

Maynooth 2015-2016

If you decide to go to Maynooth for your Erasmus, you have a magnificent adventure and possibly marvellous time ahead of you. The country, the people, and the university are great but the expenses are considerable and so is the level of chaos and stress at times. If you decide to apply for any of the offered exchange programmes, you will soon be overwhelmed with crucial information to be processed and internalised and a lot of stuff that is good to know, too. The following is my humble contribution to this enormous mental task ahead of you. I have tried to concentrate on the questions that might be pressing for future outgoing Erasmus students but in the end, the classification is entirely up to you.

Money

Ireland is comparatively expensive. Even if you live very economically like I believe I did, you may still reckon with expenses of some €600 - €800 per month. Most of this will be the rent and bills for your housing, but groceries are also pretty expensive (even if you mostly buy them at Aldi's, which I strongly recommend you to do – the store is also conveniently close to campus) and so is public transport, especially if you commute (and are used to the German Semesterticket). When buying stuff in Maynooth, always ask if they offer a student discount. The rest is up to you and your chosen lifestyle: going out, eating out, and travelling will naturally take their toll on your finances, but then again – if you can afford it, it is not the worst idea to spend some money in order to make your time abroad worthwhile.

Housing

Finding accommodation in and around Maynooth is tough; there is no two ways about it. If you know you are going and can squeeze in a trip to Ireland in summer, you should definitely use the opportunity to look for accommodation in person. If not, you will have to take care of that from here like most of us had to. International students from Europe hardly ever get a place in on-campus accommodation, so you don't actually have to wait for your official refusal to start looking elsewhere. It is a good idea to start as early as spring. A popular online platform for accommodation in Ireland is daft.ie. Once you are enrolled as a NUIM student and get your login details you can also check out maynoothstudentpad.ie. There also is a facebook group concerning student accommodation in Maynooth “Maynooth students' accommodation <academic year>” that you can join (as well as one for all the incoming Erasmus students of the academic year, which is also incredibly useful). I believe there is always a risk when you try and secure accommodation from abroad, but you can take security measures such as asking your prospective landlord/landlady if they are willing to skype with you and of course insist on a written agreement to be signed by both parties (this is not necessarily usual in Ireland, especially if you rent a room in an owner-occupied house). You should definitely consider living in one of the nearby towns such as Celbridge and Leixlip, but make sure you add the price for commuting to the rent and other costs in your calculations.

I personally found my first accommodation on daft.ie: a reasonably sized room with a double bed in a house that I would share with “other international students”. They turned out to be Chinese girls and really nice for the most part, but with a very different idea of hygiene than I had. I paid €480 per month without bills (electricity, heating, wifi, etc.) and decided I wanted to move somewhere else soon after my first month there. Everyone told me I should be happy that I even had a place in Maynooth and that I wouldn't find anything else anyway, but I looked on maynoothstudentpad and was lucky to find a room that was not even far nicer (although considerably smaller) than my first one, but I also had my own bathroom and got to live with an Irish woman with who I got on far, far better. Plus, the monthly rent was only €400, bills included. So yes, the accommodation part of organising your stay in Maynooth is very likely to be nerve-wracking, but I would advise you just to keep trying until you find

something you can actually live with. If you feel absolutely helpless, there is always people around that you can ask for help, for example at the International Office, the Accommodation Office, the Students' Union (they're also on facebook) and of course the other former and incoming international students.

Studying

For me, studying and University life in Maynooth itself really were the most reliable fun part of my stay abroad. There is a whole range of fascinating classes you can choose from. My actual subjects are English and German, but since I went to Ireland in my seventh and eighth semester and there was not much I could do in terms of getting credits for my BA anymore anyway, I seized the opportunity to take a little look around. Alongside some captivating English and German classes, I ended up dabbling in history, sociology, and also took a class called "Introduction to Irish Studies" specifically made for and aimed at international students. If you are studying German and go to Maynooth after having completed six semesters of German studies, I can warmly recommend you to try and get into one of the Master's seminars of the German department there. They do not take in many international students as there are so few Irish students who are actually enrolled in the German MA, but this also means the classes normally comprise two to three students tops and you are in for an interesting and intensive learning experience. This way, I could take a seminar in Maynooth that counted as a literary studies Hauptseminar in Wuppertal and got the credit points for it. Also, after taking part in this seminar during the first term I was offered a job as a tutor for the German department for the second term. Generally speaking, I found especially the academic staff and instructors at NUIM to be nothing but kind, eager to help, and very approachable.

However, there are also some aspects about studying at an Irish university that you should know so that you can avoid getting a nasty surprise. Expect to work a lot for your classes. Usually, you will have an exam at the end of the term but also continuous assessment, normally in the shape of a presentation or an essay due sometime during term. Depending on how many classes you have and what kind of assessment they require, this system can get you extremely busy at times. It is quite normal to get the choice of essay questions only a few weeks before the essay is due, so you cannot necessarily work in advance. In Ireland, you can definitely forget about the German approach of knowing that you will have to write a term paper for your classes at some point, and then forgetting all about it for the next couple of months. The written exams in January and May can also be really tough. For the most part, you will receive a sheet with several questions and are required to answer one or two of them in the form of an entire essay each. It does not have to be as long or detailed as a term paper, but you need to know your primary text and the argumentation and authors of some secondary sources well enough to spontaneously write an academic, well-founded text of your own. For me and I daresay most German students this is unfamiliar and a real challenge, but also manageable with reasonable preparation. Another thing to watch out for is the difference in the German and Irish grading system which can lead to trouble when you are back in Wuppertal and in the process of getting your grade converted and credited for your BA. In Maynooth, your assessments will be graded percentagewise with an additional letter grade. Theoretically, 40 per cent is the pass mark and 100 the full mark but in practice no one ever scores 100. Everything from 70 upwards is considered an A and is a great accomplishment. Depending on who you have to deal with for the translation of your Irish grades into German ones in Wuppertal, you might feel treated unfairly as some insist on using a converting formula that only takes the theoretical grading scale into account and completely ignores the reality of how it is employed in practice.

All in all, however, studying abroad is a great way of broadening your horizon and learning loads about yourself and the world beyond your own nose. Do not be too afraid of the obstacles that certainly await you – ask yourself what growth and wisdom they offer.