
Prášily – an extraordinary orientation for incoming Erasmus students

There are many activities organized for incoming Erasmus students at Charles University. We will hear about some of them in our series of the Erasmus articles and interviews to commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Erasmus program, which will be celebrated in all participating countries in May, regardless of when they joined the program.

Since 2008, one of the most exciting events organized for Erasmus students in Charles University has been the summer semester orientation course for students of the Faculty of Science. Unlike other faculties that organize a regular, administrative orientation session in the respective faculty building, the Faculty of Science invite their new students alongside teachers, representatives of the Department of Sport and Czech members of the Erasmus Club of Faculty of Science on a four day trip to the Czech mountains. In 2011 and 2012 the inscription was held in the skiing resort of Prášily in the heart of the Šumava Mountains.

On Saturday 18th February 2012, a diverse group boarded a train to Železná Ruda. Czech teachers and students of the Faculty of Science carried their backpacks full of warm clothes, food and ski waxes, as well as bags of cross-country skies, whilst the newly arrived students were dragging a common cabin luggage with just a few items thought necessary for the four day trip – little did they realize that a tiny Šumava village covered by fresh snow is hardly an ideal place for this type of bag.

Nonetheless, “U Jakuba”, the cottage styled guesthouse that awaited the group in the very centre of Prášily village, was well worth any luggage hassle! The cottage is one of the oldest timber houses preserved in Šumava Mountains, whilst its shared kitchen, and bunk-bed bedrooms allowed the group to bond and get to know one another quickly. Whatsmore, the Erasmus students were able to experience a real and typically Czech (skiing) trip – including common cooking, playing music and singing, both traditional Czech and more international songs. This is unfortunately something that does not always happen during trips organized for exchange students as the organisers can usually only take up to four Czech tutors.



Contrary to other ski trips that typically only ski downhill, in Prášily, students were introduced to the much loved locally cross-country skiing. Even the absolute ski novices - two Portuguese students - managed a 15 kilometers trip, to their (and the organisers') great surprise and delight! For those who did not enjoy skiing, walking trips through the snow-covered landscape were organised by the tutors, or they helped local children build an igloo in front of the cottage. We asked the Erasmus students of the Faculty of Science and the organisers of the event to share with us what they liked at this trip.

Joanna Opyrchal, a Biology student from the Uniwersytet Jagiellonski in Cracow, Poland said: "Introduction course in Šumava Mountains was really nice. It helped us to get to know each other a bit. Some of us even saw real snow (a looooot of snow!) for the first time. The cross-country skiing lessons taught us that everybody should eat breakfast before a five hour trip! I think that all of us will remember this weekend as something really special and pleasant. We would like to thank to everyone who organized it and took care of us!

Mariusz Hajdo, a Geography student also from Cracow, remembers the orientation trip fondly: "The time in Prášily was great. Personally, I didn't take part in the cross-country skiing course, but I participated in some short walking trips. We tried to integrate and mix with all the other students as much as possible, especially in the evenings after the information meetings about our stay in Prague and the Czech Republic. I really enjoyed the music and the Czech songs played on the accordion, harmonica and guitar. I also tried to play the accordion and it was really nice experience. It isn't easy, but not so difficult as I thought."

Ivo Bardarov, a Chemistry student from the Bulgarian South-West University "Neofit Rilski" in Blagoevgrad said: "My impressions of the Czech Republic are great! The people from the Erasmus office at the Faculty of Science prepared a very warm and friendly welcome for us, which was very important because every beginning is difficult. All the employees and local students from the Faculty of Science did their best to create a friendly atmosphere during the orientation in the Šumava Mountains and made our stay there unforgettable. Our host faculty and the International/Erasmus Clubs are also preparing different trips and interesting program for us every week which surprised me, because I have talked with many Erasmus students staying in other countries and none of them has experienced such hospitality."



Associated Professor David Havlíček, the Erasmus coordinator at Faculty of Science, 2008-2012, shared: "Personally, I like outdoor sports very much and I spend a lot of my time out of the city, very often with our Czech students. This opportunity is offered to any interested teachers of the Faculty of Science by the Department of Sport. We believe that the presence of teachers of the scientific subjects in the courses organized by the Department of Sports is very useful for everyone – the students, the staff of the Department of Sports as well as the teachers.

Four years ago, when I was named as the Erasmus coordinator at the Faculty of Science, I decided to organize a similar course for incoming Erasmus students in cooperation with approximately the same amount of Czech students, teachers and people from the Department of Sports.

Our first orientation course out of Prague took place in the Giant Mountains (Krkonoše), in the chalet Lysečinská bouda. To save the money, students and teachers were stayed in my private weekend-house only half a kilometer from Lysečinská bouda, so it was not a problem to spend the time together both in Lysečinská bouda, and in my weekend-house. The building is over 150 years old, with the same facilities like in those times – so it was an unique experience for some of the students just to visit it. When you imagine meters of fresh snow outside it, the atmosphere was really wonderful...

In the following year, we repeated this trip in the same location. Since 2011 we have organized orientation in the Prášily village in the Šumava Mountains. The incoming Erasmus students are able to learn a lot of practical information from the present teachers and Czech students throughout this course and can prepare all the necessary administrative documents. Aside from that, they spend time in the beautiful Czech countryside and can practice outdoor sport – which we think they enjoy as much as we do."