

I did my compulsory semester abroad in Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. My principal idea was to pick a university in Central Europe. What made me choose Masaryk University was mainly the wide range of courses offered to exchange students. In addition, I had previously been to Brno and was left with the impression that it is a vibrant city, rich in history and culture, and with a lot of young people living and visiting.

Study programme

As already mentioned, the university offers a great choice of subjects in foreign languages (English and German). The current course catalogue can be found [here](#). Most of the courses are worth 4, 5, or 6 ECTS, so in order to complete the 30 ECTS requirement, one needs to take 5-6 of them. Even though this sounds like a lot compared to the 2 courses at a time in Groningen, the average amount of studying per week is actually way smaller (around 20 hours per week outside of lectures/seminars). There are two reasons for this: first of all, the courses are stretched over a longer period of time, and second, the material covered in some of them is way less than in others. Usually, each course has one seminar per week which, depending on the tutor's preferences, is either a one-sided lecture or also includes discussions. There are, in addition, the so-called 'intensive' courses which last only a week, contain 3-4 lectures overall, and end with a final examination or a written submission in the end of that week.

Examinations take place in the final weeks of the semester (usually before Christmas). There is no separate exam period – they take place during regular lecture hours. However, many of the subjects do not use examinations as a method of grading. I, for example, took 5 courses, but only had 2 exams. Instead, oral presentations, written submissions, or other types of projects are being considered when determining a final grade. What is more, many subjects do not provide a final grade, but only a pass/fail. What I found odd about this was that in many cases, the amount of study material did not correspond to the final method of grading. For example, a course which required 3 essays and a presentation only provided a pass/fail, while a course with a single, multiple-choice examination in the end provided a full grade. All of these details, however, are laid down in the course descriptions, so one has the ability to consider them before choosing a particular course.

Language

Most of the courses offered to exchange students are in English (there are some in German and, of course, Czech). Not all tutors are entirely fluent in English, but this does not obstruct the study process (the only problem I have come across on a few occasions is when asking a tutor about something which is not strictly in line with the material; sometimes, some of them might have a difficulty answering side questions). With regards to language courses, there is a free Czech course for beginners available to exchange students. There are also courses in various other languages, but they are paid.

Outside of the university, the language barrier is more apparent. The larger part of the population does not speak English, so one might have some misunderstandings in stores and other public places from time to time. People do, however, often speak German and if one has the good wish and some patience, communication is rarely impossible.

Finance and other conditions

Life in the Czech Republic is cheaper in comparison with the Netherlands. On average, a person needs less than 300 Euro per month (excluding accommodation and the related bills; for more information on those, refer to section **Housing**).

There are no additional costs to the host university. The application procedure is extremely simple – on the day of admission (the first compulsory meeting at the university where all general information is provided), students are given small forms to complete and hand in at the end of the event.

Residence requirements for the Czech Republic are similar to those in the Netherlands. The only obligation upon citizens of the European Union is to register in the police department responsible for foreigners (located on Cejl 712/62B; this address is nowhere to be found in the information booklets provided by the university).

Preparation and contacts with the faculty abroad

During the process of choosing courses and preparation of the learning agreement, the law faculty at Masaryk University is quite responsive – one can find contacts of the tutors in the course descriptions and they are ready to answer any questions in relation to the course

they are teaching. In addition, the exchange coordinators answer quickly to any issue which might arise in the process.

One downside of the course application process is that courses fill up extremely quickly and not all tutors are willing to grant exceptions to students who have applied after the limit of a particular course has been reached. Therefore, my advice is to apply for courses as soon as you receive credentials for the online portal of the university, in order to avoid changing courses later, as the process is very complicated and tiring.

Housing

Masaryk University is offering accommodation in 3 dormitories. In general, two people are sharing a room, the bathroom is shared between two such rooms and the kitchen facilities are shared between several rooms. The monthly rent for the dormitories is considerably lower than for a private accommodation. In addition, one of the three buildings is situated right next to the Faculty of Law. Another benefit of living in university accommodation is that one gets the chance to stay in touch with a lot of students, providing for a better social life.

Personally, I chose to stay in a private accommodation. Finding one is a considerably easy task – there are several websites with housing announcements, as well as a few groups on Facebook. In general, the average monthly rent in Brno is lower than in the Netherlands. Additional costs (water, electricity, etc. – around 90 Euro per month) are usually included in the monthly rent, so one does not need to deal with them separately.

Guidance / reception at host university

In the beginning of the semester, there is an orientation week. It has all kinds of events, some of which are compulsory. The most important of them is the Admission in which general information about the university is provided, as well as a to-do list for incoming exchange students. The different faculties organize introductions as well. There are also voluntary social events which have as an aim to get students to know each other before the academic year starts. Furthermore, there are social events both in the beginning and throughout the semester, organized by student associations. In general, one has the chance to have a good social life.

The exchange coordinators are able to provide guidance both to issues related to the university and outside of it. As already mentioned, they are quite responsive and helpful. They can be reached in person during their office hours, but also via email/phone (for emergencies) at any other time.

Culture, free time and travelling

Brno and its surroundings are offering a great deal of natural, historical and cultural sites. There are quite a few churches and castles which one could visit. In addition, there are constantly changing art exhibitions. There are also many concerts and fests on the main squares in town.

There is plenty of free time since most of the lectures and seminars take place in the beginning of the week, so days off towards the end of it are not unusual. Therefore, one has many opportunities to travel and explore the country, as well as Central Europe as a whole. Brno is a main connecting point of the Czech Republic, so it is really well off logistically. What is more, travelling by bus or train is extremely cheap.

In conclusion, the combination of the town and the university makes for a great setting for a semester abroad and I would recommend it to future exchange students.