ERASMUS+ Student Report

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Going on Erasmus has been the best decision in my life. And yes, in certain ways it can change everything.

My Erasmus

Meeting new people, parties, travelling – Erasmus can be summarised like this, but it definitely won’t describe the fantastic atmosphere, the spontaneity, how open Erasmus people really are or how much fun you are going to have. If you want to study or write your thesis, don’t plan that because it’s not going to happen (I’m telling that from experience). Instead, what you can expect is the unexpected. Believe me! I would have never expected to find love… after all, Erasmus is more famous for other adventures. But if you let it, anything can happen.

At the time of the Erasmus application, I was in my first semester of the Master programme at Corvinus. I did not participate in Erasmus during my BA, but in the autumn of 2016, I thought that it would be my last chance and if I did not want to regret it later I should at least try to apply. I attended the Erasmus programme briefing and started my research. Due to my language knowledge I was thinking about the English- and German-speaking countries and Italy, but the course offers of the interesting universities were not attractive to me. Then I ended up looking at the course catalogue of the University of Lodz and it seemed perfect for me because of the large number of courses related to my interests. So in the end, this was the only university I applied to – successfully.

Advice: Take advantage of all events, info sessions organised before the application deadline, consider your own interests and do your own research! Also, less known universities can be as good or even better than the big, prestigious ones.
Accommodation

The serious search started in the summer. I joined groups on Facebook and looked for flats on several Polish websites (of course, Google Translator was my great friend). However, soon I became disappointed since I received hardly any answers and even those were negative. In the middle of the summer I changed my strategy and instead of writing emails and turned to calling the potential landlords. For that I looked up the basic Polish phrases for saying hello and introducing myself (thinking that it would give a good impression), but after this part I always changed to English and most of the time there was no problem. It was this way that I successfully ended up with a fantastic flat (which was a bit more expensive than I initially planned, yet I loved it and still miss it) and with a fantastic landlord. He sent all the documents about the flat and himself, he also had an English contract ready and he was really helpful throughout the semester.

Advice: Searching for accommodation can be a long procedure and problematic when one cannot have a look at the place and meet the owner before deciding. It’s better to start as soon as possible.
For information: The university dormitory is the cheapest option; in the case of the University of Lodz its cost is around PLN 350-400. However, the university has more dormitories and there are big differences in quality. Dorm No. 13 is quite nice, but I have heard stories of other dorms where there was a hole in the wall of the bathroom letting in the cold air from outside. Also, if you apply for dormitory, there is no guarantee that you will get a place (as it happened to my friend, who then quickly had to look for other accommodation).

The other possibilities include private dormitories, shared flats or living alone as I did. The best private dorm is called Basecamp (https://basecampstudent.com/locations/polska/lodz/), its renovation was completed in December 2017 (students could move in only in that month). The prices per room start from PLN 1150/month. The rooms are cosy, and the common kitchens are huge and modern. The dorm itself is very well situated, right next to the Faculty of Economics and Sociology (and close to other faculties). There’s another popular private dormitory called Salsa Student Depot (https://studentdepot.pl/en/dormitory-salsa-lodz), where my friend stayed, but we would not recommend it. Its advertisements look great, but reality is different. The price (PLN 880-1950/month) is not worth for the quality, and the attitude and administration are problematic.

In the case of shared flats, there’s a wide range of possibilities. Prices are around PLN 500-600 in general; if you are lucky, you can find a place right in the centre for this money. Sharing a flat was often about five students staying together and many times you should expect old, socialist-type buildings and apartments. I would recommend checking the Facebook group for Erasmus students in Lodz, there are many people looking for flatmates at the beginning of semesters.

Useful links:

https://erasmusu.com/en/erasmus-student-housing?gclid=Cj0KCQiAzrTUBRCnARIsAL0mqcwSwkEjvQFYZxxjFc84ijSOi_UwLPFlNPi1UuDYnIZXIP5c01m4is4aAhdGEALw_wcB

https://pepehousing.com/

https://www.gumtree.pl/

https://www.otodom.pl/sprzedaz/mieszkanie/lodz/

http://dom.gratka.pl/mieszkania/lodz/
Getting there

There are two preferred ways to get to Lodz from Budapest: by plane or by bus. Lodz has an airport, but of course not so big to have direct flights between Lodz and Budapest. Therefore, the solution is to fly to Warsaw (the cheapest option is Wizz Air) and take the bus or train to Lodz from there. The other possibility is Polskibus from Budapest to Krakow and then from Krakow to Lodz, which is the cheapest (PLN 50-80), but long (approximately 10-11 hours) and less convenient.

I chose the plane both for getting there in September and coming back in February. I arrived at the Warsaw Chopin Airport and from there took Modlinbus (PLN 36) directly to Lodz Kaliska. The station is not far from the city centre by tram or bus, but as I have already mentioned my landlord was really helpful, he actually gave me a lift from the station to the flat and even helped to carry up my 32 kg luggage to the third floor (there was no elevator).

Another possibility is the train from Warsaw to Lodz, but it is not a direct route: first you should get to the Warsaw Central Station by train or bus and take the train from there to Lodz Fabryczna (the main and most modern train station of Lodz in the city centre). But don’t worry, the University of Lodz really takes care of students and the guide they send before the start of Erasmus includes all necessary information.

Public transport

Lodz has only buses and trams, the trams are rather slow when compared to transportation in Budapest. Until you get your Polish student ID, you will need to rely on buying tickets from the ticket automats, which can be found directly on buses and trams, but also close to important stations. In Lodz (and generally in Poland) tickets are valid for a certain period of time after validation: 20, 40 or 60 minutes.

When you already have your student ID (maybe after one, maybe two weeks after requesting it), you are entitled to 51% discount when travelling and can buy the Migawka, a kind of season ticket in Lodz for one or three months (or even longer if needed). The ticket for three months costs PLN 112 with the discount (as of 2017). Since the Migawka will be assigned to your ID, you won’t need to show anything else when checked.

Advice: Don’t try to use the discounted ticket without a Polish student ID because controllers don’t accept other type of student IDs and you will be fined for almost PLN 120 (this is also
true for travelling by train in Poland!). If a ticket automat doesn’t function and controllers come, don’t worry, you can buy the ticket from them without being fined.

Administration

The best is to have the Erasmus contract signed early enough, so you will have the scholarship transferred to your bank account already before the start of the mobility. After arriving to Lodz, the first thing to do is going to ISO (International Students’ Office) to have the Validation Form signed, which marks the start of your Erasmus semester (the same has to be done on your last day of Erasmus). For anything else, e.g. Learning Agreement changes, you need to go to your faculty’s Erasmus office. It is also the place, where you will need to collect your student ID (which Unfortunately you have to give back in the end).

If you are interested in languages, I advise you to take advantage of the free, **2-week-long intensive Polish course** offered by ISO before the start of the semester. It can help you getting around with some basic phrases and also meeting many of your fellow Erasmus students. My teacher in the 2 weeks was Roman Tarnowski, whose enthusiasm made me fall in love with Polish right at the beginning. Fortunately, during the semester there’s a chance to continue the Polish studies.

Eating out

The most dangerous feature of Lodz (and Poland) is that there is a confectionery (*cukiernia*) on every corner with all kinds of delicious cakes. It’s impossible to resist. Also, having a *pączek* (Polish donut) freshly from an open-view bakery is a must. Below you can find a short list of my favourite places in Lodz.

*Pozytywka:* maybe the cheapest place to eat located in the city centre, in Piotrkowska Street. It has a traditional Polish cuisine with a wide variety of Polish pancakes (salty and sweet) and other dishes. Because of this the place is rather popular, reservations are not possible, and the service can be quite slow, but the food is always delicious. You can have a proper lunch for PLN 16.

*Manekin:* another cheap Polish pancake place (with even more choices) with the same price level and maybe even more popular because there is always a queue to get in.
**Piwnica Smaków:** a small restaurant next to the Faculty of Political and International Studies (Narutowicza 59a) serving fantastic homemade dishes in large portions (prices for a good lunch start from PLN 17). With my friend, Bori (also from Hungary) we regularly had lunch sessions here – also to discuss our recent adventures (and we always had a lot to tell). The waiter, who also seemed to be the owner, was our favourite, always welcoming and appreciating our basic Polish knowledge.

**Dzień Dobry Café:** the best place to have a coffee/tea/hot chocolate after classes and/or to study. It opened during my Erasmus semester and with my friends we became the biggest fans of the place. Highly recommended!

**Pijalnia Czekolady E. Wedel:** best hot chocolate place in Piotrkowska.

**Entertainment**

**Lordi’s** (and its upper floor, the *FooFoo Bar*): advertised as the best sound club in Lodz, it might be considered mainstream by locals, but it was our favourite. Every Erasmus student knew that if Thursday, then it’s Lordi’s and Ladies’ Night.

**Abracadabra:** Friday was the Abracadabra party night, though this club is much smaller than Lordi’s. It’s the place of the occasional Latino Parties as well.

**Czekolada:** the Czekolada day was Wednesday but compared to others I didn’t really like this club.

**For information:** at the time of my Erasmus, smoking was still permitted in the clubs and the people really took advantage of this. As for **safety**, crime in Lodz is generally low; I always walked home from the parties (my flat was 10-15 minutes away from Piotrkowska, in Żeromskiego Street) and never had any problems. Night buses also operate, but if preferred, calling a taxi is always possible, e.g. when living farther away from the centre.

**Manufaktura:** the main shopping centre of Lodz, which also houses a Cinema City, bowling place, a museum, and many other entertainment options. In Poland all foreign (American) films are screened in English with Polish subtitles (with the exception of animation movies) making
it easier for foreign students to go to cinema (discounted ticket for a normal 2D film is PLN 20).

Piotrkowska OFF: an alternative, hipster place located in the buildings of a former cotton mill.

Sightseeing, travelling

Lodz is one of the most undervalued cities, even throughout Poland Polish people won’t believe you if you say you enjoy your time there. The reason for this is that Lodz is still associated with its industrial history. It was full of factories, which became abandoned in the 1990s after the socialist system was changed. However, in recent years a comprehensive programme has started to rebuild Lodz and make it more liveable.

While many people say that Lodz has only Piotrkowska and Manufaktura that are worth visiting, it’s not true. There are many hidden gems, all waiting for you to discover. Lodz is famous for its street art, artists from around the world have created wonderful murals on the buildings’ walls. You probably won’t even have time to find all of them. The city is also full of parks and beautiful churches (both Catholic and Orthodox). What you shouldn’t miss are the Łagiewniki forest (30 minutes from the centre by bus), where there is also a rope park for adrenaline lovers, the palm house (its warmth is especially welcoming in the winter), the Pasaż Róży under Piotrkowska 3 and the Lodz City Museum in the palace next to Manufaktura.

Lodz is very well-situated to travel around Poland. Warsaw, the capital city is just one and a half hours away by train, Gdańsk, the most popular city by the Baltic Sea is 5 hours by train. Other cities to discover in Poland: Wrocław, Poznań, Toruń, Zakopane, Kraków, Katowice.

When looking outside Poland, Berlin, the capital of Germany is 7 hours away from Lodz by Polskibus. From the airport of Lodz the following cities are usually available: Athens, Dublin, London, Munich. As already mentioned, Warsaw is close to Lodz, you can choose a flight from there any time. What is more, with the ESN card you can get discount from Ryanair. Remember, only your imagination limits you in your possibilities!
For information: The local ESN is very active, they organise numerous programmes both inside and outside Lodz. What is more, the university staff is also enthusiastic about the growing number of foreign students and they offer a large variety of activities, e.g. free cultural events (ballet, opera, museum visits) or international dinners. Try everything!

I hope I could help a bit with this report, if you have other questions, feel free to contact me!