

Hello Everyone! It's time for a new story about an Erasmus experience! Victoria will tell us about her adventures in Padova, Italy :)

Hey Victoria! Please tell us something about yourself :)

Hello, my name is Victoria, but many foreigners are used to calling me Vicky, I just recently turned 20 and my major is English in Public communications, this is my third year of studies. I am originally from Ukraine, specifically Lviv, a city which charms everyone. In my free time I enjoy singing, I finished music school when I was 15, my major was an instrument called Bandura. I also like to learn languages, right now I know 5 of them, but I am eager to learn more for sure. I adore animals, because they bring peace to me, so I also like to spend time with my dog, which I sadly have to leave back home in Ukraine with other members of my family whenever I leave for uni.

Could you tell me what place you decided to choose as your Erasmus destination? What was your first feeling when you arrived to there?

I decided to choose Padova and ended up staying there for 4 months and a half, due to some of my visa's issues. I have never heard about this city and was not interested in Italy that much before going on Erasmus, but when I arrived in Padova I was pleasantly surprised with its beautiful architecture and with Italy's weather as well, I looked kind of funny coming in a thick coat when everyone were wearing light sweaters. I was definitely excited about getting to know Italian culture and the food the Italians consume on daily basis.

Why did you decide to choose Padova as your Erasmus destination?

To be completely honest, I was thinking about Germany, because I associate this country the most with studies and academics, but then made a last second decision (actually a last 6 hour decision, because that is when the term was finishing) to switch to Italy. When I was thinking about Italy, anything but studies came to my mind, so I was not entirely sure whether it was a good decision. When I took a look at the university of Padova's site, I liked it a lot as well as the variety of courses they have being conducted in English. I also browsed a little about the city itself and loved the look of it. In the end, I decided to risk it all and apply, and it was the best decision possible.

Tell me a little bit more about the application process. Is it hard? Do you have any suggestions to students who want to take part in Erasmus+ program as well?

The application process for Erasmus is overall pretty difficult, especially for the non-EU citizens. Apart from regulars document, you will need a visa as well as an insurance that you pay for and many more. I was frustrated with the quantity of documents I had to have and was suffering a little. However, both the Erasmus Office in Padova and in Opole helped me so much and assisted me with any questions I had at any time, which I am very grateful for. I would advice the applicants to take this process seriously and mind the deadlines, because if you miss them, nobody will be able to help you, even if they really want to (and they do).

Did you think long time whether you should do it? What ultimately convinced you?

It was my dream to go on Erasmus, ever since I got into the university of Opole. Due to the restrictions connected with Corona virus, I was really hesitating a lot whether to go or not, but due to my boredom and unwillingness to stay at home no more, I decided to go till the end with it, even if I would end up studying online at University of Padova. I was still curious how Italians organize their subjects and how does the education look from the inside, which was my motive to make up my mind in the end.

What do you like the most about this place?

Even though Padova is pretty small and is considered to be a students' city, that is what makes it so special. There are so many places devoted to getting to know new people or having an *aperitivo*, on your way to university, city center or home you would meet your acquaintances who would always invite you somewhere and you would never feel alone in this city. It was very easy to get around Padova and the city itself felt very safe. I loved the community we had there, the vibes of the city as well as the Italians themselves.

What surprised you the most when you started living there?

I would say it was the level of English Italian people had. On my way to Italy, I met an old Italian man in the airport who told me that I have to learn some Italian before coming to Padova, because the level of English in Italy wishes for the best. However, anytime I would need some help, Italian people would try their best to help me or spoke on a very good level and excellently expressed their thoughts in English. I was surprised with the level of education Italian people have, even later on in the university itself my conclusions were confirmed by the knowledge students had.

Why do you think it's a good idea to study in a different country? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this decision?

Firstly, you get to know a new culture, which might shape your mind in a different way, travelling abroad is always a positive thing which enriches your internal world. You can also meet so many new people and establish new relationships, you never know who you might meet. Secondly, if you choose to study abroad, you make a brave step into an adult life, you get to choose on your own, cook your own food and expect help only from yourself, which is a very cool thing in my opinion. The only disadvantage of this decision is when a person is not ready, the feeling of homesickness might get very intense and he/she ends up at home again, which is okay. You should always think it through before travelling abroad all alone for studies.

What do you recommend to do in Padova? How can people spend their free time there?

I would recommend you take a long walk around Padova and see the marvelous architecture there is. For example, you could visit Ragione Palace, which is recommended by many Padova inhabitants, as well as the beautiful Basilica of St. Anthony. It is a good decision to make friends with whom you would go on picnics at Prato della valle, a beautiful mini park near the center of the city with lots of statues and people resting on the grass under the sun. It is worth going around the coffee and food shops in Padova in order to have a little gastronomic heaven for yourself.

Your favourite places in Padova and close to this city. What are the best places to visit? Did you visit any other places in Italy?

A place which every Padova student has to visit at least 5 times is a Sottomarina beach located 40 km from Padova, you can take a bus which travels there every hour, grab a ball and some blankets with food, and you are ready to enjoy a day at the beach.

I happened to make very good friends while I was there and we travelled a lot after the exam session by one of the girlfriend's car. We have travelled around Tuscany and got to visit Sienna which became one of the absolute favorite places in Italy. We also visited Florence, Cinque Terre, Monterosso while we were there and it was absolutely unforgettable. I visited Milan and liked it a lot, it reminded me of my hometown a little which surprised me. Some of the places also worth mentioning were: Verona, Dozza, Monselice, Rimini, San Marino.

I visited Venice twice and surprisingly covid happened to help me because usually there are

too many tourists in Venice and the streets are very narrow there, so it might be very difficult to get through. Because of covid, I did not have to struggle and the gondola ride which usually costs around 80 euros for 30 minute ride, so many people can not afford it, costed us 40 euros (10 euros per each of my friends), due to the lack of tourists!

My next trip was to Rome, Napoli, Pompei and Sorrento. Rome became one of my favorite cities, because of the architecture and its size, there is also such a strange and magical feeling to this city, it's just indescribable. I happened to plan this trip with my friend at the time Italy won the Eurocup 2020, and we accidentally met the team «coming home/coming Rome» with the cup, which was such a cool day in our lives.

I would not say I enjoyed Napoli much, due to the lack of sanitary and crime levels but Sorrento and Pompei were very captivating!

How about the transport? Is it hard to find buses / trains / flights to other places? Is it expensive / cheap?

It is relatively easy to get around in Padova due to its size. Many students choose to travel by bike and it is almost a must have for every student to have a bike. The buses in Padova do not go according to the schedule, so it is difficult to be somewhere on time when you take a bus. The bus ticket costs 1.50 euros which is pretty costly. I usually just strolled somewhere for 30 minutes, it was a good exercise. There trains to other cities were always on time and very clean, although pretty expensive as well, a trip to the city an hour away would cost you around 10 euros. There were no discounts for students with a student's card as here in Poland.

Can you describe Italian people? What are they like?

Most Italian people are very cordial, open and friendly. They are always willing to help and usually love what they do. Italian people like to chat a lot and compliment each others. Italians also tend to try not to take life too seriously and welcome every day given. Italians have a very good sense of fashion, which could be noticed as you walk past them on the streets of the city.

Any funny stories regarding misunderstandings with Italians?

Only that I was saying good evening to everybody in the day time.

Is it an expensive country?

It depends on the background of the given foreigner but for me it was pretty expensive to live and travel in Italy, thankfully Erasmus students get a scholarship which helped me.

Are there any disadvantages of choosing Padova as your studies destination?

The only disadvantage in Padova that it is located in such specific way, that the city traps a lot of heat in Summer, so it was too hot for me to function sometimes or to think about studies. Also there is a tendency that many bikes are stolen in Padova and resold again, so you have to buy a good lock for your bike to feel secure.

Are classes at the University hard? Is it hard to pass exams?

I would say that the subjects were neither easy nor hard for me, somewhere in between. Italians have a different system of their schedules, which meant that we could have the same subject 3 times per week and get more ECTS points. Italians also have their final examinations conducted mostly in an oral form, even from math, which I did not enjoy much because you get a little nervous.

Your favourite Italian food! What can you recommend to non-Italian people?

I would definitely recommend everyone to try different kinds of pastas in different cities, a pizza in Napoli (where it originated) and Gnocchi. My absolute favorite food would be lasagna, I ate way too much of it. But also a sorbet, which is a yummy frozen dessert.

Would you recommend to others to come here or in general take part in Erasmus+ program? Why?

I would encourage everyone to take part in Erasmus as soon as it's possible and if it's possible. Don't be afraid of the application process, you will get through it with the help of many people who stand behind the program and are always ready to help students with any questions they have. You should go on Erasmus to expand your horizons, meet different people, make friends, see for yourself what kinds of culture exist on the planet earth and why we should all love each other and cherish the cultures we have created.

Thank you so much for sharing your experience with us! :)