

Nominee

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My Story

To be able to speak about my Erasmus experience I have to step back a little bit.

I was still in high school, when I first heard about ERASMUS. By then I had already had the opportunity to travel the world and since then I knew that this was my passion. So to realise that I could have the opportunity to learn, and what's more in another country where I could keep my passion burning, was the key for my application to university.

As early as my first year I tried to get as much information as I could about the programme. I met some Erasmus students and, since then, I have kept in touch with them and the Erasmus system.

I decided to offer help to the Erasmus department of my faculty and there I had the privilege to welcome and support incoming students until the day of my own exchange experience. Each time I received the news that a new student was arriving I was so excited that I wouldn't ease off until I met him/her.

My turn finally came. In September 2012 I travelled to Istanbul, Turkey, where I stayed for the next five months. Because of my pre-Erasmus experience, I made friends from Europe and around the world. I had the good fortune to have a former Erasmus student of my University to welcome me with open arms in his country, in his hometown. And I knew that what I did for him I would receive back twice as much in return.

It is hard to explain what you feel inside when you are living such an experience. We are eager to learn in school but at the same time want to absorb everything around us - culture, religion, traditions, politics... When I say that Erasmus is not perfect, I do not wish to criticise the system but contribute to improve it. In my first night I had a setback situation with the accommodation but it that happens all the time; these are flaws in the system, but the return from this little 'bad luck' made my experience worthwhile. I decided to live with a Turkish family instead of socialising only with other Erasmus students. It was a choice of mine because I find it important to do our best to adapt to the place where we are. Therefore, I ate like a Turk, watched TV like a Turk and learned like a Turk! Of course I also socialised with Erasmus students from other countries, such as Poland and Germany, who would teach me a lot about their own countries and their own experiences in Turkey.

However, if not for the sake of the Erasmus programme, you should travel more, especially before choosing your degree course and what you want to do with your life.

Travelling does not make you older but wiser, and if you have the chance to travel as a youngster you will certainly make better decisions as an adult.

This opportunity made me want to know the world better and most of all to have a better understanding of my country. Getting to know other countries, their weaknesses and strengths, I realised not only how much I love my country and how proud I am of it, but also how far behind we still are. This opinion can have no other effect than that of contributing to develop society and I formed it thanks to the opportunities I had to travel abroad, mainly that provided by the ERASMUS programme.

Even today, I continue to help incoming ERASMUS students at my University, although I have already finished my studies. And as far as I'm concerned I will always do it because I'm aware of the impact such an experience can have on peoples' lives.

And, lastly, I must say that Erasmus should continue to exist, even with flaws because it is an unforgettable academic experience.

When people ask me why I keep receiving these students, and to do so without receiving any remuneration, I always say that there is a huge difference between Undertaking Erasmus and Being Erasmus. I AM Erasmus and I must thank its creators for this fantastic idea! I am what I am today and know what I want to be in the future because of this incredible experience. It was so incredible that I'll repeat it soon as part of the European Voluntary Service, ERASMUS+.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain briefly how Erasmus made a difference to my life and the lives in those around me.