

## Joe Rickelton : Erasmus Report – Leiden, Netherlands

### Applying

At first, I hadn't considered a year abroad. It was only when I received an email saying it was my last chance to apply that I really thought about it, and I soon decided that it was an opportunity not to be missed. In the future I would like to live/study/work abroad, but I would always have something going on which might restrict the amount of fun I could have. But with Erasmus (choosing the intercalated year where my grades wouldn't count) the pressure was off to perform. Although I would still participate in my studies, the final grade wouldn't make much difference to the future. For me, not taking the year for credit was the best choice.

At the time, I didn't consider the location too much. I just knew that I wanted somewhere with a language which isn't too standard (France, Germany etc), and nowhere too hot. From what I was offered, the Netherlands seemed a good choice.

### EILC: Amsterdam

I highly recommend doing some kind of language course. The Erasmus specific ones are great because you meet a small group of Erasmus students who you can keep in touch with through the year. Most of all though, they are free, and you even get the Erasmus grant.

Amsterdam is very busy to live for a whole year, so being right in the centre (my room was 2 minutes walk from Anne Frank's House, and Dam Square) for a month was perfect. Since your EILC will probably be in a different university to your Erasmus placement, it is another good chance to experience somewhere new.

Knowing some Dutch helped me a great deal in the year. They all speak perfect English, but it is much easier to mix with locals once you can introduce yourself in their language. I made friends with a group of local Dutch lads to do things with, and in fact I have already been back to visit them and go to a music festival, and consider them very close friends. If I didn't speak a bit of Dutch, I'm almost certain it would be different.

### Leiden

Settling into Leiden was at first difficult, since I was literally the first person there, and there was no one in my (temporary) accommodation which was awful. However, I soon moved to the place I was supposed to be in the first place. I met with some English guys to watch football which was organised over a Facebook group, and then a few days later the introduction week started. Everyone is in the same boat, in a new country knowing nobody, so it isn't difficult to make friends quickly. Friendship groups soon form, but if I have any advice, don't become restricted to these and continue to meet new people while you can.

Leiden is a great student city. It has a perfect mix of bars, cafes, parks and nice scenery. You are a bike ride from the beach, a short train journey from Den Haag, Amsterdam and Rotterdam. You are also only 15 mins from Schiphol Airport. There are a lot of events happening all the time, and the best thing is 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> October, Leids Ontzet (the whole town stops and parties for 2 days, its brilliant). There is also King's Day in April, which is incredible. Definitely head to Amsterdam on this day, there is a party on every street corner.

The canals are brilliant too. Just to sit beside and have a drink, or even to hire a boat. For my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, I hired a boat (which had a BBQ built in, and a beer tap, and speakers) with a group of friends, making a brilliant day and night.

## **Travelling**

While I didn't feel much pressure from my studies, I took the opportunity to see some more of Europe. I took advantage of my network of old Warwick and new Erasmus friends who lived abroad, making it easier and cheaper to travel. It also meant I had a pretty good guide. For examples of where I went:

- Romania: to visit a friend from Warwick. Stayed in Bucharest and drove to the mountains for a few days.
- Brussels: 24 hours without sleep since it was only a train journey from Leiden, and we didn't want to pay for a hotel.
- Norwich: my friend invited too many girls from Leiden to his UEA law ball, and his girlfriend wasn't too happy, so I went to help him out.
- Norway: in second semester went to visit a close friend who was in Leiden for first semester. We stayed in her cabin in the Norwegian mountains for a few days with another Leiden friend, and then went back to Oslo for a week.
- Germany: a failed road trip since we didn't have a credit card to hire a car, so spent 2 days in Cologne, and went to a football game.
- Rome: watched Italy v England in the Six Nations, staying with some friends, one which was on Erasmus in Rome.
- Antwerp: since Belgium is only a train journey away, and my favourite DJ was playing his world tour in Antwerp, I decided to go with a friend. We had a hotel this time.

Since I don't travel very much, I thought this was pretty good for one year. I also have some friends from Erasmus with invitations to visit, so definitely plan on making use of those.

## **Studying**

My aim of Erasmus was to enjoy my year abroad, but without dropping studying altogether since I think it would be difficult to get back into the habit on my return. In the end, this plan worked well.

I took some difficult courses which were offered to masters students, and some easier modules. I even studied The History of The Netherlands (thought it would be fun/different, it was only different). This gave a good balance, since I did have some challenging maths to keep that part of me happy, but it wasn't too much to take up much time and allowed quite a flexible schedule. I ended up with decent grades and found that I managed my time quite well.

Studying abroad was quite different to what I was used to at Warwick. Classes were smaller and I got to know the lecturers quite well, which made me comfortable asking for help. However, it took a while because it was very independent at the start with little structure or guidance. This is a good thing though, because if I go onto further study after Warwick, or a job, then it is very unlikely to be a similar structure and environment to Warwick, so it is useful to be able to adapt to be comfortable in these situations.

## **Conclusion**

You won't regret going on Erasmus. It is a unique opportunity, where you will meet people who you become incredibly close to. I would say that I have become closer to people on Erasmus than I have in 2 years at Warwick, or even with people at school. If you do go on Erasmus, don't take things too seriously, just enjoy yourself and take advantage of as many opportunities as possible.