

Exchange experience National University of Ireland, Galway, Fall 2019

Study period: 1st semester

Start date study abroad: 01.09.2019

End date: 20.12.2019

Did you follow a language course: No

Courses completed at the host university:

1. Commercial Law
2. Company Law
3. Comparative Competition Law
4. Irish Legal System
5. Legal and Business Ethics
6. Information Technology law

I chose the National University of Ireland, Galway as my exchange place for specific reasons. I wanted to study in a country where English is the main language, as well as I wanted to take courses that are more focused on business.

Culture, Free time, Travelling

However, I would first like to talk about the city of Galway. Galway is a vibrant city filled with students, very much alike to Groningen. Even though Galway has evolved into a major Western city within Ireland in the last couple of decades, it was historically a smaller town. This results in buzzing city center which still has a coastal town's charm to it. As the Western part of Ireland is fairly far from the capital Dublin, one could assume that Galway is in the middle of nowhere. This is actually the case, but in the positive sense. The city of Galway is surrounded by the most authentic and original regions of Ireland, while Galway is still a very international city at the core of these areas. Galway is host to some of the best places in the whole country so spend quality travel time. Single day trips can be taken to the breathtaking Connemara, Aran Islands, and Cliffs of Moher, while weekend trips can be made to Dublin, Cork, Belfast and many more.

Reception and Guidance at the Host University

NUIG has an intensive program to make newcomers well-informed and prepared. The first couple of days are all centered around getting everyone ready for the semester. International students have thorough info sessions both on a university and a faculty basis. Sports clubs and societies also have their introduction days which motivates one to try new things. This last aspect is definitely something that is missing from Groningen. Many people joined random clubs and societies in order to try new things, this helped a lot with integration as well.

Language

Irish people all speak English as their first language, the university of 100% English-speaking. However, the native language of Irish people can be studied for free and exchange students are encouraged to do so. One can also work on their English academic writing with free courses provided by the university.

Finance

Prices are generally the same as in the Netherlands. Therefore, for groceries one can calculate with roughly the same expenses. Many books can be rented from the library for short periods of time, and many teachers just upload study materials, so one would not need to buy many books. The biggest expense one will have is housing.

Housing

Although I was staying in the University's dormitory, it is not an exaggeration to say that there is a housing crisis in Galway. Prices are exorbitant, places are few and landlords can be a problem. However, if I went again I would still try this option first, since the student residences cost me approx. €3000 for the 4 months. Private housing is still cheaper. If someone still decided to take student accommodation, I would suggest not taking Corrib Village because of its bad quality, only if one wants to be in the center of student life at all times, then Corrib Village is the place to be.

Study Program

Since all first semester only courses were 5 ECTS, I took 6 courses, most of which were business related and definitely belonged to the hard ones. Exchange student can generally choose from a large pool of subjects, but some are offered only to ones staying for the whole year which limits this number quite significantly. The lecture-seminar system is mostly like in Groningen, two 45 minute lectures per week, plus seminar depending on the subject. In general, the study period is less demanding in my opinion than in Groningen, even though people tend to have more classes per week. No matter what courses one takes, by far the biggest issue with this exchange spot is the exam period. All my courses required me to write a 2-hour test at the end of the semester, which meant 6 exams. Normally local students at the end of the first semester take 2-3 exams, since many courses extend to the second semester, so exams for those take place after that. This meant that I had to write 6 exams in 10 days, once I had 2 exams on the same day.

Regardless of the minor issues with housing and the exam system, I would very much suggest Galway as an exchange place. It is the most student-oriented city in the country which offers a very active student life to everyone, while the National University of Ireland still provides top quality academic teaching and a tsunami of opportunities for personal growth.