



Erasmus Reflection:

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia - Winter Semester 2017/18

Semester:
Winter Semester 2017/18

Date:
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Introduction

I study environmental & resource management at BTU Cottbus in Germany. I am originally from the United States but have been in Europe as an international student for the last three years. As part of my study program, I chose to travel to Slovenia for a semester abroad with the Biotechnical faculty of the University of Ljubljana. The mountainous and natural landscape of Slovenia, as well as the city's pleasant reputation as a hidden gem within Europe attracted me more than other destinations. After enough planning, I was also able to find subjects taught in English that suited my academic interests and provided me with a new perspective within my field. Overall, my experience studying and living in Ljubljana was almost entirely positive and I would strongly recommend Slovenia as an Erasmus destination.

City

Prior to my trip, I did a lot of research about Ljubljana and Slovenia. When I arrived for the first month, it was nice to find out that what I had read was mostly accurate. The atmosphere of the city is very pleasant and welcoming. A perfect balance of historical and modern design gives the streets, buildings and public spaces a clean yet old-fashion feel. Many parks, forested areas and waterways are scattered throughout Ljubljana, as well as a fine castle perched on top of an elevated peak overlooking the city. As the capital, it has all the services and options of a large European city, however the smaller population allows for a calmer environment. The bus system does an efficient job with point to point transportation, but I can strongly recommend using the bike paths as your main form of getting around. There were also plenty of nightlife options which ranged between events organized by the Erasmus student groups and parties held by local bars or clubs. After a semester, I left with the feeling of being a local, while also knowing there is much more for me to discover during my next visit.

University

The University of Ljubljana is spread throughout the city by faculty. I was a member of the Biotechnical faculty which is located near both agricultural and forested areas about ten minutes outside the city center. The setting and facilities here were perfectly suiting for the learning objectives of this department. My courses focused mainly on the social, economic and environmental factors that influence farming and forestry practices. Some of my subjects were taught in lectures, while others were conducted with small groups of Erasmus students meeting periodically with certain professors. I also took part in multiple excursions which I rather enjoyed. Due to the smaller number of Erasmus students partnered with the Biotechnical faculty compared to other faculties, some administrative processes such as the SiS online system, were not ideally designed. The staff in charge of international students at my faculty were extremely friendly and helpful at all times though, making my time studying there go smoothly.

Accommodation

Finding a place to stay in this city of 60,000+ students can be difficult, especially if you are arriving late like I did. In my case, the student dorms had already filled up meaning I would have to find another option for housing. In the beginning while I was searching, I stayed at multiple hostels which were all affordable, clean and fun. Many rooms are also available on AirBnB, so I decided to stay at one place in the city center for a week until my new room was ready. In the end I settled in a flat with one roommate and plenty of space. The 400 euros per month that I paid was higher than some of my friends, but the location and atmosphere of my apartment made the price worth it. I often visited friends who lived together with many other Erasmus students in houses rented out for only that purpose. Depending on the people staying with you, this may be the most social and entertaining accommodation option. One warning: many of the housing advertisements that get posted to the Erasmus Facebook group that sound too good to be true may be scams so do your research before making any commitments.

People

The Slovenians I met almost always left a good impression on me. They are active, ambitious and always seeking ways to have a good time. Besides my Erasmus friends, I was fortunate to build connections with some great people who grew up in Ljubljana. I discovered all the best places and cultural information from these friends. Learning to speak Slovenian would be a monumental task, but everyone I encountered spoke English and was eager to practice it. I found that the city was quite open minded in most regards, however I was also witness to some acts of racism and intolerance that left me with a little resentment. The academic and art communities are thriving in Ljubljana however, and in my view it is one of the most unique and beautiful cities in Europe. You will find everything that you are looking for in Ljubljana as long as you take the time to search and become integrated.