

# Abroad in Milan: An Experience to Cherish

## General Information

Going on an exchange during the third year of my bachelor Econometrics was one of the best choices I made. It should be a real no brainer to do if you get the opportunity. Not only can you incorporate courses into your current curriculum, but you will have an amazing time abroad which will be greatly valued by future employers. I did my semester abroad at the Bocconi University in Milan, Italy: which started on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September and ended on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2016. I arrived two weeks earlier in Milan due to the start of an Italian Crash Course at the university and left the day before Christmas. Bocconi University is a destination I cannot recommend highly enough, it has a great international atmosphere and reputation, lots of international students, a very active international student organization, plenty of interesting courses and best of all: situated in a great city in Italy. You will not regret choosing Milan as your destination.

## Preparations

Planning to go on exchange requires you to make several decisions. You should not be worried too much about this, as the process is gradually over time and well explained by the university. They will take care of the administrative and organizational affairs. The major choice you have to make is choosing a destination. Your first stop should be a visit to the exchange information market organized by the university, this will give you a good impression about locations and the idea of an exchange in general. I advise everyone to read all the student reports of destinations that might interest you. One of the main reasons I chose Milan was that I wanted to travel through Italy and experience Italian culture. I therefore suggest, when searching for destinations, to take into account any nearby cities/countries you would like to visit during your time abroad. Important to note is that some universities have different semester dates than the Erasmus university has, which may cause conflicts in your schedule upon return. Finally don't care too much about wanting to go outside of Europe, as every destination abroad will be an unforgettable experience.

I heard at the beginning of February 2016 that I was selected at Bocconi University for the fall semester 2016/2017. In the months leading up to the semester, Bocconi informs you by email about your exchange with various links to their website and the tasks you should carry out. There is a specific time period in May, in which you should register on Bocconi's website. This includes uploading your personal information/documents, signing up for the Italian Crash Course/Follow Up Course and subscribing for one of the rooms in the Bocconi dorms.

I signed up within 1 hour and 30 minutes after the application opened, but did not get a room in one of Bocconi's dorms. The period between signing up for a room and actually hearing if you get one of the rooms takes up an incredible two months. I therefore had to search for private accommodation, which I started doing in July. This turned out to be incredibly hard in Milan. Some of the frequent problems I came across were: landlords only accepting renters who will stay longer than 6 months, non-responding landlords at all and incredibly high service fees. As I did not want to stay in a hostel when I would arrive in Milan, I contacted DoveVivo, a real estate agent, directly. They had a room for €590 in the neighbourhood Lorenteggio, which I eventually took. Although it was relatively far away from the university, the room was in an area with many supermarkets, shops and good public transport connections (even at night). Afterwards I heard that all the rooms in the Bocconi dorms were gone within half an hour after the website opened. I would therefore suggest anyone, who does not complete the online booking within the first 20 minutes after it opens, to look for private accommodation right away. The areas you should consider first are Navigli, the area around Bocconi and the south side of the city centre. If you can't find anything within these areas, then make sure you book a room with a proper public transport connection during the day and night. I would sincerely recommend you to take a room with air-conditioning, as the average temperature in August and September is well over 30 degrees Celsius. For private accommodations and other matters you need an Italian fiscal code in Italy. You can get it for free at the Italian embassy in the Netherlands or in any Italian city. If you don't get one, the agency will often charge you a fee. Furthermore make sure you have some extra passport photos, as they are needed for your public transport card among others. Last but not least, I would discourage the real estate agency (DoveVivo) I used, as they work inefficient and are disorganized.

## Arrival

I arrived in Milan on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August by car with my parents. After I got the keys from my new room, I had to purchase a phone subscription and a public transport card. A prepaid mobile phone subscription in Italy is relatively inexpensive. There are three providers: TIM, Wind and Vodafone. They all charge roughly the same, so I would take a brand store closest to your home. I paid €10 a month for 3GB of 4G data and 300 international minutes (meaning you can call to numbers outside of Italy without extra costs) at Vodafone. The public transport card for students only costs €22 a month and provides unlimited use to all public transport services. Public transport in Milan is great, busses and metros depart every few minutes and there is an extensive night service. You can get your personal card only at offices of the ATM (Azienda Trasporti Milanese), which are located at certain metro stations. I would suggest you go to the office at the Duomo metro station, as it is in the centre of Milan. I highly recommend you to take the public transport card. You can rent bicycles in Milan as well using the BikeMi program, which has multiple pick-up and storage points throughout the city. However cycling in Milan might not be the best idea, the roads have lots of cracks in them and car drivers seem to think you are invisible. On top of that, you cannot rent the bicycles at night.

After I organized these matters, I had to go to Bocconi to attend my Italian crash course and pick up my student card. I sincerely enjoyed the crash course, which lasted about two weeks. You learn some basic Italian which proved very helpful in daily life to me. I would definitely recommend everyone to do it, as it also provided a great opportunity to meet other exchange students and hang out with them in the first couple of weeks. I did do the follow-up course as well, but this was a bit of a let-down. In hindsight, I would have only taken the crash course, although this was largely a consequence of the teacher we got for the follow up course.

The university, together with ESN Bocconi, organizes lots of events at the beginning of the semester to meet other international students. The sheer number of other exchange students makes it a very international environment, where it is easy to meet up with new people. I advise everyone to attend as many of these events at the beginning of the semester, as students will be there with an open mind to meet new people; it thereby provides you with a perfect opportunity to make your first friendships. Furthermore I suggest to come to Milan at least a week before your semester starts, as many students are already there and will meet up (using Facebook) at bars in Navigli to get to know each other.

## Courses

One can find all the courses taught at Bocconi online on their website. In the description of each course you can find a brief overview of the courses' content, details on examination and available classes. Pay attention to the fact that the course guide of the corresponding year will only be updated about a month before selecting your courses. The website to select your courses opens two weeks before they start and places are done by first come first serve basis, so be on time. I chose to do 5 courses, so I could fail one without consequences as I needed 24 ECTS. They are listed below:

Long Term Investments: Finance & Management – 6 ECTS

This was a new course at Bocconi and was taught by Giovanni Tempini and Veronica Vecchi. It revolved around the important role investors play in the economy and specifically focused on the investments done by banks, public organizations and companies. The teacher, Giovanni Tempini turned out to be a former CEO of an Italian bank and used his skills and experience to give some unique insight views on banks and investors in general. There were many guest speakers present in this course, who were highly placed figures and personal contacts of professor Tempini. Among others the vice president of the European Investment Bank, CFO of Eni and the CEO of Cassa Depositi e Prestiti. There were two projects to be handed in by teams of 4 people, each consisting out of 20% of your total grade. The course was not hard, but did take some time because of the assignments. I would definitely recommend this course.

Alternative Investment – 6 ECTS

The course treats four different modules, all related to alternative investments. They are real estate, art, financial instruments and hedge funds. The course is taught by two professors and numerous guest speakers

are present for each module. No book is required, all the information is on the slides. There are two options to choose to do the exam. You can take the full exam of 32 questions in December or two midterms of each 16 questions. I would choose the latter one. There is also the option to do an assignment which will eliminate some wrong answered questions on the exam. I thoroughly enjoyed this course. The topics were interesting and the guest speakers were outstanding. The course was not challenging to pass, but getting a high grade was difficult.

#### Leadership Skills – 6 ECTS

The course was aimed at explaining what a good leader should do in certain situations and what the characteristics of leaders should be. I thought the course was alright, but I was not thrilled about it. If you have an interest in psychology I would recommend this course, otherwise I would choose something different. The course was easy to pass. You get three exams throughout the semester, of which only the two highest scoring exams count. Furthermore you have to make a group assignment and present it in class. The group assignment took a lot of time, as it involved searching for scientific papers.

#### Public Finance – 6 ECTS

The course public finance was taught by Massimo Anelli and aimed at introducing and explaining public tasks, such as healthcare, education, social benefits, etc. There was a large emphasize during this course on the United States in terms of the topics discussed. The courses consisted out of two midterms or a final exam. Although the subjects were interesting on paper, I did not enjoy this course. The classes missed discussion and the teacher couldn't interest me during the lectures. However the course was easy to pass and didn't have any group assignments. I would recommend this course only for non-attending students.

#### Management of Fashion Companies – 6 ECTS

I chose this course because of the link between fashion and the city Milan and the positive reviews about it in student reports of the past couple of years. The course gives an inside into the fashion industry, it explains the history and development of the industry in different countries. Furthermore it discusses the industry as a whole and spends several classes on certain brands (e.g. Ray-Ban, Chanel, LVMH, etc.). Several classes were given by guest speakers, who talked about their profession in the fashion industry or their relation to it. I thought this course was alright, but nothing special. Subjects discussed in class did not interest me and the link with the city of Milan was not present. Furthermore, there was a large group assignment you had to do, which took up a lot of time. The final exam however was easy to pass.

#### Finances

According to the student reports I read, Milan would be a rather expensive cities. Although that is certainly true for certain aspects, i.e. housing, going out to clubs, most matters were comparable or even cheaper than in the Netherlands. I would say that supermarkets cost roughly the same in Italy as in NL, while phone subscriptions, public transport, going out to dinner are less expensive. Below I made a balance sheet with my income and expenses each month. Going on an exchange is not cheap, but it is definitely worth it.

Income		Expenses	
Erasmus Grant	€270.00	Rent	€690.00
Public Transport Reimbursement	€89.07	Public Transport	€22.00
		Groceries	€150.00
		Phone subscription	€10.00
		Travel	€100.00
		Expenses made by going to a club, dinner, bar etc.	€150.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>€359.07</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>€1122</b>

## Daily Life

Living in Milan during my exchange was great and has to be one of the best experiences of my life. During my stay I enjoyed the open Italian culture, all the beautiful towns surrounding Milan and the nice summer weather in the first months while having air conditioning in my own room. Although Milan is not the prettiest city of Italy, you soon will look past that. It is a very dynamic city with its own charm. Furthermore Milan is famous for its vivid nightlife and that reputation isn't based on lies. It has some of the best clubs I have been to and is more upscale than Rotterdam. They are also a lot more expensive than in Rotterdam. You usually pay an entrance fee and drinks will cost you €10. However, the ESN card, provides you with a great deal each day for a different famous club in the city. I do suggest everyone to experience Milan and the cities laying around it. There are plenty of travel opportunities in the weekends and the transportation to get you there is well organized and relatively inexpensive for students. You can get the Cartafreccia for students from TrentItalia, which will give you a 50% discount on all trains, except the regional ones. During my stay I travelled to Cinque Terre, Turin, Bologna, Parma, Florence just to name a few, but don't forget about smaller cities in the neighbourhood like Brescia and Bergamo. As Italy, according to me, has one of the greatest cultures in the world, I would recommend everyone to truly experience life in the city. I, for example, always drank coffee at the same café in my neighbourhood which resulted in knowing all the employees. I also recommend to visit a market sometime in the weekend, as it has some great deals and it is just fun to walk around. I lived in a house with 8 other students, of which 6 were Italians. The fact that so many were Italians was not a problem at all. They speak English pretty well, were welcoming and open to everyone and they even tried learning me how to cook (although I thought my cooking skills were already great). I even travelled with some of them. Although 9 people in a house probably sounds a lot, during an exchange it only has benefits. I would never be alone when I came home and there was always someone to play sports with or go to the city centre. I would discourage you to look for a studio. The great thing about Bocconi university is its large number of international students and its active community, including many activities on campus and an international student organization who organizes events and trips throughout the semester. The whole experience has made me more independent and mature. It also changed my perspective on certain matters, as it opens and broadens your views. If you choose to do your exchange at Bocconi in Milan I can guarantee you that you will not regret it! If you do have any questions I will gladly be willing to talk to you about it, you can send an email to [dvahagenbeek@hotmail.com](mailto:dvahagenbeek@hotmail.com).



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