

# Erasmus Broadening Horizons

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“My Erasmus adventure has been the experience that has had the greatest impact on my life and my perspective.”



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## Denmark and the art of bicycle maintenance.

*From cycle maintenance to ceilidh dancing, Georgia Hingston's Erasmus experience went way beyond learning the local language. She explains why, although she is back home, her heart will always be in Copenhagen.*

It has been a long night. In fact, it is night no longer. I am gloriously tired, blended against the soft clean light of dawn. I make my way past the deserted entrance to Nørreport Station and across a small square, feeling the warmth of the sun on my back, and utter contentment, of sheer belonging, coupled with the sudden grief because in a few short weeks, I must leave this place.

I round the final corner that leads me to the back of Stunderhuset, the student-run volunteer bar where I have spent the last five months working in my free time. Where I have worked with, and met some of my best friends. People from as near and far as Denmark, Spain, Scotland, America, Canada, Greece, France and Hungary to name a few, and from where I have just walked my Spanish friend back home after a BBQ and Ceilidh dance to bid me farewell.

It is also, coincidentally, where I practiced my Danish the most. I can now speak the language well enough to elicit a curious ‘Er du Svensk?’ Are you Swedish? Rather than, on hearing my accent, an automatic response in the Danes’ flawless English. This is something of which I am perhaps overly proud.

While we were ceilidh dancing, our Danish friend is playing the bag pipes, but I am no longer surprised by the unusual events that take place in my daily life in Copenhagen. If there is one thing that Erasmus has taught me it is to expect the unexpected and to accept it graciously. Opportunity is forever knocking in this magical Scandinavian city.

Over the last nine months I have developed a perhaps slightly irrational attachment to my bicycle, even going so far as to name it Mabel. In Copenhagen a bike is like a fifth limb, if it is off the road for a few days for some maintenance you feel like you have lost a leg. It is a symbol of freedom, your badge that labels you as a true Copenhagener, it is your most prized possession. As such, it has become a matter of principle amongst the Erasmus students to cycle everywhere, in all weathers, even in the famous high winds and blizzards that sweep the city in the winter months. This has led to a general development in my levels of determination and staying power when it comes to other aspects of my life. Who would have thought a mere bike could exercise such influence?

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My Erasmus adventure has been the experience that has had the greatest impact on my life and my perspective. From starting the year as a person often stressed and anxious, the experiences have helped me develop into someone who can relax and feel confident in introducing myself to new people. In short, the unknown has become something to embrace, to be excited about, rather than to fear.

I have been privileged to meet people from all over the world, and within that community form a family, a family of people whose kindness and diversity never ceased to amaze me. From the austere sincerity of the Danes, to the willingness of everyone I met to embrace people of all different nationalities and immerse themselves in an alien culture. Having thought myself a fairly cultured individual prior to my trip, they helped me realise how narrow and naive my experience of the world was and to discover how much there is to learn and see.

Although I have chosen to write about a night when I stayed up dancing until dawn, it would be wrong to conclude that late nights are the focus of my experience. Quite the contrary. For me, that particular night embodies all the most important elements of the Erasmus experience and the reasons why anyone should take part. What I draw on here is the sense of community, the building of international bridges and acceptance, the expansion of personal horizons and the gaining of knowledge. That morning I felt as if Copenhagen were not just a place I was staying for a while but a place that had truly become my home.

Having returned to England I feel that there is a part of me that has been left behind. I return having gained a sense of deep contentment, a capacity for continuing self-improvement, a greater knowledge academically, linguistically and personally, and with restless feet that will always carry me to further adventures and new people. Although I know I will always feel that tug, a strange gravity of the heart, calling me back to Copenhagen.

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