

## Erasmus+ Erfahrungsbericht

Persönliche Angaben			
Name:		Vorname:	
E-Mail-Adresse			
Gastland	Spanien		
Gasthochschule	University of Zaragoza		
Aufenthalt	von:	14.09.2017	bis: 6.2.2018

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### Winter Semester 2017/2018 in Zaragoza, Spain

I spent one semester at the University of Zaragoza and surely it was a life experience. Zaragoza is not as famous and known as Barcelona or Sevilla, but spending a few months there is an opportunity to experience Aragonia – an important province in the Spanish history. With the population of 700 000, Zaragoza is the fifth biggest city in Spain so you will surely not get bored, since there is a lot of things to do.

#### Preparations

Once I was admitted, there were a few things I had to take care of. Firstly, apply online at the University of Zaragoza. I was waiting a long time for their email to officially accept me, but it was not coming, so I wrote an email to their international office and soon I was able to register. I had to fill in two online forms, and two weeks later another form. Secondly, I had to make my Learning Agreement and send it Ms Lores to have it signed. The LA can be changed once you are in Zaragoza if you want to attend different classes. Thirdly, I had to find a place to stay. This I consider a difficulty in Spain. Dormitory is not a popular choice of students because they're expensive. This is why most of students stay in apartments. The first option to find a flat is trying searching online for an apartment from Germany, which is not easy and time-consuming. The other option, which many foreign students choose, is to arrive in Zaragoza a week before the beginning of their studies, stay in a hostel, and look for a place to stay on the spot. The price for a room in an apartment is usually between 150-200€ plus the costs of electricity, water and heating. Lastly, I had to buy tickets. The best is to fly to Barcelona (to Madrid it's a bit more expensive) and then by bus to Zaragoza. Alsa.es offers cheap buses all over Spain, many times I paid only 14€ to travel from Zaragoza to Barcelona and back. It takes almost 4 hours by bus. You can also go by train, which is much faster but also much more expensive, check renfe.com. With Ryanair, the flight from Berlin to Barcelona is about 25-35€ (without a baggage) when bought a month before the departure.

#### University of Zaragoza

One of my teachers said that the university immatriculation is a mess, and soon I understood why. Classes began already on 18<sup>th</sup> October, but the immatriculation started only on 28<sup>th</sup> October, so almost two weeks I was attending classes and didn't know if they would have a place once I am immatriculated. Most of classes of the English department have a limited number of places for international students, usually it's 6, so sometimes they cannot study the class they would like to. Furthermore, the immatriculation had to be done in person, three times I had to go to the international office, and manage all in Spanish, which was a bit surprising but very good for my Spanish. I think without having any knowledge of Spanish, I would have had a hard time at the beginning. Also, the international office did not provide much information about the city, university and its system. At the beginning, I went to the

welcome meeting for international students where they spoke only Spanish and gave me instructions in Spanish.

I recommend asking the local ESN organization for a buddy. I got one a month before my arrival, and he was very kind and helpful. Also the ESN in Zaragoza makes trips and various events in the city. The students in the organization are only volunteers, but they do their job really well.

### **Classes**

I was warned that in Spain classes are often officially written as taught in English but then they are taught in Spanish. This is certainly not the case at the English Department in Zaragoza. All classes which are supposed to be taught in English, are in English.

The Spanish grading system is different. They use a scale from 1 to 10, ten being the best. I had three classes, and the way of teaching reminded me of high school. The teacher speaks and the students mostly listen and do not really actively participate. The classes are usually ended with a written test, but students also have the option to write an essay and then have the test shorter. This is one thing which I found confusing. In two classes, I had the choice to either write a final test for 10 points or write an essay, for which I would get up to 3 points, and then have the final test only for 7 points. The essay is optional and requires a few days to write, so it doesn't really make sense to spend a few days on the essay and then study for the test which I have to take anyway, however, the teacher does not tell you that if you don't write the essay, you will have a harder version of the final test.

### **Spanish Courses**

The university offers quite an expensive Spanish course which I did not attend. It consists of 60 hours in four weeks - 45 hours in the class, 15 at home. The price is about 230€, but the university pays 50€ for you. The classes were in the evening. It overlapped with another class, but anyway I didn't find it worth the money. I studied on my own and practiced with my Spanish roommates.

Learning Spanish in Spain is easy for a few reasons. Firstly, people in Zaragoza speak Spanish which is very close to the standard Castilian Spanish taught in textbooks. If you go to another parts of Spain, it might be much harder to understand local people. Especially, the South is known to differ a lot from the standard - ¿Que taa? instead of ¿Que tal? Secondly, people don't speak so much English, so when you need to arrange something, you depend mostly on your Spanish skills. Lastly, people are unbelievably open and friendly. Any time I asked someone on the street for help, they did not hesitate to help me and never scorned at my mediocre Spanish skills.

### **Life in Zaragoza**

The city has a lot to offer. There are many places for sightseeing. The cathedral, the bridge, the Expo area, Aljafería and so on. Also there are many parks where you can go for a picnic. There is no snow in winter, but the city is very windy throughout the year, and also very sunny. I recommend bringing sunglasses. There are over 25 000 students in the city and it's known on the streets. There are many bars and places where students go to.

Transportation in the city is on a good level. You need to buy a card for 5€ and charge it with money, then you can use buses and trams paying 80 cents for every ride. Without the card one ride costs 1.35. However, if your apartment is close to the campus (Plaza San Francisco) you won't have to take a bus or tram so much because everything is in a walking distance.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, I tried to list not only the good aspects of my Erasmus but also the bad ones, since I did not want to write the report as if all was perfect. Spain is not like Germany and things do not always work the way they should. I would not say I experienced a cultural shock but at the beginning I was at times surprised how it goes in Spain, but after a month I got used to the Spanish way of life and liked it in a way. Spending a semester in Zaragoza was a worthy experience which definitely enriched my life in my ways.