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# The definition of Erasmus: the tears and the smiles

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Some people say that Erasmus life is like marmite: you either love it or hate it. It is the once in a lifetime opportunity, the decision that everybody told you you were 'so brave' to make. It is the year that you can't predict, the year that will always surprise you at every turn.



Of course, there are bad parts of everything. There are moments when, in this opportunity of a lifetime, you would do anything to go home. It's when your friends are planning Easter break together and you are the only one who isn't going to be there. It's when it's your mother's birthday and you should be taking her out for dinner instead of hurriedly calling her between classes. It's when you realise that that puppy you left behind is going to be three times bigger by the time you see him again; when you would do anything to sit in *that* pub with *that* food and with *those* people.

But, in retrospect, these moments mean little. At the time, it might seem like the worst thing in the world that you lost your bank card in this strange country; you might feel like you are the unluckiest person ever to end up at this weird hospital where nobody speaks a word of English, but I guarantee you that, in a few weeks' time, you will either have forgotten that it ever happened or you will be crying with laughter when you tell the story to your friends.

These little things, these tearful phone calls back home, are part of a much bigger, much more wonderful story. A story where your Erasmus experience abroad turned out to be the time of your life. Erasmus is such a unique opportunity and, for many people, the best thing that they ever chose to do. I'm writing this right now sitting in a serene park in the wonderful sunshine, drinking the best beer that I have ever had, and overlooking the most beautiful city that I have ever been fortunate enough to see – Prague, seat of Charles University.

Erasmus is immersing yourself in this new culture and this new language and learning new and wonderful things every day. Erasmus is making friends all over the world and becoming the most international person that you will ever be. Erasmus is realising that you have travelled more countries in the last few months, explored more places, delved into more cuisines and traditions, than you have done in the entirety of your life.

Erasmus means something different to every person that experiences it. For me, it meant discovering new ways of life that I never would have encountered before. It meant developing as a person, learning to grow in confidence and belief, learning what I enjoyed in life and what I wanted to achieve from it. Erasmus is making some of the best friends from all over the world, whilst learning to appreciate the ones I already had back home.

Erasmus is learning to take every opportunity, every risk, because you might not get this chance again. Erasmus is never looking back, but always looking forward. Erasmus will always be the best year of my life, the year that I had no regrets.