

Report: Erasmus Experience, Masaryk University

From September 2017 to January 2018 I studied at Masaryk University's Faculty of Law in Brno, Czech Republic. There are a significant number of courses available in English at the faculty (available [here](#)) spreading over a diverse range of subjects but typically from an international or European legal perspective. The expectations placed on Erasmus students are not very intense, and for some students this can serve as a welcome time to focus on other areas of your professional or personal development. However, the ability to undergo a self-taught study of the materials is more than possible if you are interested. There is always some form of attendance rule, but otherwise you can expect to study about 5 hours per course for exams. It is noteworthy that the classrooms are not as engaging as we are used to (i.e. little critical analysis or discussion) at the RUG.

Courses

In terms of specific courses, I enjoyed European Private International Law the most. This is not a substantive issue I am particularly interested in, but the lecturers (Klára Drličková and Tereza Kyselovská) themselves make it worthwhile. They use many case examples and have a wonderful structure to the course with clear guidelines. It is perfect to build on what we learned in Civil Procedural Law in year 2.

I also took two environmental law courses: 1) EU Environmental Law and 2) International and Czech Environmental Law, for which there were only 1 open-book exam each, plus a short presentation. The courses had interesting substance, but I did regret taking both of them because there was much overlap - I would hence recommend choosing one or the other.

In addition, I also took Competition Law and Policy, the course I looked most forward to. This course is known as the most demanding of all the Erasmus law courses, since it requires a 15-page essay and an exam, but is highly worth it if you are interested in competition law. Professor Josef Bejček, former Dean of the Faculty of Law and current head of the commercial law department, has published hundreds of articles and is a great mind to learn from.

My final two courses, International Criminal Law, and International Law in International Tribunals and Domestic Courts, were both with Professor Kateřina Uhlířová - an extremely experienced, passionate scholar and practitioner. Both courses are graded on the basis of a short essay.

These 6 courses collectively added up to 36 ECTS - taking an extra course (or several) is really no problem in terms of workload. It is more than possible to score the highest grade (A) in all courses. For exchange students, all teachers provide an option to write the exam the last week of classes (December), meaning you can leave for good before the winter holidays if you want. There are an additional two or three dates provided in January.

Finances

A key reason I chose to live in Brno was in light of the fact that it is a very affordable option. It is perhaps one of the best 'values' I could find in terms of the classification it is given of the three tiers for the Erasmus scholarship and the overall price levels. The student accommodation is extremely cheap, though I lived off campus in a reasonable location and still paid 33% less rent than in Groningen. As for food: this is where you will see the greatest price difference. It often seemed cheaper to go to the restaurant than cook at home. This is the most ideal city I have yet seen for vegetarians or vegans, as there are plenty of plant-based restaurants in Brno where you can get a meal for about 3 euro. The Brno public transport is incredible, with trams and (very late) night buses, and a 3-month transport pass was available for about 30 euro through a discount arranged by the university. The Czech government also surprises you with a bonus 100 euro for your exchange, you just need to open a Czech bank. Important: when withdrawing from the ATM you will be given an option to accept the transaction with or without the bank's standard conversion rate – always choose without!

Other factors

The social element is the part that was perhaps most difficult for me. My personal observations led me to believe that the easiest way to make friends is by living in student housing. The ESN group is not quite as

active as the Groningen chapter but does host weekend trips and country presentations. One great thing they do is arrange for a local to meet you at the train or bus station when you first arrive in Brno, and they will help you with bags to your apartment.

Regarding employment, if you are interested in working I recommend finding a law firm and asking them if they could use some help, particularly with English proofreading. They employ many Czech law students because they must gain practical experience before passing the Czech bar. I worked at a commercial firm and it was a great way to meet friends, gain skills, and see what junior lawyers do. It is worth noting that the Czech minimum wage is rather low – it has been raised from 55 to 73.20 czk (about 3 euros) as of January 2018.

Finally, if you are a student with certain accessibility needs, Masaryk has a wonderful department called the 'Teiresias Centre' who will happily meet with you and find the most appropriate solution.