

La Rossa, la Dotta e la Grassa

Living in Bologna, the culinary capital of Italy

General information

The last four months I have studied at the University of Bologna (L'Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna) in Bologna, Italy. I arrived in the end of August and I left Bologna in the end of December, just before Christmas.

Preparation

The preparation for my exchange was quite easy. I didn't need to arrange a visa or prove my level of English. After I got nominated by the Erasmus University, I only needed to confirm my personal details and then I got accepted immediately by the University of Bologna. I wanted to do an Italian language course (5 ECTS) at the University and I had to apply for this course in August. You should check regularly when the applications for this course open, because it's very popular, and apply as soon as possible.

The only big difficulty in my preparation was the arrangement of my accommodation. The University of Bologna doesn't arrange your accommodation, so you have to arrange it all by yourself. The university does mention some agencies and organizations that can help you, like SAIS, but in my experience those agencies are busy and the rooms they provide are expensive and most of the time outside the center. My first advice is: start looking for accommodation immediately! I started looking in the end of May/beginning of June and I think I found my room in the end of June. There are several websites you can use:

- <http://bologna.bakeca.it/>
- <http://www.housinganywhere.com>
- <http://www.flatme.it>
- <http://www.easystanza.it>
- <http://www.uniplaces.com>
- <http://www.kijiji.it/>
- <http://www.facebook.com>

After two weeks of looking around and responding on at least thirty advertisements without any response back, I felt a little desperate and I decided to change my strategy. Instead of responding on advertisements, I started to place my own advertisements, so people could send me a message if they had a room for me. People barely speak English in Bologna, so it's important that you also put the advertisement online in Italian. This is not so complicated: just look at the other advertisements and use some of the Italian you already know/Google Translate. It's very common in Bologna to share a room, this is called a doppia and it's quite cheap. However, I really wanted to have a room for myself, so I had to look for a singola (put this in the top of your message, because otherwise you get a lot of reactions from people who want to offer you a bed (un posto letto) in a doppia. You should look for a room in the historic center (centro storico), inside the city walls (dentro murri). (The faculty of Economics is at Via Zamboni, so you can also check on the map if the offered room is nearby Via Zamboni).

I lived next to Piazza Santo Stefano and this was perfect, because the university and the Due Torri were within 5/10 minutes walking distance. I was very lucky with my room: it was a big singola in the middle of the historic center and I only paid €350,- (€380,- including gas, water and light). However, a lot of my friends weren't so lucky, because they started to late with looking for a room and they ended up with an expensive room quite far from the center. I even heard of people who were 'homeless' until October, because there are so many Erasmus students in Bologna and they are all looking for a room at the same time, while most Italian people don't want Erasmus students in their apartments, because they only stay for a short period and they party a lot. Therefore it's very important to start looking for a room on time!

In the end, I didn't find my room at the websites I mentioned before, but I found it on Facebook. There are many Facebook groups you can join:

- Affittasi!!!!!!!!!! Offro/cerco casa a BOLOGNA
- Bologna affitto studenti e/o lavoratori
- Bologna Rentals: Housing (rooms and flats), affitto stanze appartamenti
- Erasmus Bologna 2017/2018
- ESN Bologna - Official Erasmus Bologna Group 2017/2018

I posted advertisements in those Facebook groups and I got a lot of reactions from people who were offering a room. You should however be very careful, because there are also people who got skimmed via Facebook. I skyped with the girl who offered me the room and she showed me the apartment, while we were skyping, and she and the other flatmate added me on Facebook, so I could do a Facebook check. I didn't have to pay rent until I arrived in Bologna and I had actually seen the room, so I could be sure that it really was there. I think that that is the most important thing to remember if you find a room via Facebook: don't pay rent or a deposit before you can actually see the room in real life!

Arrival

I arrived at the 28th of August, because I had to do an in-take conversation for the Italian language course at the 1st of September. You have to go to the in check-office for incoming exchange students: Palazzina della Viola at Via Filippo Re 4, and there you have to give them a photograph, so they can make a student card. They tell you when your welcome session is at the University and at this session they tell you everything you need to know and they give you a big information package and the student card. There are three organizations for exchange students in Bologna: ESN, Erasmusland and ELBOO. I became a member of all of them, so I could join all of the activities and parties and trips. They start with activities in the first week of September and I immediately participated in the first activity, the Beach Trip of ESN, and I can recommend this, because here you get to know a lot of people. The organizations also organize city tours in the first weeks and other activities and parties. At the language course you can also get to know other exchange students. Besides the welcome session however, the university didn't really organize other introducing activities.

Courses

Choosing courses was quite a challenge, since the new course guide was put online very late in August. Therefore I had to look in the old course guide and only in the end of September the teachers published the dates of the exams. Since I had to go home before Christmas and I was not planning to come back in January, because the Major courses in Rotterdam started on the 2nd of January, I only wanted to do courses that had exams in December. This was a challenge, since a lot of courses have their exams in January, but in the end (and after two changes in my Learning

Agreement) I found courses which had exams in December, because a lot of teachers are also willing to plan a special exam for Erasmus students in December. I used all my courses to incorporate them into my elective space.

Italian Language Course A1 (5 ECTS)

This course was an intensive language course of two weeks I took in the beginning of September. The course objective was to provide a basic knowledge of the Italian language. I can really recommend this course, because the teachers are very enthusiastic and I learned a lot during this course. It was really interactive and we had to talk a lot in Italian, so it was very useful. However, since it was a course for absolute beginners, it was less intensive than the higher level courses and I think I could have learned much more in the A2 course, because the A1 course was quite easy. Before coming to Bologna, you could prepare yourself with an Italian language course in the Netherlands (or an app like DuoLingo), so you can do the A2 course (or higher).

Introduction to Italian Culture (6 ECTS)

This course, meant for exchange students, was new in the curriculum of the university and the course objective was to provide a basic knowledge of the Italian culture. The idea was really nice: every week on Thursday night we had a lecture about a different part of the Italian culture from a different professor. Attendance was mandatory and you had to write a paper in the end of the course, but there was no exam, so the course was quite easy. However, the English of the teachers was very bad, so we could barely understand them, and the lectures were most of the time not so interesting and therefore I would not recommend this course.

Principles of Management (9 ECTS)

The objective of this course was to provide a basic knowledge of management (in particular Operations and Supply Chain Management). It was about the basic concepts within operations and supply chain management and these concepts were often described with cases. I think this course was interesting, because in Rotterdam I had never done a management course before, so it was something new for me. The teacher and book were good and I really gained more insight in operations and supply chain management. The level of the course was not so high, since it was a course for first year students, and a lot of concepts I already knew from previous courses at Erasmus University. I did the exam in two parts: I took the first midterm (50%) in the end of October and the second (50%) in the end of December.

Public and Regulatory Economics (8 ECTS)

This course was my favorite and it was about public finance and public policy. In the beginning it looked a lot like Applied Micro-Economics, but after that, the course was about subjects we didn't discuss in that subject and it was more specialized. Public & Regulatory Economics was a lot about public provision of goods (like education and health care), social benefit and taxation. The course consisted out of a lot of mathematics, but the teacher also found the ethics and theory important, so the two mid-terms (both 50% of the final grade) consisted out of both essay questions and exercises. The teacher was good and the book was also really interesting, since it described a lot of researches that had been done at the different subjects. The course was a little complicated, so for this course I had to study the most, but once you study the book and practice the exercises, the exam is quite easy.

Finances

My budget varied a lot per month, because in some months I did a lot of trips or I had a lot of friends visiting me and in other months I studied more, but I will present my average budget per month.

Rent (including gas, water, light and wifi)	€380
Costs of living (groceries and going out for dinner)	€400
Social life	€175
Travelling/trips	€150
Mobile phone costs	€10

The supermarkets in Bologna are a little bit more expensive than in the Netherlands, but the restaurants are cheaper. I went out for dinner a lot, so that raised my costs of living, but going to restaurants together was a big part of social life in Bologna. Going out was not so expensive, since you can enter the Erasmus parties for free with your cards from the international organizations. I travelled a lot, with the organizations and with friends, and I can really recommend this, because you'll have a lot of time and it's really easy to travel from Bologna to every other place in Italy (and the organizations offer really good and cheap trips). I bought a sim card at Tre and I paid only €10 per month for 1GB. The only catch is that you shouldn't try to call or text to the Netherlands, because then all of your credit will be gone immediately.

(I didn't include my study costs in my budget, because they were very low. If you want to buy your books, you can go to one of the copy shops (copisteria's) in the Via delle Belle Arti next to the university. The copy shops have all the books you want and you can print them for less than €20.)

Daily life

Bologna is the perfect destination for your exchange! It's the oldest university in the Western World and when it was founded in 1088, it actually became the first 'Erasmus'-city, because students from whole Europe came to Bologna to study and the city was soon filled with (international) students and this never changed since then. There are three organizations for Erasmus students in Bologna, so you can go to a different party, activity or trip every day. However, Bologna is still a real Italian city: the Italian people barely speak English, so you have to learn some Italian, and the city is filled with trattoria's, osteria's en pizzeria's. Since Bologna is not so touristic, the restaurants are still authentic and not touristic and you can even have a drink at Piazza Maggiore (the heart of Bologna) for a low price. Bologna is famous for its food and I could talk for hours about it, because I've never had so much good food in my life as in the past four months. Tortellini and mortadella come from Bologna and the region, Emilia-Romagna, is famous for its Parma ham, Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, balsamic vinegar, wines (Lambrusco, Sangiovese and many more), and much more. I even learned how to make tortellini from old Italian grandmothers!

The city is beautiful and really old. It's famous for its porticoes, that are literally everywhere in the old center, and its medieval streets around Piazza Maggiore, where you can find markets every day. Bologna is not too big and not too small, you can walk everywhere if you're inside the walls (the historic center), but it's big enough to keep exploring (and to try new restaurants every day). Italians like to live outside and therefore it's always busy out on the streets: people enjoy the little things in life and they take it easy. Under the porticoes there are always people talking, drinking (the best coffee and spritz) and eating (the delicious ice cream from one of the many gelateria's and cremeria's) and that vibrant atmosphere is one of the things I liked the most about Bologna.

I walked everywhere and only took the bus three or four times (for one hour by bus you only pay €0,50), when I was too lazy to walk to the other side of the center (which was thirty minutes by foot). A lot of people bought a bike for €60 or less and they sold it afterwards, but you should make sure that you lock it with two or three locks, because bikes get stolen a lot in Bologna. I did use the train often, because the central station of Bologna is an important hub in the train network of Italy, so it's easy to travel anywhere by train (Venice in less than 1,5 hour and Rome in 2 hours for example). You can get a lot of discount on the fast trains with a special card. To receive this special discount card, you should go to the (Freccia) service office at the train station and ask for the FrecciaYoung card. (Sometimes they say that you can't get it, but this is not true, so then you should just go to another person or come back another time.) You will have enough time to travel, so take advantage of it and explore the region of Emilia-Romagna and the rest of Italy!

(I also wrote a blog about my exchange in Bologna for study association In Duplo:

<http://www.dediplomaat.nl/in-duploers-over-de-grens-kyra-hanemaayer/>)