

Exchange experience report University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Autumn 2019

Exchange period : 1 October 2019 – 31 January 2020
Exam period : 8 December 2019 – 30 January 2020

Choosing to go to Slovenia for my exchange semester proved to be an extremely good decision. Its nature is incredible, and since it is landlocked by Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Italy, travelling to said countries is relatively easy. I recommend taking busses as trains in Slovenia usually take a long time due to the winding roads. I attended the Law Faculty of the University of Ljubljana during my exchange, which is the biggest and top-ranked university Slovenia located in its capital. The city is very small for a capital, thus making everything accessible by foot or bike, although public transportation is also readily available and cheap. As a student, you are able to get a 20-euro monthly subscription to use the bus in the city for as much as you want; however, if you manage to get a place to live in the city center like I did, this subscription is hardly needed.

The Faculty of the University sits comfortably in the city center, near the Ljubljana Castle, restaurant area and the main city square. Despite its central location, the faculty building is very modern and the staff are well-prepared for welcoming and accommodating Erasmus students. Almost everyone in (and outside) campus speaks a good level of English, so communication should not be a problem for Groningen students. Slovene people are generally very friendly as well, so do not be afraid of communicating with them. As for academics, all courses we took were tailored specifically for Erasmus students (hence taught fully in English with other Erasmus students only, unlike other faculties in the university) and are all 6 ECTS. I took the following courses:

1. Diplomatic and Consular Law

This course was my favorite one I took during my exchange. Most of the content we have learned in Groningen as part of Public International Law, but a little more in depth, especially in consular law. As part of this course, we had to undergo a Model United Nations (MUN) conference which I never had the chance to do in Groningen. It was daunting at first, but later on proved quite fun and I felt that it was really well-organized. During the conference, I also got to meet more Slovene students. I also took part in the non-compulsory 3-day trip to Vienna in December. We visited and had presentations from Schönherr Law Firm, the Slovenian mission to Austria, the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna and Sustainable Energy for All. The most exciting part, however, was the visit to the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in Vienna. During this visit, we had presentations from the International Atomic Energy Association and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Slovenia to the UN (the UN Office on Drugs and Crime was also scheduled, but cancelled at the last minute due to the presenter being sick). The only downside about this trip was that it was scheduled in the middle of exam period of Erasmus students as the organizers followed the Slovene students' exam period. The professor who taught this class was working for the UN Human Rights Committee, and is thus very experienced and enthusiastic about the subject, making the lectures more interesting to follow. The exam was oral and lasted for 15 minutes. As long as you review the materials taught in the lectures as well as maintain good composure and confidence throughout the exam, I think you will easily get a good mark.

2. Roman Law

This was easily the hardest course I took during my exchange and I regretted taking it a little bit. The materials to be learned for the exam was too much for a 6-credit course. Moreover, the professor was extremely demanding. The exam was written and lasted for approximately one hour. It was personally really hard for me as the questions were in my opinion very vaguely worded. Although I managed to pass, I would not recommend this course.

3. International and European Social Security Law

I took this course as it was never taught in Groningen. The course was mainly taught by the Dean of the Faculty and we had to present the social security systems of each of our countries of origin. The lectures were sometimes hard to follow and sometimes, there were few coordination between the teachers regarding the topics to be included in the exam materials. The reading required for this course is also quite a lot. However, I still found this course insightful. The exam was oral and was supposed to last for approximately 10 minutes depending on the knowledge shown by the student. The student will be asked 3 questions: 1 about comparative social security systems, 1 about international social security law, and 1 about European social security law. The hardest for me personally was the first question as we had to compare 2 social security systems and it was quite a lot to remember. However, even if you make a small mistake in 1 question and show that you have sufficient knowledge about the others, you can still easily attain a high mark.

4. Mergers, Acquisitions and Corporate Restructurings

This course was also fun to follow since it slightly departs from law, thus providing a little refresher from all the full legal courses. The professor used to be the president of a huge Slovene bank and is thus very knowledgeable about the subject. We focused more on Mergers and Acquisitions, as well as the due diligence of corporate lawyers. There were a few guest lectures from practicing lawyers which I found really interesting. Overall, the course was not that hard and the reading materials were easy to follow. The exam was written and comprised of 3 questions, which we were able to answer in bullet points.

5. International Criminal Law

This course was a little bit disappointing for me. The topics were interesting, such as the sexual autonomy and force feeding of detainees, but I felt that the teacher explained the topic so shallowly and left too much to the students. There were not a lot of concrete international law discussed and the course was more to comparative studies. Some students will get the chance to present on the topics and get a bonus point for the exam, which was written and lasted about an hour. This course did not require much effort or studying to pass.

All the exams for the courses had 2 attempts, the first in December and the second in January. If you passed the first time, then you cannot sit at the second exam. Keep in mind that you have to undergo at least 3 months of exchange to receive the grant, so you have to schedule at least 1 exam in January. It is not as hard to get a good grade as in Groningen, as long as you put in adequate effort. I usually study in the library of the Faculty and the National Library (for the latter, you have to pay 3 euros for a student subscription sufficient for the duration of your exchange, so it is convenient).

The daily lives in Slovenia is really cheap compared to the Netherlands. Students can register in the subsidized student meal system where they can have a bowl of soup, a salad, a main dish and desert and/or fruit for up to 5 euros only. You can use it in a lot of restaurants in

Ljubljana. All you have to do is register at the ESN office with your Slovene SIM card or mobile application. Some supermarkets such as Mercator and Spar are quite expensive (some things even cost more than in the Netherlands, eg. garlic), but cheaper supermarkets such as Lidl and Hofer are also available (there is a Hofer near the Faculty). Accommodation price varies - I live in a shared apartment in the center and it was relatively expensive, but if you manage to get a room in the dorms (which is quite hard), it will be really cheap. You can use public transport only if you have the public transportation card (1 ride costs 1.30 euros), but as mentioned before, they are rarely needed unless you live further out of the city. You can register with the public bike system that you can use almost anytime, but I rarely used them because I live in the center already. The annoying thing all exchange students have to go through is the Slovene bureaucracy. Since we are theoretically staying in Slovenia for more than 3 months, we have to apply for the residence permit at one of the government offices, and this takes up a lot of time. You would have to wait for hours since early morning to apply, wait for around a month for it to be done and wait for another set of long hours just to collect it, so make sure to get this done as soon as possible.

Overall, my exchange experience was pleasant. I got to meet new and memorable people, experience the beautiful nature, and gain new knowledge not previously covered in my studies in the Netherlands. I would highly recommend going here for exchange and I hope that you would have the same experience I did.