MY ERASMUS EXPERIENCE

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Andreia Catarina da Silva Ferreira, who wrote the following essay to celebrate the 30 years anniversary of the Erasmus programme, is an Erasmus student of Medicine from the Nova University of Lisbon in Portugal. During the summer semester 2016/2017, Charles University's Faculty of Medicine in Pilsen is hosting her.

I am a 5th year medical student in Lisbon and honestly doing an Erasmus has never been a part of my studying plan. I genuinely still don't really know how I got involved in this amazing experience; I guess it was some sort of fate, and I feel so privileged to have grabbed hold of this opportunity with both my hands!

It was only after receiving a confirmed place at Charles University and booking my tickets to the Czech Republic, that the nerves really kicked in. I suddenly realized that this would be one of the biggest challenges I've ever had to face. It was scary, yet exciting to think that I would be a foreign student for half a year, especially as it would also be my first time being away from my own country by



myself.

I arrived in Pilsen on the 4th of February 2017. At the start I had to face a few difficulties, as I had to figure out how to communicate in a new and foreign language, and learn how to manage my own money (I barely knew how much would a frozen pizza, a pill for the headache, or a bus ticket cost at this point). I also came across electrical outlets which didn't connect with my phone charger... Let's just say that my first couple of weeks as an Erasmus student aged me at least 2 to 3 years.

It was definitely challenging for me to go through the initial weeks, however I learned so much about myself and it also helped me develop in so many different ways; I never thought I would be able to overcome these challenges on my own. I am now able to see it as a learning curve within my life, as well as an absolutely fantastic challenge that I appreciated and loved every minute of.

Suddenly, I was getting really involved in the atmosphere created by the Erasmus students and society. The orientation programme (in Pilsen organized by the Erasmus Student Network of the University of West Bohemia) gave me the possibility to learn more about Czech culture, the beautiful city of Pilsen and also helped me meet and interact with people who would shortly become friends and part of my Erasmus family during the next few months!

I have been asked to describe what I've been through these last few months, but honestly no words can accurately describe the Erasmus experience. You have to experience it! I can only tell you to prepare yourself for losing yourself

in the time, for spending days and nights in endless conversations, for finding out that you actually like food you never thought you would eat, for getting to know so many unthinkable places it makes you feel like you're dreaming, for celebrating the nights you won't remember with the people you will never forget!

Erasmus makes your dream of visiting stunning and new places become a reality, while also saving money by staying with your new friends! Once you start working, you'll see that Erasmus has opened you many doors for you, as it gives you world knowledge and brings you connections to people from all over the world.

Get ready for the months that flip your life a full 360 degrees because once you've experienced Erasmus, your life will never be the same! Once you return to your country, you won't be the same person with the same thoughts; otherwise you were not on Erasmus!

I guess I have to finally face it: it's the end. First of all, I have to thank my parents for making all this possible, without their support I would have never been able to get through such an amazing experience! I also have to thank to all my intercultural friends for making these months the best ones of my whole life. I had everything an Erasmus student could ever want: parties, travelling and a group of amazing friends. It was by far one of the best experiences I could ever have been a part of.

In the near future I imagine myself telling endless stories to my family and friends about my Erasmus experience, even though they are probably sick of hearing it. I don't think I'll ever get enough! My day to day in Portugal will be forever connected to Charles University and its Faculty of Medicine in Pilsen.

While I write this, I keep hearing Avicii's song in my head; it reminds me that this cannot be the end, because: "These are the days we've been waiting for, on days like these who couldn't ask for more, keep them coming, cause we're not done yet; these are the days we won't regret, these are the days we won't forget."

Erasmus family: You will forever be in my heart.

Andreia Catarina da Silva Ferreira Charles University Erasmus Student

Clara Meinerts is currently studying English and American literature at the University of Kent in England. This is why she has a heightened knowledge of texts and the structure of writing which she felt would be beneficial to editing and writing articles for iForum. She also relishes any opportunity to take part in her host University life. Her host faculty in Prague is the Faculty of Arts.

