

Today our guest is Danik from Moldova who went on Erasmus to Croatia!  
Let's read about his experience!

*Hey! Please introduce yourself and tell us about your hobbies! :)*

My name is Danik, I am 20 years old and I am from Moldova. I'm currently finishing my Bachelor degree at the University of Opole, Faculty of Economics. I am a quite positive guy and I always look for new opportunities in my life, I really like travelling. Speaking about hobbies, it's: playing soccer, table tennis and FIFA in my free time.

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

It was my third Erasmus exchange, because before I went to Covilha in Portugal and Hamburg in Germany and now I decided to choose Rijeka in Croatia. The city is located on the coast and is surrounded by mountains.

During the first days, I decided to take my parents with me to show them the beauty of Europe. We had a flight from Moldova and I was super excited to explore this new destination with them. It was a huge responsibility because I was the one who organised the trip. Luckily, we had really nice weather in Croatia, so the temperature of the water was more than 20 degrees.

From the first days, ESN Erasmus in Rijeka started organising nice trips and city walks.

*Why did you decide to choose Rijeka as your Erasmus+ destination?*

Because of the coast and it also has a quite good location in Europe to travel from. I thought that Croatia is quite a cheap destination, however, it is not.

I have never heard any reviews regarding this city before. I knew that Rijeka got a reward of "European Capital of Culture 2020". However, I wanted to explore something new and I decided to take the unknown destination.

*Tell us a little bit more about the application process. Do you have any suggestions for students who want to take part in the Erasmus+ program?*

As I already had experience in taking part in the Erasmus+ programs, I did not have any problems. It was quite complicated for me when I was on my first trip to Portugal. I felt like I was not provided with enough information and I had some problems with some subjects.

I would suggest not to hesitate to ask any question related to Erasmus, to prepare all the documents in advance and not to be afraid to choose a destination that's far away from your home.

*Did it take you long to decide whether you should do it? What did ultimately convince you?*

Yeah, that time I was thinking a lot about my Erasmus because it is my last year of studies and I am writing my Bachelor Thesis now.

I was thinking just about Rijeka and applied just to this one place. I would say it is good that it is supported by the Erasmus scholarship and students can get money for this.

Before I was like "Croatia? What? I would never live there" and then I saw it on the list of partner Universities and I thought "Why not?"

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

A different country means different culture. It gives you a lot of opportunities to improve your communication skills and adaptability to the environment you live in. I would say that there is a lot of advantages and disadvantages. Let me start with the advantages: for sure it's new people. Everyone is in the same situation as you are, all international students don't know each other and everybody is looking forward to making new friendships. Everyone is ambitious and every person is trying to organize some trips or events, even parties. Disadvantages: at your university, where you study in your ordinary language, all professors know you and they know your skills. When you decide to take part in the Erasmus+ programme you become a new student for everybody and you need to study in a completely different language - in English, some courses can be even held in their local language. This is not hard for me, but for some students, it's quite hard.

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

I was studying there two different faculties and had some subjects I already had in Poland, so it was easier for me :)

So the faculty of Tourism in Opatija was located in another city, close to Rijeka, right near the coast with an amazing view at the sea. Subjects in that Faculty weren't that hard and I had more time to chill, but the Economics faculty in the centre of Rijeka was quite hard and I had some difficulties at studying. Luckily I passed all exams in all faculties. It wasn't so hard but they don't have the usual system with midterm exams, where you need to collect 50% to pass the subject. So basically you need to stay focused for the whole semester.

*What do you like the most about this city?*

The weather for sure. Now I am sitting on the beach and I'm writing the answers to the questions with an amazing view at the mountains. It is February and I feel like it's summer, because people are swimming and enjoying the sun.

The second pro I would say is the atmosphere in the city. Everyone is so friendly to you.

The third thing I would say is dormitories. They have really good dorms with everything you need. They are really modern and comfortable. They have a gym, ping pong table, darts, canteen straight on the first floor. You are like in another reality, because everything around you is so futuristic.

*What surprised you the most when you started living there?*

Canteen! When I came there I realised that prices in the supermarket are really high (like in Austria). Then I realised that they have a canteen here on campus where you can buy really cheap and healthy food. Basically, you get the menu with soup, second meal, for example, mashed potatoes with goulash, bread, salad, dessert (can be cake, yoghurt or fruits) for only 0.85 euro cents!!! You can get it every day for lunch and dinner and everyone is going there, so it was like our meeting point almost every day. The best thing is that you can find this canteen in each city in Croatia, such as Dubrovnik, Zagreb, Split and so on.

*What do you recommend to do in Rijeka? How can you spend your free time there?*

You can drink a beer with your friends there, take a walk along the coast. They have a really famous yacht port, called Marina, that is full of beautiful yachts. Most people drink there, starting from the morning and finishing at midnight :D Rijeka is a port city, with a lot of ships and noisy life, I would say.

*Your favourite places in Rijeka and close to this city. What are the best places to visit?*

I will start from the nearest places to my city. As my second faculty was in Opatija, I was going there quite often. It was one hour journey from Rijeka and I would say it is a more touristic place than the place where I lived. Opatija is really popular even during Christmas time, because a lot of people from the whole Europe go there to see the Christmas market. There's really beautiful during Christmas time and the city looks like an American city from the Home Alone if you know what I mean :)

We also went to Pula, Rovinj, Zadar, Zagreb, Porec, Plitvice Lakes, Dubrovnik, Split, Krk Island, Pag Island and Zrce.

Each destination is full of memories. When we are talking about Rovinj, Porec, Pula – these places are more about tasting the Istrian wine, truffles, olive oil and so on. Zagreb, Dubrovnik, Split and Zadar are more party cities. Lakes and islands are full of spectacular views.

P.S. During the covid, it was harder to party in Croatia, because all the clubs were closed at midnight.

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

We were travelling by car because most of the international students lived nearby so it was more flexible for us to travel by car. Once we used Ryanair to travel to Montenegro because flights from Zagreb are really cheap and we bought a ticket for 10 Euro!

*Can you describe Croatian people? What are they like?*

Croatians are really similar to Slavic people. They have the same mentality. Croatia became a part of the EU in 2013 carrying along numerous changes. Once coming there you will understand why. You feel how people changed everything for their best lives. They said no to corruption, they started to be more strict in different aspects, but at the same time positive to everybody who is coming. Croatians are known for their hospitality. When the season starts everybody is coming there from the whole Europe to enjoy those amazing places. And indeed, the coasts and water are beautiful.

*Is it difficult to communicate with them in English? Do they know English or should foreigners know at least a little bit of Croatian?*

In the city where I have been living it wasn't that hard to communicate in English. Taxi drivers, waiters, sellers in supermarkets (not in local markets) understood English. They are used to English. Germans and Austrians travel to Croatia in the summer season so they can speak with them whatever language you want, even Russian with me :) But of course Croatian language is always welcomed. Hvala! Bok!

*Is Croatia an expensive country?*

I would say yes, it is quite expensive. Products in the supermarket are not so cheap, petrol at the gas station costs more than 1,5€. But because of the fact I used to eat at the canteen, I didn't feel it that much. Now we are living in difficult times when prices are increasing everywhere. In my opinion, even in Poland prices went up, so it's hard to compare.

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

I don't really like Croatian food haha. It is more Yugoslavian stuff. They have cevapi there, pljeskavica, sarma, goulash. Of course, it is really tasty but too fatty for me. I can recommend you to try *paski sir* there, it was made from sheep milk with a bottle of Gospoja wine from the Krk Island.

*Would you recommend taking part in the Erasmus+ Programme to others?*

Definitely yes! It's an amazing experience you can get in your student life. Now during covid and with all these different difficulties you have to overcome you are just taking the rest by travelling. It is like a reboot. You will definitely find new friends and people from the whole world (Spain, China, Portugal, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Russia, France, Italy, who will be definitely there!)

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

Thank you so much :)