

The Erasmus Initiative

All the Erasmus students know each other as soon as they arrive. How? Well, that's all thanks to the Erasmus Initiative – a group of volunteers (mostly students) who organise events for incoming Erasmus Students and help them settle into their new host country. I've been going to EIB (Erasmus Initiative Bremen) -organised events since the first day I moved to Bremen. They've had treasure hunts, trips to other places, guided tours, sightseeing in Bremen, ice-breaker bingo, the list goes on and on. The best thing about these events is that none of them are online. 0%. Finally the chance to meet people somewhere other than on Zoom!

It really surprised me when I learnt that they're all volunteers, mainly because it takes so much time and energy to organise these events and there's always a member of the EIB at the events to ensure everything runs smoothly etc. I've spoken to some of them and asked why they decided to join the EIB and they all said the exact same thing. They too did a semester (or two!) abroad and know what it feels like to be alone in a foreign country. They want to help us adapt to Bremen and get to know as many people as possible.

I've definitely mentioned it before but I *looveeeee* getting to know people from different countries who all have different backgrounds and cultures and languages. People are great in general but it's even better when you get to learn so much from them. Comparing things between your countries/cultures is also interesting and both parties benefit from this.

If you ever decide to study a language and go on a year abroad (which I highly recommend you do), the Erasmus Initiative will be your best friend. They really do take care of you and ensure you make the most of your year abroad, although that part is also up to you. My advice would be to always participate. It doesn't matter if the event is bowling and you don't like bowling (or the German "Kegeln" version of bowling), just do it. Always take part, say yes to every invite, make plans, don't be afraid to just go out and try new things. That's what Erasmus is all about and the EIB remind us of that every week. Take every opportunity and learn from it – you get to practice the language, build new relationships with people from all over the world.

I did a culture module in Maynooth before I moved and I learnt so much from it. It touched on subjects such as interculturality, respecting other cultures, culture shocks (i.e. new/different ideas in different countries that differ to those in your home country). It really prepared me and all the other students for the year abroad. I was able to begin Erasmus with an even more clear and open mind. One thing I'll never forget is something my lecturer said in one of his culture lectures – everything is a learning experience, whether you realise it or not (or something like that). I've kept that in mind since the moment I moved here and I will continue when I'm back in Ireland. If I'm unsure of whether or not to go, if I know enough people who are taking part, if I'll even like it – I always squash those doubts with the simple thought that is: it's a learning experience. If I don't enjoy it I don't have to go back, but if I don't try it I'll never know. Tonight, there's a dinner organised by the EIB, tomorrow night we have bingo and at the weekend a trip to Ankelohe, a small village in Lower Saxony, Germany. I can't wait to find out what's planned for next week.

Tschüss!

Zoya