



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Study programme WUR	Communicatie en Life Sciences
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	02/10/2023 until 23/02/2024
Exchange destination: University	University of Maribor
Faculty	Faculty of Arts & Faculty of Education
Country	Slovenia
City	Maribor

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

Since my first year in university, I knew I wanted to go on an Erasmus Exchange. What an opportunity to live in a different country for a while! It is a chance to meet people from other cultures, learn a new language, stepping out of your comfort zone, explore new places – enough reasons for me to continue this plan and go on a study exchange.

What is the reason you chose for this country/university?

I wanted to go to eastern Europe to a place that was not very common to go to, in a country that was relatively unknown.

When I told people that I would go to Maribor in Slovenia, most of the time they reacted surprised. I wanted to explore a country with a rich and interesting history, so in the Balkan I was in the right place for that.

Besides that, Maribor is situated on a very good location in Europe to travel to beautiful cities and places.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination?

The easiest way to reach Maribor is by plane. A few times a week planes go from Eindhoven or Amsterdam to Ljubljana (the capital), Zagreb (Croatia) or Vienna (Austria). From these places you can take the train, Flixbus or GoOpti to Maribor.

If you do not want to fly, there are options for Flixbus from cities in Germany directly to Maribor. They take many hours. Recently I learned there is also a night train from the Netherlands to Vienna. From Vienna there is a 3-hour Flixbus going to Maribor.

4. University and studying

Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

	Course	ECTS	Short description of the contents	Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high)	Remarks
1	Astronomy	4	Basic knowledge about solar system, planets, moon and the Earth. All in the context of being a school teacher.	5	Very nice and diverse course. It consisted of lectures and a creative assignment and some astronomical observations outside at nighttime. For me it was the only course that was fully in English, and I enjoyed it a lot.
2	Drawing I	9	Drawing objects in open space (atelier) with different techniques in shading and perspective.	4	This course was set up very freely. Every session you draw the objects the teacher puts in the middle of the atelier and the teacher walks around and gives you feedback on your work. It was very interactive and that is why I learned a lot in this course.
3	Sculpture I	8	Art history lessons and practicals (claying) in the atelier.	3	The course was set up nicely with partly the theoretical lessons and practicals in the atelier. But the lessons were in Slovene and we as Erasmus students did not know this before. I therefore do not recommend choosing this subject unless you can understand the language. The practicals (claying in the atelier) were nice and fun and the teacher is kind and helpful.
4	Introduction to Philosophy	3	Basic concepts about philosophy like <i>the meaning of life, free will</i> and <i>death</i> are discussed	2	As Erasmus students we did not have any lectures because the general lectures were in Slovene. Therefore, the teacher gave us an assignment that was writing a summary about the textbook. We had to hand in at the end of the semester. The textbook was nice to read but as Erasmus students we could hardly call this a course because we were not following any lectures and had no interaction with the teacher or other students. That is why I am giving it this low score.
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What is it like to study there?

E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material.

The academic level was lower compared to the level at Wageningen University. There were less contact hours and the readings were shorter and sometimes even not scientific.

The study forms were comparable to the study forms in Wageningen. The courses generally consisted of lectures and practicals and sometimes a little bit of groupwork. The examination was most of the time done orally so that was the biggest difference. The workload was lower than in Wageningen but you are expected to participate actively in the courses in order to pass – nothing abnormal, I think.

For me personally it was sometimes hard to stay motivated for my courses because they were in Slovene language. At other, bigger faculties like the Faculty of Engineering or the Faculty of Economics, the lectures were provided in English. Maybe because there were more Erasmus students following courses there. Beforehand, I did not know that my courses were in Slovene because in the course guide on the website of Maribor University it seemed that they would be in English. So keep this in mind if you want to follow courses at the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Education.

What is the culture of the university?

E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with the WUR?

The professors were very approachable. I could go to them any moment and they were very willing to help me. One advantage of taking courses in Slovene language is that you get to know the local students. At one of my courses I was the only Erasmus student in class so I got the chance to interact with the Slovene students a lot. And the same goes for them: they were very kind and willing to help and translate for me as well as possible.

The classes are smaller than at Wageningen University. It felt a bit like high school to me.

What does the university offer students additionally?

E.g. catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?

The nicest thing the university offered students is the food coupon system. With these coupons you could eat at restaurants in the city for a reduced price. A lot of restaurants participated in this system and in general the food is very good in Slovenia. So my friends and I used the coupon system a lot.

There are a few places to eat at the faculties and machines everywhere where you could get coffee, tea and hot chocolate – all for pretty cheap as well.

The university also offers sports facilities, like fitness or team sports in the sports hall. I did not make use of this so I do not know how well this was organised.

There is also ESN in Maribor. They organised parties, two nice trips, the Welcome Weeks and some other activities. It was not that much, but for me it was enough, and I felt very soon at home because of the activities they organized. The ESN members were also very approachable and involved with the Erasmus students.

5.Housing-travelling-living

What are the possibilities for housing?

E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?

The university offers accommodation on campus for Erasmus students and local students. Most of the time these are shared rooms, which means that you can be in a room with one or two other students. The prices vary between 180-220 euro's per month. If I am not mistaken there is also a limited amount of individual rooms on campus. These will be more expensive.

Because of circumstances I could not apply anymore for campus-accommodation, so I had to rent a private room. It was very difficult for me to find a room and it took me two months before I found something. My room was in the city centre and pretty expensive for Maribor norms.

My advice is to start looking very early. The university offers help in the search for accommodation. As far as I know all Erasmus students could find a room in the end.

What is the culture of the country like?

E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?

The culture of Slovenia is not that different from Dutch culture. They value the same things and have the same manners. Life in Slovenia goes a bit slower than in the Netherlands. People really take their time to eat and socialize in cafés or on the street. But they are also hard working and driven people, so it is a bit of both worlds. In general, Slovene people speak very good English – especially younger people.

(Tip: always keep some cash money with you because sometimes you cannot pay with card.)

The local cuisine was much better than in the Netherlands. I don't know why but everything just tasted better. To my surprise there were a lot of vegetarian options! The local people think being a vegetarian is a bit strange, but there were always a few vegetarian options on the menu.

Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?)

Maribor has a bike system for only 3 euros for a year and you can use the city bikes as much as you want. You need to download an app and make an account but it is totally worth it. Bike stations are everywhere and very convenient. I used it a lot to go to university and other places in the city.

You can also take the bus to the Faculty and for students there is a discount on busses in the city. I think it was around 25 euros for a bus card.

I only took the bus a couple of times – mostly I did everything walking or biking.

Public transport is cheaper in Slovenia than in the Netherlands. The big cities are connected through trains and the trains run every day a few times. Sometimes I randomly took a train to Ljubljana or Celje just to enjoy the pretty environment.

6. Expenses

Can you give an indication of your expenses for/during your exchange?

E.g. you can also indicate price differences (higher/lower/equal) in comparison to the Netherlands.

- Ticket there: around 50 euros
- Visa if applicable: not applicable
- Vaccinations if applicable: not applicable
- Insurances (extra, if applicable): not applicable
- Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation: I paid 470 euros per month for my private room, but it was on the higher end, and I was in desperate need of a room. There are many cheaper options when it comes to accommodation in Maribor.
- Groceries: prices in Maribor were similar to prices in the Netherlands
- Public transport: I did many trips in- and outside of Slovenia. I would say that a train-trip inside Slovenia would cost around 15 euros (retour). The buses are cheaper. A bus ticket costs between 1,60 and 2,20.
- Restaurant/going out for dinner: much cheaper than in the Netherlands. With the student food coupons it is between 0 and 5 euros.
- Daytrips/sight-seeing: Most of the time we went by Flixbus. Prices vary between 15 euros and 60 euros I would say. We also rented cars and with a bigger group (so a full car) it was around 15-20 euros per person for a whole day (including gas). Sight-seeing in Slovenia is in low season very affordable. For example we went seeing a waterfall for 2 euros per person.

Additional remarks regarding expenses?

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7. Free time

What are must-sees in the area?

E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?

Slovenia is such a beautiful country. At first, I was focussed on visiting neighbouring countries like Italy, Austria, Croatia and Hungary because they are perfectly reachable by train and Flixbus.

But after a while I wanted to focus on Slovenia more because the country is full of hidden gems. There are many places that I can recommend visiting.

Close to Maribor there is the mountain 'Pohorje' which in winter is known for the skiing slopes. But in summer (and in winter as well) you can do beautiful hikes there all the way to the top. I did hikes in summer, autumn and winter and I can recommend all three seasons doing hikes there. You can find rivers and waterfalls. The mountain is reachable by bus, which takes only 25 minutes. From there you can start hiking.

Furthermore, there are the cities Ptuj and Celje that are worth a visit. In Celje there is the biggest castle in the country that you can visit. A hiking path starting close to the train station, is going up the mountain and only takes 30 minutes to go up to the castle. Celje is reachable by train and Ptuj by bus. Both take around 45 minutes.

A bit further away from Maribor there are many places that I could not get enough of visiting.

In the north-west of the country there is Triglav National Park with the beautiful blue Soca-river and the most famous waterfall: Savica Waterfall. Close to the National Park there is the famous Lake Bled and Lake Bohinj. A little less famous is Lake Jasna close to the city Kranjska Gora.

Around Ljubljana there are the Postojna Caves, Predjama castle, Velika Planina and the smaller city Kranj. Just open any travel guide and you will find more information about these places :-)

Close to the Mediterranean Sea there are the places Koper, Piran and Portoroz. Very different from the rest of the country they give an Italian feeling.

What does not appear in a travel guide, but is definitely worth a visit?

Also close to Maribor there is a hike of 10 kilometres to St. Urbans Church. You can start hiking from the city and soon you will be in the calm, surrounding forests. As far as I know, this hike does not appear in the travel guides but is totally worth doing. It took us around 2-3 hours to reach the Church, and when we arrived, we were rewarded with the most beautiful view on Maribor on the one side of the hill, and the Austrian Alps on the other side. Me and my friend are both inexperienced hikers but we still managed to get up there, so I can recommend this hike also for hikers without a lot of hiking experience!

Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time?

E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?

I recommend doing daytrips a lot! For me this was a perfect way of exploring the country. Since Slovenia is a very small country, doing daytrips can be perfect for exploring all the beautiful places. Because you do not have to spend money on a place to sleep it is also very affordable.

My favourite restaurant in the city was Mr. Falafel (with many vegetarian options!).

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

As I mentioned before, the biggest challenge for me was that the courses I took were in Slovene language. I just accepted it and still managed to pass them but it was definitely not ideal. On the positive side gave it me a chance to really interact with the local Slovene students.

My tip is to directly send e-mails about courses to the faculty of the University of Maribor if you want to have more clarity about them. Many courses are provided fully in English.

What is your best memory of your time abroad?

The first time I reached the top of the Pohorje mountain I felt euphoric. It was exhausting and it took me 2,5 hours. The view you get on the top is breathtaking. (I really made progress because the final time I did the it only took me 1 hour and 45 minutes!)

Another great memory was swimming in the Mediterranean sea close to Piran with my new Erasmus friends.

9. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
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