

# Erasmus in Geneva 2017/18

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## Why do an ERASMUS in Geneva?

Clearly there are the obvious cliché reasons – that you get to see more of the world, self-development, networking and perhaps for the CV too. But less immediately obvious is the fact that you have a support network and a point of contact from Warwick when you go abroad. Imagine wanting to study, work or even live abroad; having people from your home university and their resources as somewhere you can turn to for any questions or assistance can be very useful indeed. And finally, a major factor which should be considered is that by doing a year abroad, not only did I not have to pay the normal full school fee to Warwick (“only” £1500 administration fee to Warwick), but in addition you get a scholarship when doing the year abroad; so a year abroad could be considerably cheaper than spending the year at Warwick.

However, the main reason I did my ERASMUS in Geneva in particular though, is because I knew basic French and wanted to improve it – what a good opportunity!

## Geneva and surroundings

Before coming to Geneva, the only thing I knew about it was that it is very international which gave me the impression that it would be a large city. It is very international; however, to my surprise, it is physically and functionally more like a medium-sized town. Particularly at the centre, Geneva is beautiful. I lived in a nice suburban area from where I would be greeted with a great view of the alps every time I went out the door.

If you ever do come here to study in Geneva (or anywhere else abroad generally), don't miss the opportunity to travel around either. The views around Geneva and in Switzerland are spectacular. If you would like to travel around often, then consider getting the Swiss half fare card which gives 50% off on practically all transport around Switzerland. Or if you would like to binge travel around Switzerland for several days then consider getting a Swiss travel pass at the time; it can very much be worth the price if you go travelling around enough.

In Geneva itself, the transport system is excellent. I bought a bus pass which allows you to travel on the buses and trams and were very good but depending on what you want to do, you could also buy a bike to travel around but you need to take care as a lot of bike thefts do occur. At Geneva there are two semesters a year and a hand-me-down bike sale occurs around the start of each semester at the university.

## Academics in Geneva

Personally, I preferred the academic system/structure at Warwick. I feel like Warwick gives a much stronger, wider and deeper foundations into mathematics, with more choices too although the modules in Geneva can be more niche and can be interesting too. However, it's not to say that the mathematics taught here are easy because it isn't – but they are very much do-able from my own experience, assuming you are willing to work for it. Also unlike at Warwick there are no printed notes, so you must make sure to turn up to every lecture or at least to get the notes from any lectures you miss from your classmates.

In terms of the lecture classes, I found that some of the lecturers were amazing and some less so and the class sizes are small. They were usually around 10-20 people, but I even had a lecture with only one other student which was something different! There are also seminar classes which you can choose to go to. The format is as follows; you are assigned into groups of twos or threes and are given a topic to research. Then every week, a group will have to present their topic to the class. So in other words, it is a module where the student teaches each other rather than the lecturer teaching. On this note though, you have to sign up for the seminar classes and the spaces fill up quickly so remember to check your module choices earlier if possible and to look out especially for the seminars.

In terms of language, most of the classes are taught in French but some in English and correspondingly with the exams and assignments. However, you can always do your exams and assignments in English if you so wish; such is the advantage of Geneva being so international. My standard of French was probably just above GCSE when I first arrived and was barely even at conversational standard and yet I still found it was practical to do and learn mathematics at Geneva. I did not find it troublesome at all to learn French vocabulary for the mathematics – there are rather few and is easily picked up.

The exams I found very different; after all, most of the examinations were oral examinations (I only had one or two which were written). The oral exams usually last only 20-30 minutes which go by extremely quickly. So out of the many topics you learn in a module, only one or two aspects are asked and discussed about. In addition, because it is oral, I do believe that the exam can be influenced by not only the maths but the way you interact with the examiner (your lecturer). So I think that there are pros and cons between the two types of exams and I will leave it to you to discover which one you prefer. ;)

## Accommodation

I lived in university housing 10 minutes' walk from the airport, in a new studio flat which was great apart from the fact that it had no oven nor microwave.

It is very difficult to find housing in Geneva, so my advice is to find housing in Geneva as quickly as possible, maybe even before it's been confirmed that you'll be going to Geneva for a year abroad, just so that you can get on those waiting lists. I suggest you apply to Cité Université which is where many foreign students apply to and is an international hub of people.

## Social Life

It is not difficult to make international friends as an ERASMUS student, but the hardest group I found to make friends with were the locals, language being the main barrier. I found keeping up with conversations in French hard, so it was a bit difficult socialising and conversing with my classmates at times. Also note, despite there being many ERASMUS students doing other subjects, there was only one other ERASMUS student doing maths in Geneva and that was only for the first of the two semesters. Club-wise, there are a good choice of sports but not many of the other types of societies; it is my impression that societies aren't really promoted as core to the student life at Geneva. Because mostly everyone is international, you learn so much about different cultures and conversations can get very interesting. If you wish to socialise, most of the Erasmus students are probably at Cité Université. Also, I suggest going to ESN events and meetups. ESN is basically the

ERASMUS society in Geneva. Unfortunately, since Geneva is more town-like, the night life is lacking if that's your thing.

## Conclusion

I very much enjoyed my time abroad and I strongly recommend doing a year abroad if you can! You learn so much and experience new things. You meet so many great people from all over the world and when you come back you even have something to put on your CV. At the very least, a year abroad is cheaper than a year at Warwick – there is very little to lose and much to gain!