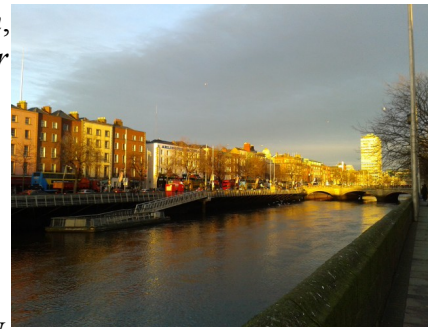


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## One Year at Maynooth University

Studying abroad is one of my best experiences, and I can highly recommend applying for Erasmus at the BUW, regardless of what country you prefer and what university you want to attend. As I studied at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM), from September 2015 to June 2016, I might be able to help you in your decision, though I have to say that in the following report my experience, of course, is presented in a compressed form. If you have any questions not answered by the end, feel free to send me an email! I'm also up for meeting over a cup of coffee (or tea) so that you can ask your questions in person, be it before the application process or after you have been accepted.

### Preparation

The most thrilling, and probably exhausting, part of your Erasmus experience will be the preparation for your stay abroad. You have to fill out a lot of documents, you have to search for accommodation, you have to clarify insurance protection, and countless other things. The preparation time might leave you confused, and possibly frustrated, though I can assure you that these feelings are shared by a lot of students getting ready to study abroad, so there is no need to panic. The most important part is the learning agreement. As soon as you get accepted by the Erasmus coordinators, start going to the professors of your 'Fachbereiche', talk with them about possible courses you can attend and for which classes you can get credits at the BUW. As I was almost finished with my Bachelor's degree, I couldn't get any further credits for that Bachelor, but it was possible to attend courses that could be accredited for my Master's degree.

### Accommodation

After dealing with the necessary paper work, the question of where to live arises. There are basically two options, the first one being on-campus accommodation. For this type of accommodation you can apply, though it is not guaranteed you will get a place in one of the apartments managed by the university. I only know of two people who were lucky enough to get a place in one of the three different student dorms (River Apartments, Village Apartments or Rye Hall), whereas most of the people I got to know there had to find other accommodation, myself included. If you do not belong to the lucky ones, do not despair. The University offers help in the form of a program and additional information. The program is a website for which you get a password, allowing you to log in and view landlords and the rooms that are up for rent.

At this point let me briefly explain the type of accommodation that you usually find off-campus. You do not find huge apartment blocks in Maynooth, but instead families offering a room in their house or renting a semi-detached house to a group of students. The first option includes the use of the kitchen and sometimes the living room as well, allowing you to interact with Irish people on a regular basis. The alternative is a flat or house share. I got a room in a house rented solely to other international students.

Getting back to the process of finding accommodation, the website is one of the means by which you can come into contact with landlords. There are other websites not managed by the university as well, such as daft.ie or rent.ie. I found the room I rented on the first website. The problem that you will face is renting a room without actually visiting it, if you are not able to fly over to Ireland and visit possible rooms before the semester starts in September. Not seeing the room in person is kind of risky, but I didn't want to arrive in Ireland without a place to stay, so I asked for photographs and

later on for the lease agreement to be sent to me. The alternative is that you rent a bed in a hostel and then search for accommodation after your arrival. There are advantages and disadvantages to both methods, I decided to rent a room from overseas because I wasn't really sure if I would find accommodation once I was there, due to the fact that Maynooth is a really small town and there are more students than offered accommodation every year. The surrounding villages also offer rooms for rent, but I wasn't sure if I would find something suitable and, as I learned later, a lot of students search for accommodation before their arrival, so starting to look for something as early as possible seems the best option to me.

## **The University**

Studying at NUIM was something I greatly enjoyed. The first week is something like the Fresherman's week, introducing you to the workings of the university, getting you acquainted with the campus and allowing you to meet other international students. You also have to finalize your course plan, i.e. getting the different courses signed by the professors there. What I found great is the possibility of changing your courses during the first two weeks of the semester. If you realize that you are not as interested in a course or that you would like to include another course in your semester plan, you can still change it. This has the advantage that you can spend the first week visiting different courses and then decide which you want to attend, allowing you to discard classes that turn out to be different from what you expected, which happened to me. I had, as I perceived, the great advantage of almost being finished with my Bachelor's degree, and only being able to get credits for some of the Master's degree classes. This allowed me to choose courses solely based on my interest, and next to English and Biology courses I, for instance, attended a geography course, and several early Irish classes.

If you plan your classes, be aware of the fact that often it is the case that they take place twice a week, with every slot taking up around 50 minutes. When you plan your timetable, the courses are presented as taking place during the whole hour, for example from 10-11, thus you might be confused at first how you are supposed to change lecture hall with one course being in a different building right after the other lecture has just finished. It is common practice though that the lesson starts 5 minutes later and ends 5 minutes earlier, thus you will always have enough time to change the room and/or the building.

What I really want to highlight is the Buddy-System, for which you can apply. It provides you with a buddy, an Irish student helping you get all your questions answered, and your first "Irish contact". Really do apply for this, it is a great way of getting to know someone at the university, someone who can help you with the countless questions you will most likely have and who is maybe the first person you know there, making you feel more secure. Even if you decide that you do not get along with the student, or if the contact somehow decreases over the semester, I can only stress that it is a great help especially in the beginning.

## **Free-time activities**

While Maynooth is a small town, its pubs and the university offer a lot of chances for enjoyment. The university's clubs and societies provide lot of activities where you can take part, and I highly recommend having a look at the list provided on the website of the university and signing up for as many societies as you find interesting. The international office also organizes weekend and day trips, which have the advantage of not requiring any planning for you.

Whereas Maynooth is really small and doesn't really offer a lot of activities in and of itself, Dublin is not far away and can be reached via train within 30-40 minutes and via bus within 50 minutes, allowing day trips for exploring the city, sight-seeing or just a good old plain shopping trip.

## Finances

Studying abroad is always connected with questions concerning financing. While it is not possible to tell you how much it will cost you, considering that everyone has different expectations concerning traveling, free-time activities and such things, I can at least give you a broad overview over what to expect regarding the rent and groceries. For my room I had to pay around 430 € per month, and as far as I know, this is roughly what you should expect with monthly rents ranging from 300 (if you're lucky) to around 500 € (and I've heard of cases where the rent was even higher). Food is also more expensive than in Germany, and especially the Irish supermarkets such as Dunnes Stores or Tesco can't be compared to German price standards. Nevertheless, there are student-friendly supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl in Maynooth, so you do have the choice of where you want to go grocery shopping.

## Conclusion

As I said in the beginning, studying abroad has been, at least for me, one of the best experiences I had so far. It might not always go as smoothly as you hope, it certainly didn't for me, but even including all the not so great experiences I had, which I haven't talked about since they were of a more personal nature and not connected to the general housing and university experience, I would do it again any time. So for those of you who are still unsure whether you should really study abroad, just do it. You won't regret it! And for those of you who are in the process of deciding what university you want to prioritize, Maynooth is a really great place to live and study.



*Inch Beach Head, Dingle*