

Erasmus Broadening Horizons

Shivani Raghvani tells us about her Erasmus Experience in Turkey



I'm a pharmacy student at Cardiff University and through the Erasmus programme I worked in the pharmaceutical chemistry lab at Ankara University to help make compounds to treat cancer. The research has formed a platform as to what I would like to specialise in one day.

Questions Questions

When I found out that I would be spending three months in Ankara, Turkey, my initial reaction of ecstasy changed to one of anxiety when it hit me that I would be flying out that week.

I had questions that probably ran through many other Erasmus students' minds: what will the country be like? Will I have to make any major changes to my life? Three months is a long time, will I get homesick? Who do I go to for support?

Then I remembered that many students have been in the same situation and if I organised everything well and had a general idea of what to expect - then everything would be fine. However I also came to learn to go with the flow! The result? An amazing experience!

Cultural Concerns

I was a bit worried that, as Turkey is a Muslim country, their culture would be very different from the UK. I was terrified of offending the locals by doing things which would be normal back home. Luckily, on the whole, they dressed and behaved similarly to us in the UK.

My parents were panicking more than I was, as I have never gone to a new country by myself before and I am the first of my two siblings to do this. They couldn't resist coming to visit me, midway through my placement. We made a little family holiday out of this.

By the time the three months were up, I was torn between the excitement of seeing my family in London again and unbelievably sad at leaving behind the new family I made in Turkey.

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Talking Turkish

I hadn't taken language issues into consideration before going to Turkey where the main language is Turkish. However, I found the Turkish people to be the friendliest bunch I've ever met in all my travels. When the locals found out I was an English speaker, they used to call me over to join them for tea and backgammon whilst I told them about myself and they taught me Turkish! I picked up a few words this way and through my trusty dictionary!

Full support

I cannot see a downside to the Erasmus programme. The universities gave me all the support I needed from the point that contracts had to be signed to when I got my participation certificate. I got to see a beautiful country which I would have otherwise never considered to visit.

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Just one month into the programme and my father saw the change in me when he came to visit. He saw that I was more independent, responsible and the first to contribute to any problem that required solving. This was of great importance to me, especially because I am Indian. My father has always been the traditional kind and worries about my safety. The fact that I was going to a country which had civil unrest terrified him. However, after seeing how the programme benefitted me, he even told my younger sister to apply for an Erasmus programme too!

Spreading the Word

Once I got back to London I immediately applied to become an Erasmus ambassador to help promote this life-changing programme and I've been supporting students who are in the application process since then. I have become more confident and more proactive, and have started applying for other positions within the university to help change the lives of more students. The Erasmus programme helped me so I want to help others benefit too.