

Student report; Exchange in Prague, the city of a hundred spires

General information

I studied in Prague in the Fall semester of 2015. The period started at the 14th of September and I had my last exam on the 18th of December. I studied at the Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze, in short the VŠE or just the University of Economics. The university is located in Žižkov (Prague 3) in Prague, the capital of The Czech Republic.

Preparation

I didn't need to do many preparations before I left for Prague. I didn't need a visa and my health and travel insurances would already cover my stay abroad. Arranging housing was also pretty easy for me. The university offers dorm rooms about 15 minutes by tram from the university campus. The dorms are located in an area with two big apartment buildings for exchange students and some Czech students and a few smaller buildings only for Czech students. The apartments have 2 bedrooms each with two beds, a very small kitchen, a bathroom, a toilet and a lot of closet space. You share the apartment with four, so this means you have a roommate. You can also ask for a single room, but the university can't guarantee that they have enough single rooms for everyone who wants one. I shared a room and it wasn't ideal but it wasn't too bad either. The biggest advantage of the dorms is that most exchange students live there, so it's easy to get to know new people. The rooms are very basic, but they have everything you need. Except for if you like to cook three course meals, because you only have two electrical jacks. You can also choose to look for your own apartment somewhere else in the city. This takes some more preparation and is also more expensive than the university dorms.

Arrival

I went to Prague by car with my parents. This was very easy because they could drop me off at the dorm entrance and I could take more stuff with me than if I would have taken a plane. The university in Prague will arrange a buddy for every exchange student that states that he or she wants one. My buddy was a Czech girl in the second year of her bachelor. The buddies are there to pick you up from the airport and take you to the dorms when you arrive. Because I came by car, I met my buddy at the dorms. She helped me register and helped me to get my stuff to the room. Registering was not hard at all. I only had to fill in some personal details and sign a form that I wouldn't destroy anything. It is very important to bring your passport for this, just your European ID card is not enough. My buddy showed me around Prague the first day after I arrived. The day after was the first day of the introduction week. I went there together with my buddy to register and then the first introductory lectures started. The first week is mostly informative lectures and some activities with the buddy system to get to know the city and the other exchange students. The weekend after introduction week is called icebreaking weekend. You go to some kind of camp house somewhere in the woods, two hours outside of Prague. We were there with about 50 exchange students and the active members of the buddy system who organized the weekend. We did some activities to get to know all the other students and there were some nice parties. The icebreaking weekend is not a mandatory part of the introduction week but I can really recommend participating. The Monday after, the first classes started.

Courses

When you get accepted to the university, you will get an email with a list of courses you can choose. This list of courses was much larger than I expected and although it's the university of economics, they also have a lot of non-economical courses. I just chose the courses that I thought I would like.

You get the opportunity to choose courses until after the first weeks of classes. So if you don't like one of your courses after the first lecture you can still change.

I incorporated all my courses in my elective space.

I chose these five courses:

Development economics (5 ECTS): the course was mostly about developing countries and why they are underdeveloped and how we could fix this problem. I found the course very interesting because of the importance of the subject and we talked about actual existing problems. The course was mostly based on actualities, models and a lot of scientific papers. The level of the course was about the same as of courses in Rotterdam

Economics and Psychology (4 ECTS): the course was about behavioural economics and also about the technical and practical implications of psychology in economics. This course was also mostly based on actualities, models and a lot of scientific papers. The level of the course was about the same as of courses in Rotterdam

European Politics in Comparative Perspective (3 ECTS): this course was about political systems in different European countries. It was also about democratization of Central and Eastern European countries. The course was pretty interesting, but I was a bit fooled by the name because I thought it would contain more information about the politics of the EU. The level of the course was a bit different because it was mostly studying dry information.

Introduction to Environmental Economics and Policy (6 ECTS) the course was about the increasingly important matter of what happens to the environment with economic activity and about the policy countries introduce for sustainable development. We also had make a short presentation. This was mostly explained through models and maths. The level of the course was a bit lower than courses in Rotterdam.

World Economy (6 ECTS) this course was about the interactions of the world economy. It was about the economic crises, international cooperation's and treaties and about the system of the European Union. I thought the course was very interesting, but it was a lot of theory to study. The course level was approximately the same as in Rotterdam.

Finances

The Czech Republic is a cheap country, compared to the Netherlands. But they don't use euros but Czech crowns (approximately 27 crowns= 1 euro) and I think you will spend money more easily because the value of the money there feels different. I still spent less in four months there, then I would have spent here in Rotterdam.

The rent of the dorms was about 350 euros for the whole semester. If you rent a room yourself somewhere not too far from the centre it's about 300-500 euros a month.

Groceries are also not very expensive, but I didn't cook much because of the small kitchen. Eating out in Prague is very cheap, as long as you don't go to the touristic restaurants in the centre. You can get a good meal with a drink for less than 10 euros.

Public transport isn't expensive either. You get some documents at the first day of introduction and if you take them with you to the train station to buy a ticket, you get a student discount. A public transport card for tram, bus and metro with a student discount is about 35 euros for 3 months.

I spent most money on weekend trips to for example Berlin, Vienna, Bratislava and Oktoberfest. These trips cost about 200 euros.

I bought a sim card for my phone at O2 with internet. This cost me about 25 euros a month.

Gyms in Prague are pretty expensive, especially for a short period. The university has a gym that isn't expensive but it's not a very big gym and they don't have a lot of equipment. I did take a gym membership at pure jatomy fitness for about 120 euros for 3 months.

Daily life

Daily student life in Prague is very different from daily life in Rotterdam. The atmosphere in the group of exchange study is very social because almost everyone who comes there doesn't know anyone when they get there. That's why you get very close with people there, very fast.

Prague is a very beautiful and dynamic city with its bridges, old buildings and trams everywhere. There is a lot of cultural stuff to do because the city has such a rich history. Prague is also full of nice restaurants, cosy bars and big clubs. You will never get bored.

Every Tuesday, the buddy system organized a party for all exchange students. Czech students from the university came here too. These parties were really cool because they were at a different location in the city each time. This was a very nice way to see the social life of Prague.

The buddy system also organized other events and trips, but I mostly organized my own trips.

Another organization, student zone, also organizes parties and trips for all exchange students of all universities in Prague.

I think going on exchange will always be a great experience no matter where you go. But I can really recommend Prague because it is a beautiful city with a university that is perfect for exchange students.