

Erasmus+ 2017/18 Report

Johannes Münch, Medicine Student, 4th year
Universitatea de Medicina si Farmacie "Victor Babes" Timisoara



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1. About me

My name is Johannes Münch, I am 23 years old and come from Germany. I study medicine in the 4th year at the "Universitatea de Medicina si Farmacie "Victor Babes" Timisoara, Romania.

2. Why Erasmus?

I really enjoy traveling and seeing new places, so for me there wasn't any doubt that Erasmus could be perfect for me.

You study abroad, meet new people, see a new culture, learn another language and on the same time follow your university curriculum and get granted. There are so many new things to learn.

And why Palermo? I have always been a fan of Italy and especially its beautiful southern part. My subjects for the 4th year matched for both universities, hence the offer to go to Palermo was just perfect for me. In addition my brother who studies at the same university like me got accepted for the place aswell and we went to Palermo together.

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3. Preparations

Some weeks before my departure I spoke to a student which already did Erasmus in Palermo about what to expect from our upcoming time in Italy. In addition I searched the internet for information and read some facts about Italy, Sicily and Palermo. This helped me to get a general clue about the city. Then my brother and me searched for an accomodation via facebook groups to make sure to already have a possible stay upon our arrival.

I also started to refresh my Italian language skills using smartphone applications like "Memrize" and "Babbel" which I can both recommend.

4. Palermo

Palermo is a very vibrant city. Already the way from the airport to the central station was an adventure. My brother and me were happy to arrive safe at our apartment and immediately realized that this is truly the place the former Erasmus student has told us

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about. In the beginning Palermo was a bit overwhelming, so we needed some time to accomodate. After one or two weeks however this wasn't a problem anymore and we actually started to like it.

a) University (Unipa)

Our first week of university was very chaotic. Without the help of other students we wouldn't have found all the places/secretary where we had to go. So make sure to ask some colleauges in case you feel lost. We all were at a certain point.

For the official university registration you will find Richard Orthofer in the international office. He is very nice and takes care of your first documents. In case that you would have some problems during the semester he is always willing to help.

Unfortunately it wasn't that smooth with our Erasmus coordinator Valentino Biaggio from the medicine department. He takes care of all students coming from Romanian universities. His tasks are to

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sign the learning agreement, to print the transcript of records at the end of the semester, etc.

In case that you aren't comfortable with your Italian language skills yet make sure to visit him with a person which can translate Italian, because he doesn't speak English at all. Make sure that your learning agreement is flawless because otherwise you risk to come again and again (which is tragic, because he is very hard to reach; sometimes he is in his office and sometimes he is not). Our colleagues from other countries had different Erasmus coordinators and apparently less problems.

Besides Richard Orthofer and Valentino Biaggio there is also Mario Lipari who takes care of the "appelli" which are practically the dates of your exams. Before each exam you first go to the professor and set a date and afterwards you go to Mario Lipari to open an "appello" for that date. Then you can register yourself online (Unipa website) for this exam. It took us a long time to find this out.

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The university facility made a good impression. Many lecture rooms are well equipped. Most of the professors are kind and there was a friendly atmosphere between the students. All lectures are held in Italian. Punctuality and organization could be improved however.

Concerning the exams: All of my exams were oral. I personally liked it. Most of the times the professors know that you are not a native speaker and show empathy, so don't worry if your Italian is not perfect.

b) Accomodation, food and free time activities

We decided to stay at an apartment near the central station "stazione centrale" which turned out to be a good decision. This area is very central. We shared the apartment with another flatmate.

You can expect to find a nice room in the centre for about 150-250 euros.

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If you like Italian food, congratulation: Sicily is famous for offering Italy's best dishes. I can totally confirm this by finding myself in love with "arancine", "sfincione", "cannoli", their delicious pasta dishes, pizzas, ice cream and amazing coffe. Brace yourself to gain some weight (however without any regrets!).

Concerning free time activities Palermo is definitely not a place for boredom. If you like sightseeing it offers you many places with different historical background. If you are a sportive person and like to workout Palermo offers you a lot of gyms, however if you prefer to do sports outside you could take a run along "Foro Italico" which is situated directly at the seaside. From the centre it takes only 10-15 minutes by foot to the sea.

Do you like nature? Perfect, beautiful Monte Pellegrino is a good adress for you.

Do you like swimming? Also fine. You reach Mondello, Palermo's city beach by bus within 30 minutes.

Do you like going out? From Monday to Sunday you find open

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places where young people gather. Palermo's famous "Vucciria", "Piazza Sant'Anna", "Piazza Magione" are just a few names.

In case that these aren't enough examples there is also an Erasmus organization called "ESN" which organizes trips, get-togethers, parties and other social events. My brother and me always had a good time with the people from ESN.



(Monte Pellegrino)

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5. Tips and tricks to get the most out of it!

1. Start early enough to refresh your Italian. In the beginning it was very difficult for me to follow the lectures. Often when you go out you will also hear Sicilian dialect which is even more difficult to understand. But don't worry. Take advantage of the free Erasmus language course which the university is offering you (we took the course at the "ITASTRA" language school near the central station) and everything will be fine.

2. Studying for the exams: Ask your Italian colleagues how they studied for that certain subject which you have to take. They usually know what the professor expects from his students.

3. Get a travel guide: Before my arrival I read some information about the city on the Internet. It helps you to get an idea but take my advice and get a proper travel guide. Start to read it early enough so that you have enough time to explore all the recommended places.

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4. Join ESN events. They are both fun and a good possibility to meet other Erasmus students and discover new places.

5. Travel! Take the bus, a train or rent a car. Sicily has so many astonishing places which wait to be discovered. You can't start early enough with this. Most of the students start traveling at the end of their erasmus period and find themselves a bit stressed. Look up the places which attract you and make sure to visit them.



(Riserva naturale dello Zingaro)

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6. Conclusion

There were many moments when it seemed that there is no solution for a certain problem. This often led to frustration.

However the good thing in Palermo is that there doesn't always have to be a solution for everything. Sometimes alternatives also work and at the end it always turned out for the good. So don't stress yourself if sometimes the things don't go as you expect them to be. Take a good Italian coffee and relax, at the end everything will be fine.

Palermo is such a diverse city with a very interesting historical background and people from all different ethnic backgrounds come together to make it as special as it is.

Be excited to improve your Italian (and even to learn some Sicilian), to taste the best food of your life, to participate exciting trips, to meet interesting people, to discover Sicily and on top of that you study for your subjects! Palermo is a true adventure.

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Most probably every country you can choose in the Erasmus program would be a good choice. However I can assure you that for me personally Palermo was a great one. I would do it again every time.



(Teatro Massimo)

Timisoara, September 2018

Johannes Münch