

Introduction

I believe it was the autumn term second year when I received an email about doing a year abroad, it had never been my plan to do Erasmus but with Covid on I knew I wanted to get away. This was the best decision I've made at university and probably the best in my life, if you think that it could be something that appeals to you then definitely try.

Specifically for going to Padova, I don't think I could have made a better choice. It was fate actually; since I only wanted to go to an Italian university, and this was the only option available for my course. However now I couldn't imagine living anywhere else for a year. Padova is a wonderful historic Italian town, very clean and safe, within reaching distance of many famous tourist spots like Venice and Verona, which are great places to explore. The University is very popular with Erasmus students and I found it easy to make plenty of friends there.

Before leaving (paperwork)

Before I went it seemed as there was a mountain of things to organise and sort out, and to be honest there is quite a lot, to save yourself a lot of stress I would advise you to get things done early. For example: looking for a flat, doing all the Erasmus paperwork (learning agreements), looking into whether you need a Visa, renewing your passport, checking if you need insurance. If you're not sure I would suggest emailing both the study abroad departments at Warwick and Padova for advice, both helped me greatly, but note they are very busy so you can usually expect long waits for replying, which is another reason to start your form filling early. Although none of this is fun, personally I really don't like paperwork, it's definitely worth it in the end, and if you're prepared you won't be overwhelmed.

Accommodation

From the experience of other international students, I know finding a place to stay can be the worst part of your year abroad. There is very high competition for rooms, and I met a disproportionate amount of people who had to spend their first month in an Airbnb because they could not yet find a flat to stay in or had been scammed. Personally, I found a room on HousingAnywhere around April or May as soon as my place at the university was confirmed, I had no issues at all using this website, the landlords were helpful, and I felt confident that all would be well on my arrival. I was paying €275 for a shared room with bills included, the room was large and I lived with 5 other flatmates. The only downsides were that I was a bit out of the town and not living with other Erasmus students. In the end though I found many other ways to meet Erasmus students like myself. I would say the average price of a room was €400 for a single and around €275 for a shared both with bills included. Although it could likely be more expensive if your flat houses less than 6 people.

Other ways to find houses could be off Facebook or Erasmusu but you must be careful, I would suggest maybe looking for an advertiser who is a student leaving, they will probably be more sympathetic in helping you and you can ask for more information as to make sure it's not a scam, for example a video call of the flat. I've attached links below of places to get started. Also you can apply for the university housing, however since you only get confirmation of a place very late I would

suggest applying for it then finding private housing and rejecting the offer if you don't need it. If you're having trouble with your private accommodation you could then accept Uni housing. I must add though that I didn't know many people who did live in them so I can't say sincerely whether they are good or bad.

HousingAnywhere: <https://housinganywhere.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/erasmus.padova>

Erasmusu: <https://erasmusu.com/>

Life in Padova

As I'm writing this it has been just over a year since I moved to Padova and after travelling through a lot of Italy I never found a City I would have preferred to live in. During the first few weeks I was struck with the beauty of the centre: the three large Piazzas filled with bars, cafes and gelaterias which was my favourite setting to meet friends, there are the beautiful shops, the stunning San Antonio Basilica and the peaceful Prato della Valle. The large student population means there is always something to do too, there are a few clubs in the town that are not huge but a lot of fun, often in the Parco della musica they have concerts, and for a quiet night there are hundreds of bars and coffee shops open in the evening for aperitivo.

Padova is not a very large city but this is definitely a strength, you can reach everywhere on bicycle (which I would say you must buy but shouldn't spend more than 80 euro on a second hand one). and after 6 months you can really start to feel a sense of community. Shop owners will recognise you; you will often bump into friends or classmates in the streets, and within a year you get the experience of having lived somewhere and not just being a long-term tourist like you may in other cities. Other things to look out for are cheap classical concerts for students going on in the Teatro Verdi and the markets that are held everyday in the centre, here you can get the best fruits and vegetables, much cheaper than the supermarket.

Studying

Next, we should talk about the University, first off I was surprised to find out Padova is a very historic Uni, one of the oldest in the world founded in 1222. They are very proud of their history and they still have many beautiful old buildings used for teaching today, it may remind you of a historic University town in the UK like York or Oxford. Also, it is very prestigious in Italy and although Warwick is excellent you should not think that the quality of teaching or expectations on students are any less there.

Now regarding my experience in the maths department there will be some differences from what you're used to in England. First off classes are much smaller and the masters' modules rarely have more than 20 people in attendance, so be ready to make use of a lot closer contact with your lecturer, they are usually very approachable and will be happy to assist with any questions you may have. Second note that an exam can be written, oral or a mixture of both, when deciding which modules to take always find out the mode of examination so you know how to prepare. With regards to exams, you must also know that in Italy you can take an exam multiple times, technically up to 5 times however in practice since you will only attend the university for 1 year you will probably only have two opportunities to take an exam. The first exam will usually be two weeks after the end of a module, if you fail this or think you can do better you may reject the grade and attend a

second one usually a month or so later. This is a good system as you can have a trial run for each exam and see how much extra revision/ practice you think you need to get your desired grade.

Deciding which modules (courses) you take is very important as there are some great professors at Padova and it's worth getting the most out of your studies there. You can try/ attend as many courses as you wish and take as many exams as you wish both 3rd year undergraduate and masters courses. Nearly all UG courses are taught in Italian but are much easier mathematically and depending on your confidence in the language they may be worth trying. I took nearly all masters courses however since they were taught in English, I will admit some are a bit of a stretch for a 3rd year but most are quite self-contained so it is not necessary to have a lot of preliminary reading. I took 3 courses each semester for a total of just over 45 ECTS which is around 90 CATS. I would suggest for you to do 3 modules each semester maybe with an extra one as backup since any more will be too much work for you and could mean having less time to enjoy the extracurricular Erasmus experiences. To make a decision I suggest you attend all courses you are interested in for the first week or two and ask other students what they think, the other mathematics students I met were all very friendly. It's important that you can understand the lecturer, the pace of the course is good for you, and you agree with the method of examination.

In terms of facilities, I would also add there are many libraries and study rooms around the city which you can use with an app could affluences. These are very useful especially if you have a busy flat where it can be difficult to study, however note they often close quite early and are not open on the weekends.

Outside of mathematics I also took a free Italian language course which is on offer to all Erasmus students, I would highly recommend taking this, the teachers are very good and you will pick up the basics of the language quickly.

Travelling

One of the best things about being in Padova is how easy it is to travel, with my friends in the first semester we would try to explore a new city every weekend, from the train station we quickly and cheaply could reach Venice, Verona, Vicenza, Bologna, Milan, Bassano del Grappa, Belluno and more. All these we could explore in a day picking notable landmarks and museums/galleries but also I liked to take multiple trips to cities like Venice where you're close enough to just go for an afternoon.

Being in northern Italy is very convenient for international travel, in my holidays I was able to visit some of my new international friends via train or bus. I got to travel to Grenoble, Prague, Vienna, Klagenfurt and San Marino which were all amazing experiences and of course were much more affordable than travelling from the UK.

Friends

For me this is the most important topic as after a year I realised that in all memorable events I enjoyed it was really the people that I met which made them special. I would encourage you to be as social as possible to get the most out of your time. I was extremely fortunate when finding friends, in the first week I met my neighbours (other Erasmus students) and they invited me to join many of the facebook and whatsapp groups for the international students in Padova, these were full of people wanting to go out and explore the city. One evening that week we all met up in the Piazza dei Signori and I found the majority of my friends for the next 10 months. One more thing I would recommend is try to specifically meet students not from the UK, all though it may seem difficult at first you will find it a lot more interesting and enlightening to talk to people with a different culture than your own

Fantasia

Lastly, I just want to mention one small secret of Padova. In a shop called Sumiti if you go in at lunch and ask for a fantasia panino you can buy the best sandwich you will ever taste for 2 euro. Enjoy.