

Erasmus experience report for the semester abroad

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From the end of August 2018 until mid-December of the same year I stayed in Dublin, Ireland for my Semester abroad, being an obligatory part of the Master programme of European History at the HU Berlin which I am currently undertaking.

The receiving University of the Erasmus Programme was the University College Dublin which is located south of Dublin city centre. In contrast to the centre, the location of the University is marked by suburban characteristics. It is therefore significantly different from what one would normally associate with Dublin as a bustling and exciting small city. In contrast, the region of the University is rather calm and settled, which does not change when one goes even further south where I stayed. Parks, sports fields and the coastline with cliff walks are the main attractions for recreational activities. Fortunately enough, I managed to stay with a good friend of mine who is undertaking the same programme as me and we were able to stay at a small house with an older Irish man. Being a local and a well-known personality in his community, Seamus was always keen on giving us advice and helping us out wherever it was possible. He also used to cook traditional Irish dishes and bake brown bread for us while his house was also the home of students from many different countries. Thus, we had a truly Irish experience living with our host, while we also felt as part of an international community.

This sentiment of community was eventually even reinforced by the excellent support we received by Mr. William Mulligan, our academic coordinator at UCD. Whenever we had questions or doubts concerning our Learning Agreement, available courses or everyday problems, he was always ready to give us a hand and assist us. This was especially necessary as it was not always clear which courses we would be able to take and in the end, we had to entirely change our Learning Agreements. But after the initial confusion and with the help and assistance of Mr. Mulligan, our timetables were soon established.

Studying at UCD was different from my experience in Berlin in a variety of ways where the foreign language was only a small change. Having taken part in English speaking seminars a couple of times in Berlin, discussions in class and the composition of essays in English was not much of a challenge. The big difference however was the pace of the studies at UCD. With fixed deadlines for mid- and end-of-term papers, I can hardly imagine to have had a more productive semester in my academic career, spending almost six days a week in the library. While tiring, this was definitely a positive aspect for me. Unfortunately, it was in other areas where the UCD came a bit short. For once, the library was usually helplessly overcrowded, making it difficult to find an empty spot, especially when needing a socket to work on the laptop. At the same time, it was hard to get lunch on campus for affordable prices when one was not keen on having pizza or a subway sandwich every day. Other options existed but were too expensive to consider on a long-term basis. A real plus at UCD on the other hand was the gym and swimming pool on campus. The gym was entirely free of charge and the swimming pool was available for a fee off 100€ for the entire semester.

This was a rather small expense compared to the monthly costs of living in Dublin. Due to a severe housing crisis, single rooms in the city centre are hardly available or affordable, the cheapest option being around 700€ per month, while me and my friend were also offered to

pay the same each to share a room together. Our house in the south of Dublin was a one hour drive away from the city centre and a single room was still at 550€, which was even considered a bargain. In addition, public bus transport can be quite depressing sometimes due to unreliability and the fact that busses were often overcrowded and the drivers would not let anyone else get in. And the service was not cheap either at a monthly cost of 80€. A bike would have been a good option if the Irish weather would not be that unreliable. All in all, I guess I spent around 1100€ per month which could have been easily more had I not regularly cooked my meals for university at home or gone out for drinks more frequently.

That said, I would still recommend future Erasmus participants to stay in Dublin as it is a very lively, interesting and international city which has a lot to offer. And in the end, it was probably most of all the Irish population itself which compensated for so many of the issues of their city which they are dealing with on a daily basis. Their polite and sometimes even chatty attitude lit up some grim moments when waiting for another bus and visiting the many pubs, one can always expect random but pleasant encounters. At the same time, the international community gives everyone a niche where they can feel comfortable and at home.