Erasmus Report

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Why Erasmus, Why UCL

Whenever I submitted my application to Erasmus destinations, I have to be honest went in accordance with international ranking. Provided that UCL is currently the 4th best University in the world and I could study masters courses there free of charge (normally around £10,000 pa) I considered has the greatest added value to my CV therefore definite prime destination.

I am not going to lie the competition is tough and one does have to have rather good average as well as extracurricular activities + do well on the interview to get the place. Moreover once you are in you do have to prepare for a rather different Erasmus experience to other locations – meaning especially lack of massive partying especially on postgraduate level.

London

The city itself is amazing, full of opportunities, full of various exhibitions, performances, concerts, theatres, seminars. The ever increasing population and the constant dynamism gives a real metropolis feeling. However it is constantly busy, everyone is constantly running somewhere and the city technically never sleeps, so finding peaceful, safe havens are musts even for the locals – probably a reason for the numerous parks scattered around the centre. UCL itself is situated in the centre not far from Kings Cross and Euston station, therefore the transport connection is excellent and even in rush hour flawless. In walking distance there are reasonably priced shops, the British Museum, Picadilly Circus, Oxford Street, the SOHO including Leicester Square so really in the heart of the city.

Preparations, Accommodation, Travelling

I would definitely recommend that if you have the chance go out for a week or so to find a flat to live. On the one hand it is not only easier and more convenient (advertisers do not really like “skype viewings” but also you can actually check the area, safety, tidiness of the property). I did the mistake of trying to find a place from Hungary, although having quite a few friends living there, reasonably priced and good location rooms are scarce and one does have to jump on them as soon as they become available, BUT be extremely cautious with scams and false addresses and I would NEVER suggest to transfer any money via Western Union or anything in advance because the majority of them are scams – they tried to pull me in the loop with that once. So the best place to search is either on Facebook UCL Flatfinder (they do have here 1 month sublets which can be convenient for the period while you find something more permanent) or SpareRoom.com where I rented out my
own room in the end in two weeks. They have a so called ‘early bird’ option that can be helpful to make the hunt faster. It can be upsetting at times that there are no responses and no apparent results but please do not get light-hearted and give up! I would also recommend to check the metropolitan police’s crime-watch website for your chosen area/street to avoid any surprises.

I managed finally to find a place through university friends in Maida Vale that was about 25 mins bus drive away from UCL. I thought initially it was quite much but to be honest it was excellent location, really safe and quite a posh area. I found a double room for 571 per month so was rather happy about it. Alternatively there are loads of students living in Camden and north London area that has similar price rage, although for students probably easier to find a place. As a third option there are letting agencies technically on every corner – that you cannot really avoid anyways, given in the UK landlords lease out their properties with a lot more consideration in a legal way than we are used to in Hungary. Finding a room-share is probably the easiest solution that starts at £90 per week so the most cost effective. I personally would not suggest student halls since they come with a huge price-tag yet undoubtedly if you are accepted to the close ones there is no hassle with transportation.

Transportation-wise public transport is excellent in London, there are night buses going every direction so one does not really have to worry about getting home any time of the day. I preferred this way to the underground, not only because it is less crowded and hectic but also you can build up your safety-net, familiarise yourself with your surrounding that you do not feel alienated in the big city. Also we have to take every opportunity for sunshine that is not that abundant to be honest. And we should neither forget the fact that bus is cheaper than the underground! Buying an oyster is a must, as soon as you get your student card you can apply for a student oyster that has monthly fare deals on and maximum daily ceiling but given I spent daily £2.9 on transportation it was not worth for me. You should do your own calculation!

Beyond that I strongly suggest to get your EU card issued. In case of emergency UK hospitals are obliged to treat you, however that card given it is free should ease the process. Also upon arrival it is advisable to register with a local GP although if you have something urgent you can always pop in to the UCL Hospital right beside the university and they will direct you to the right department/institution.

Under the same note I would consider doing some basic insurance or taking a bankcard out with yourselves that covers for some form of damages, medical assistance. I had a bank-card with me, that’s annual charge is 2000ft and covers me up to 1.000.000 ft medical insurance, 100.000 ft robbery etc. ... Our house unfortunately did get robbed (which is technically an everyday occurrence in London and you cannot really protect yourself against it and at least some of the loss this way hopefully will be reimbursed but keep it in mind that dental services are not covered by the UK healthcare system and this provides coverage for that as well.

**Expenses**

Further to the rental and transportation you can save a lot on food. Sainsbury’s and Tesco is just round the corner from UCL and you can get excellent meal deals for £2-3 also there are canteens within the University building and fast food restaurants nearby that offer hot food for good price.

Vegetables are best bought on the street, mainly for £1 a plastic bowl of whatever that is great. Also bargain places like Poundland and Iceland should be looked at for discounts.
It is not a surprise that the 600 Eur I received a month for living was not enough for anything and I decided to work in a gastro pub during the weekends – having had loads of bar experience from before - but the work-study-life balance becomes extremely hard if one has to perform on different levels so try to choose a workplace if you need one wisely.

For me food came at less than £20 a week and I was eating considerably healthy so I would not think one would spend more than £30 per week even if you are a boy!

University/Courses

This was the first year MA students were allowed to take Masters courses at UCL therefore it was not without hiccups and quite much organisation. On the up side I did technically all the courses in a year that full time masters students accomplish except for the dissertation which was definitely worth all the hassle.

I originally was supposed to stay until December, so technically one trimester/ semester, therefore only those courses were allowed to be picked which were single term, without exams, so the selection was rather limited. My selection included:

SEESGS11: Political Economy of International Business
SEESGS15: Quantitative Methods
SEESGS46: Advanced Quantitative Methods
SEESGS50: Corporate Finance and Investment in Emerging Markets
SEESGS51: Financial Development
SEESGS65: Energy, Technology and Innovation

The first three in the first semester and the second three in the second one respectively. I definitely suggest to take all of it, since they covered complementary areas to my studies and contributed to a great extent to theoretical knowledge and how to observe different topics from various angles. The objective of taking quantitative and advanced quantitative methods on the other hand was to familiarise myself with the STATA software that is not part of the curriculum at Corvinus.

In all prepare yourselves that you are going to be bombarded with information and readings that are not easy to navigate in and you will spend extensive hours in the postgraduate clusters/library... even sleep there sometimes but in the end of the day benefit from the effort. Also since the essay deadlines extend to other semesters it can potentially overlap with other commitments to Corvinus. I still have three big essays to submit for UCL, 3 courses to accomplish here at Corvinus and a dissertation to finish off. The only suggestion I can give in terms of this is keep your chin up and even when sometimes you feel that you cannot make it do not panic just try to talk with lecturers.

MUSTS in London

- visit free museums/galleries
- go to a Parliament tour during the weekend or sit in for a debate!!
- go to see Buckingham Palace from inside during open season
- go and see a theatre show/musical with big names
- check out free lectures at UCL (IMF, WB heads are regular guests)
- make most of the Career Service! They do have really good support!!

Best of luck and enjoy your stay! 😊