

Exchange experience report Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

My study programme

During my exchange semester, I was studying in Brno (Czech Republic) at the Masaryk University, which was my first choice. I chose it based on the reports I read online and also the opinion of a friend of mine who also spent her exchange semester there. I must say that what attracted me the most was the great variety of courses in English language offered by the university, most of which are not included in our LLB programme. Personally I took 6 courses: Racism and the Law, EU Basics of Environmental Law, European Cyberlaw, European Labour Law, Compared Constitutional Law and Politics and European Court of Human Rights and Family Law. Although all interesting subjects, some of them were last minute choices as the list of courses provided for the autumn semester was not updated and they kept cancelling courses or moving them to the spring semester. I would advise to always keep an eye on the list you find on their website and keep in mind that it might change until the first 2 weeks of September.

Most of the courses available are 4 to 6 ECTS, therefore it is advisable to choose a course not only according to your personal interests but also according to the amount of credits. There are 3 assessment methods: the traditional exam that can be graded from A to F, the pass/fail examination, and the so-called "Kolloquium" which is also a pass/fail but usually consists in presenting some topic in front of the class.

The level of study in Brno, although lower and easier compared to Groningen, is overall quite good. I must say I was able to actually enjoy the subjects, instead of simply stressing myself out about assignments and final exams. It was a way more relaxing experience, a different approach. Also, the teachers are less strict about being late, attendance, or special circumstances that might prevent you from attending class. In the specific, I really enjoyed European Court of Human Rights and Family Law as we have never discussed in our LLB human rights related to the concept of family life and children. Our professor was very nice and always wanted all of us to actively participate and discuss in class, he was able to trigger our positions, to encourage analytical thinking. Also Cyberlaw was a very interesting subject, although I must say it was very specific and confusing, quite difficult to follow and to understand if you have no IT knowledge whatsoever like me.

Regarding the preparation for an exam, it really depends on the subject and on the teacher. For some courses the exams were very easy, like multiple choice questions or open book, while for other you were required to write a paper of 3000-5000 words or you had no tools to rely on during the exam. Also it is good to keep in mind that if you want to finish your exams before Christmas and January off, you should start studying in November because you might have 3 exams in the same week one after the other.

Language

All the subjects were in English, and the level of most of the teachers was good. Some of them, usually the oldest ones, had a very strong accent or a bad use of the language but it was still possible to understand and follow them.

Finance and other conditions

Brno is a very cheap city, like most of the Czech Republic. Living costs are obviously cheaper than in the Netherlands, and you may get the chance to buy some things for very low prices. For example rent is totally affordable and it may depend on the location within the city but it's usually between 100 and 250 for a room and 300-400 for a studio. Public transports are very cheap, you can get a quarterly student travel pass for approximately 25€ for all the means of transport 24/7. Taxis are also a cheap option but if you have a travel pass you won't need them as the city is well connected, no delays, and the buses are running also at night. There are many supermarkets around the city and groceries usually have affordable prices, not as high as the Netherlands, but not even that low, I found no significant difference between Czech prices and Italian prices, as I am from Italy. On the other side,

eating out in restaurants and pubs is way better than the Netherlands, not only because the food is better, but also because the costs are very low. Most of Czech people would rather go eating out than buying groceries and cook at home, but this really depends on your budget and on your lifestyle. The estimated costs per month I think would be 300-400, but not counting in the costs of travelling outside Brno.

It is wise to keep in mind that at your arrival or before if you prefer an online payment, you will have to pay for your student card. Eventually there is also the cost for the ESN card if you want to attend their events and get discounts.

Preparation and contacts with the faculty abroad

The Erasmus office of the Masaryk university and more in particular the Erasmus coordinator were absolutely amazing. They helped a lot of us in the first month, they were always nice and ready to solve your problem immediately. They always replied very fast to our emails and would always be very kind and clear in their answers.

Housing

I rented a single room in a flat shared with other 4 czech students. Although the house was nice and my room was really big and spacious, I initially was unhappy with my accommodation because at my arrival I found out that all the Erasmus students were living in student dorms. So, if you're a socially active person who enjoys having company, meeting new people, partying and you don't like being alone then I would definitely suggest applying for the student accommodation provided by the university. I felt like it would have been a better option for me. If you don't care about these social activities and you enjoy being by yourself then a private accommodation is recommended. I found my room through Facebook thanks to a student from Brno who was going to spend his exchange semester in Groningen, so we basically swapped rooms for 5 months. However, house hunting is very difficult in Brno especially if you don't speak Czech.

Guidance/Reception at host university

We attended an orientation week before starting our lessons, full of social events, fun activities, and also some meetings aimed at guiding us through the practical aspects of the exchange like documentation, learning agreement, enrolment for courses, how the student portal works etc. Just like in Groningen, the ESN takes care of the social activities like parties, volunteering, organized trips to local villages but also to other European cities.

Culture, free time and travelling

I truly loved Brno for its culture and strategic location. You can easily travel to many European destinations like Vienna, Budapest, Krakow and many others. Travelling within the country is very easy and cheap with the ISIC card you will receive from the university, you will get many discounts. Travelling outside Czech Republic is more expensive but in my opinion it was still very affordable. I travelled more in 4 months in Czech Republic than in 2 years in the Netherlands.