
Erasmus in Prague?

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Students from across Europe flock to study for a semester or a year at Charles University in the magnificent city of Prague through the Erasmus project which proudly celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. Alex Leadbitter from De Montfort University in Leicester, England, discovers just what it is that has attracted another group of students who will shortly be arriving in the city to start their Erasmus year at the university.

The sheer beauty of Prague would be more than enough of a reason by itself to choose to sign up for an Erasmus placement in the city. The opportunity to live in this incredibly charming city should not be passed up lightly. However, Prague has a lot more to offer than just stunning views, idyllic sights and spectacular architecture. The Czech capital is often described as the heart of Europe, not just because of its geographical location, but also because of the deep history and culture that fills the streets and is around every corner.

Culturally, Prague is up there with the most captivating cities in the world. Once in the centre, there is no escape from the many cultural extravagances that Prague has to offer. Seemingly every building you walk past has a plaque attached to it that explains some sort of historical and cultural significance, and with tour guides dotted all around the city, it is easy to get engrossed in the culture and become educated as to just how momentous the city and its buildings are. Prague is famous for being steeped in culture and that is a motivation for many of the students that choose to sign up for Erasmus here.

Greek student Margkerita Alaia, who is from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, explained why she will be taking Theatre Studies at Charles University's Faculty of Arts during the 2017-18 year. She said: *"Prague is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. There are a lot of students and young people with different cultures and ideas, and with same or different interests than me. I applied to come here and I'm really glad that I'll have the opportunity to study abroad the subject that I love. I'll practise my English and I'll learn to live by myself and become independent."*

Similarly, Political Science and Civics student Malin Alsered Pihlström, arriving from Stockholm University in Sweden to CU's Faculty of Science, said: *"Immersing yourself into other cultures is an important part of my studies. The opportunity to experience the life at a university in another country and meet new people from all around the world would not only give me the practical knowledge that would be of great benefit to my continued studies with Global Development, but also be an amazing adventure for me that I would highly appreciate."*

These two students, one from Greece and the other from Sweden, show recognition towards Prague's deep cultural background despite being from very different cultural roots themselves.

Furthermore, in terms of education, Prague is well known for providing excellent schooling to its students, so a chance to study here is a great opportunity for anybody looking for an amazing experience studying with some of the world's best lecturers and teachers. Prague is home to Charles University, one of the oldest universities in the world. Established in 1348 and named after King and Emperor Charles IV, this university takes immense pride in its rich history and it is easy to see why as it is one of the most fascinating and historic universities on our planet. Some of the most decorated people in Czech history are Charles University alumni, such as Jaroslav Heyrovský, who was the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1959, and Edvard Beneš, who earned a PhD in Philosophy and became the second Czechoslovak president in 1935. These are just two examples out of a vast number of people who have studied in Charles University and Prague, and have gone on to become globally renowned.

The Erasmus programme gives students from around Europe the opportunity to follow in their footsteps and make successes of themselves. As In's Isabel Costa Carvalho, a Portuguese Pharmacy student coming from the University of Porto to the CU campus in Hradec Králové, said: *"My application to enrol in this international experience derives not only from my personal aspirations - to face new challenges in a foreign environment and deal with different people and mentalities - but also from my academic interest - to get a taste of what studying abroad really means and what methods are used in my field of studies in different countries."* She added that the way that students are taught at Charles University is different to her country, which means that students can have their eyes opened to a completely new way of learning in an efficient, enjoyable and interesting manner.

Living in Prague and other CU university cities Hradec Králové and Pilsen is also financially appealing as almost everything in the Czech Republic is relatively cheap compared to the UK and a large portion of Western Europe, so being able to live there on a student's income should be no problem at all for most. Even when you go right into the city centre, the food, drink and activities are often much cheaper than many major cities in Europe. You can easily find a

place to have a full meal and not pay much more than the equivalent of 10 Euros. Not to mention all the street performers, museums and oddities that are scattered across the entire city.

Antonio Emilio García Martínez, a Spanish Sociology and Cultural Studies student from the University of Granada who will be hosted by the Faculty of Arts of CU next semester, said: *"I would like to take part in the Erasmus scheme because I think it is an experience to develop myself as a person and grow up. I have chosen the Czech Republic because it is a beautiful country and it's quite cheaper than mine, so I can afford my stance with my scholarship."* Which emphasises how accessible it can be for students across Europe to live in Prague throughout their Erasmus experience.

The Erasmus programme connects students from all over Europe by not only enhancing their education through proven academic techniques, but also by giving them the chance of a lifetime, to spend a year living in one of the most fascinating and beautiful cities in the world.

Alex Leadbitter is a Journalism student at De Montfort University in Leicester, England. Having completed his first year studying journalism, Alex has broadened his mind about the avenue which he could potentially work in and hopes to pinpoint a journalism career in the coming years.