it was not easy, especially at the beginning. However, in the end I managed to make a pretty good group of friends. One of them, with whom I still keep in touch, invited me to their fraternity activities and towards the end of my stay they even suggested that I become a member. Making American friends enriched my exchange in a differential way.

Lectures

As a master's degree student in International Business Management expect competent professors with years of experience and practice. It was astounding that I could definitely understand their lectures. The knowledge of English as a medium of instruction is superb.

My classes are international marketing, process management, managerial economics, company management in the 21st century and Polish Language. Classes are flexible either face to face or online, choose for your own convenience. All of them are essential and vital subjects which I could not take for granted. Presentation and research is common in these classes. You have to be mentally and physically prepared for this is no joke. I was having fun with all of my major classes and I take that as a good sign. Honestly speaking, not to brag, I aced some of my presentations which I am proud of.

4.12. TRAVEL AROUND

Take advantage of the fact that you are living in a new place to get to know different places. There is a lot to explore in each country beyond the city where you study, this is also a good exercise of acculturation. You can move around the country but remember that you are in the EU. Your exchange may be one of the most intense and unforgettable experiences abroad of your life. Don't miss the opportunity to travel and see new places. Taking advantage of the fact that you will be in a country and maybe even a region different from your home country, visit cities and countries around your host country to discover new cultures, realities, etc. You can do it with friends or alone, the experience is worth it in any case.

The connected route

One of the advantages of doing my exchange in the Netherlands was its location. Being directly connected to Belgium and northern Germany, traveling to those countries became the preferred weekend activity for many. We visited several cities in and out of the Netherlands. In addition, there was a train line linking the three countries and you could travel at a low cost to cities like Hamburg, Brussels, or Amsterdam in a matter of hours or minutes.

So many places to see

While in Brussels, I really took the opportunity to travel around. What helped in these journeys was the fact that Brussels is close to many towns and cities in Europe. The road network is good and allows easy access. I visited many places in Belgium, such as Antwerp, Bruges, and Leuven. I also visited cities outside of Belgium, such as Paris. Then, I had friends engaging in Erasmus+ activities in the Netherlands and I visited them for a weekend. We took the opportunity to see the area and also go horseback riding.

CHAPTER 5

Returning Home

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- 5.1. Planning the closure
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- 5.3. Take advantage of the future

5.1. PLANNING THE CLOSURE

Returning home after a period of time might be overwhelming. Try not to leave everything to the last minute and plan your closure well. In the same way that you managed the arrival, the departure process should be more or less the reverse (except that you will return loaded with experiences, memories, souvenirs, etc.). You will find some of the most important things to consider below.

TIP: Remember to...

- ❑ Terminate the house rental contract
- ❑ Close the bank account
- ❑ Terminate any light, water or TV services contract you might have signed
- ❑ Get the credit accreditation paper form the host university
- ❑ If you notice any country authority that you arrived at, make sure you notice when you leave

Emergency home

My return home from Chicago was quite chaotic. It just happened to coincide with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and we had to get everything sorted out in record time. We closed the dorms, closed all our bank accounts there, picked everything up quickly, returned documents, IDs, ...

Obviously, there were things left behind and things unfinished, although these were the least important. Even so, such an unforeseen situation highlights the importance of having everything ready before the end of the exchange, as haste and stress can cause serious problems at the end.

Leaving

The last thing was going back home after a perfect stay at my student exchange program. Leaving a place that you are slowly or gotten attached to can be hard but in the end I had to return home. With all my acquired knowledge I knew when going back home I would not be the same again. I was well advanced. All the new friends I had made were staying behind and that was a tragedy. The day I left I was escorted by all my friends and felt as if I was leaving home since I had bonded with everyone very well. It felt like my stay was not long enough and wished I had extra time or more months.

The way back home

My name is Francesca and I'm from Florence! I took my Mobility Course in Architecture in Portugal. The end of the school year was very tiring, with the delivery of different tasks, in particular the projects and models. Therefore, when the evaluations were over, I only thought about celebrating. Lisbon has many parties going on in June and July and I just wanted to celebrate the end of the assignments and be with my friends.

When I realized that it was time to catch the plane back home -- that's when I realized that I hadn't dealt with my final documents, I hadn't gone to the international relations office, to close the mobility period, validate the dates and confirm the curricular path. Nor had I stopped by to say goodbye.

I got stressed and worried about the whole situation.

Fortunately, everything was solved, I sent an email explaining what had happened and all the documents were sent to me and to my Home University.

Planning my future

After my study of Masters in Management my plan is to learn more about Poland, and hopefully I would be speaking much better Polish by then. If I am to return to my country, it would be just to visit my beloved grandmother. I still have so much to learn from Poland and Europe, and I want to use all that knowledge to be able to help others and help make the world a better place. I want to use my critical and analytical skills to the fullest, and I want to gain as much knowledge as I can from the people around me, starting with WSEI.

5.2. SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Your experience is very important! If it was decisive for you and your life, it can certainly be decisive for the life of other students. We encourage you to share it. There are many ways you can do that, during official sessions at your home University, on social media or Erasmus+ social networking groups, as well as among colleagues and friends.

Don't forget to share your experience when you return with your family, friends and university classmates. Your friends and family will want to know what you did, saw and felt during your mobility! Sometimes it will take them a while to understand the changes you have gone through but they should support the personal and academic growth that the mobility allowed you to undergo.

Your experience may help other students when choosing their exchange destination.

TIP: Remember to...

- Talk about your experience in the country and in the city that welcomed you
- Show your friends what you learned about the culture of the country, its music, its food and its people
- Talk about the university, the academic spirit, your classmates and friends, your teachers
- Transmit that European spirit to your family and peers
- Make a visit to your International Relations Office (they might be interested in your collaboration due to your exchange experience)
- Evaluate (how did you expect it vs. what did you find, has it been generally positive?)

More than my expectations

Rome far exceeded my expectations. The city, the culture, the history, the university atmosphere.... Thanks to my exchange I began to appreciate a little more what it means to be European, the advantages it brings and the facilities that are available within the European Union.

I have recommended Italy as an exchange destination many times and will continue to do so. I believe that my experience can be useful to many more students.

Sharing my Erasmus+ experience

Upon returning home, I shared my international Erasmus+ experience with my fellow students and also with my professors. I presented the results of my research project with my thesis supervisor. I discussed with others all the positive aspects of Erasmus+, including the opportunity to take interesting courses, to see a different academic environment, to share cultural experiences, to make friends, to travel, and to become open minded. There is nothing negative about Erasmus+. The entire experience is particularly enjoyable and useful and helps young individuals become familiar with our closely interconnected European world.

Getting home

Returning home I was reunited with my family and friends I had missed, I was so excited to be back home but after some days, I observed there were certain habits that I had adopted. I later on readopted to my own culture, but the experience is something I will never forget because I learnt a lot of life lessons and for my career going for the students exchange was the best decision I made.

Encouraging others

My name is Nilo, I study at Lusófona University and I was the first student of the Faculty of Sports to do ERASMUS mobility at the University of A Coruña, Spain.

It was a fantastic experience so when I came back I started to participate in the dissemination sessions promoted by my International Relations Office. I wanted everyone to feel welcomed and experience the same as I did!

Every semester there are new students coming to my University. Sometimes I talk so much about my mobility that they make me shut up, they say: "It's enough! Don't you have anything else to talk about?" We laugh. My Erasmus+ mobility changed my life, it transformed me as a student and as a person and so it is very difficult not to talk about it!

Sharing my experience has encouraged others to discover new places and people and embark on a one-of-a-kind journey! It has also helped other students take greater advantage of their mobility and overcome the obstacles that came their way.

Change of environment

Truly, a lot of unexpected things happen in our lives, but it depends on how we react to them, whether we jump up to the opportunity or let it slide, hoping for the next (probably better) opportunity to sweep us off our feet.

I was both excited and anxious to arrive in a foreign country a thousand miles away from home, and every step all the way from the airport accumulated millions of questions in my mind: What is Poland and Lublin like? What is the demography like? Will I be able to fit in? Have I learnt enough basics of their language enough to be able to just say Hello and Thank you? I was exploding! I was lucky that one of my cousins who's already studying at WSEI came to pick me up at the airport. He helped me settle and get into my apartment, which I had already made arrangements for before I arrived.

It is anxious to change your known environment and start adapting to a new place because no one knows whether you'll get accepted or it'll take them time to adjust to your presence. But at the end of it all, both parties need time to adjust.

5.3. TAKE ADVANTAGE FOR THE FUTURE

Make sure you come back with certificates from different courses or experiences (curricular and extra-curricular) that you might have had. Memories, contacts from peers or professors that you have met may also be valuable in the future. Also consider these contacts for future recommendation letters that you may need for an internship, postgraduate programme or job.

Take advantage of the future: many companies, institutions and graduate programmes value stays abroad positively.

The benefits of my experience

I am absolutely certain that my experiences in my academic exchanges have contributed and will continue to contribute a great deal to my academic profile and my curriculum vitae. I am about to enter a very good graduate programme in the area of Development Economics. The process until I got in has been complicated and competitive, but I am sure that my experience and education in Chicago through my exchange programme has been a key factor.

Future plans

My Erasmus+ engagement was my first academic experience abroad. While in the beginning I was hesitant, it became one of my best experiences. I experienced a different academic environment, made friends, visited places, practiced my language skills, and so much more. This rounded experience, and not only the academic activities, drove my interest to pursue additional studies abroad. I followed up my Erasmus+ with a Master's degree in a foreign university, which led to international career opportunities. I also used the experience of communicating and working effectively in an international environment to develop future professional networks throughout Europe.

Becoming productive

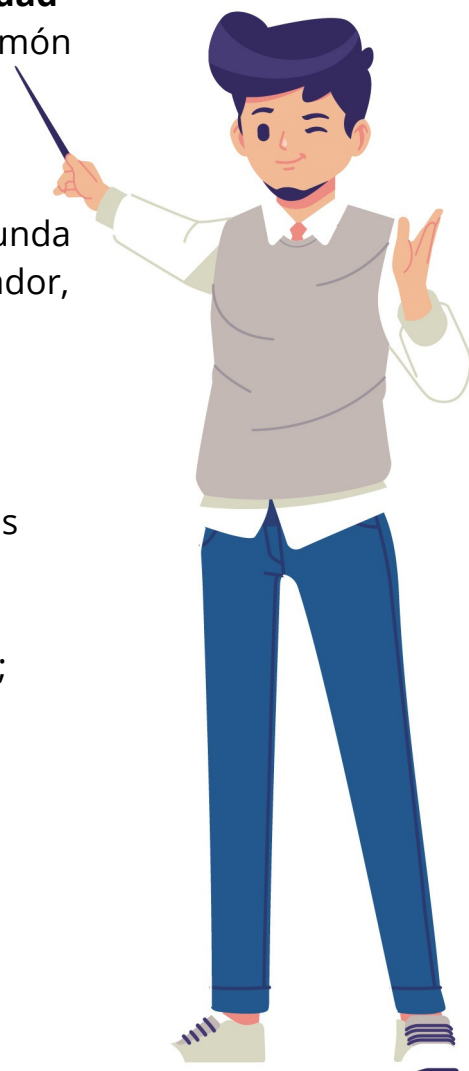
Albert Einstein was one of the great intellects of our time. Throughout his life, he never stopped being curious and never stopped learning. As brilliant as he was, he always learned from his past, asked questions and looked forward to the future. One of his famous quotes, and one he believed in and lived every day, was:

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning.” - Albert Einstein

After completing studies, you need to think outside the box. If you can't find your dream job, why not create it by setting up your own company? Perhaps you have a great business idea or believe that your final-year project has commercial potential. If so, putting your entrepreneurial skills to the test could be a smart move.

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