I am studying Social policy with a major in European labour studies at the University of Bremen. In the beginning of 2013, I studied at the University of Milan for one term (01.01. – 31.03.) as part of my master. I was in Milan as an Erasmus Mundus exchange student. With the following essay, I hope to give prospective students some useful information about the program and their stay in Italy.

1. Preparations

When planning your stay be sure to start on time. In my opinion 3 to 6 months in advance is enough time to find out information and prepare. It also depends on how organized a person is and on the amount of information and support one can get from the study coordinators. My program is a little bit different from the usual Erasmus exchange program. As this was part of the Master’s program of Labour science, coordinated by MEST universities, we got a lot of support from the program’s coordinators at our home university as well as from the receiving university. That is why we did not need as much time as other Erasmus participants and there were different timetables provided for us.

If you would like to rent a dorm room from the CiDIS(Milan version of Studentenwerk), be sure to visit this page [http://www.unimi.it/ENG/relations/31232.htm](http://www.unimi.it/ENG/relations/31232.htm). There is a lot of useful information there. Also, do not hesitate to ask the Erasmus coordinator for the University of Milan – Massimo Costa. He is a really kind person and is eager to help with any kinds of problems. He covers the general Erasmus questions and problems like accommodation, credit points, documents etc. For any specific, study related questions like courses to be taken and Learning agreements for example, you can turn to Renata Semenza. She is the MEST coordinator for the University of Milan.

About the documents required from the University of Milan and/or needed for any kind of documents you have to get in Milan be sure to bring with you at least 5 or 6 photos. You should also get a Confirmation of Erasmus study period from the Erasmus office at the home University. You will also need an European Health Insurance Card and a confirmation that you are internationally insured by your home health insurance institution. And last but not least bring your Learning agreement with you. Be aware that you have 4 weeks to send the signed LA back to your home University. Use this time think about what courses you want to take. My advice is to go to all of the first classes and decide which one would be more interesting to you. Also be informed about the credit points required. Do not forget you need at least 20 CP for the Erasmus grant and also for the MEST Certificate.

2. The University

The University of Milan is situated in the very center of the city, only few minutes away from Duomo (the famous Milan cathedral). The Erasmus office is on the right hand side of the main entrance. This is the first place you should visit once you get to Milan. From the coordinator there you will get all the documents needed for arranging your stay in Milan. Next, if you rented a dorm room, you will need to go to Via Santa Sofia, where the CiDIS office is. Be aware that they only work with students from 9am until 12pm. They will assign you a room in one of their residences and give you (not so detailed) instructions on how to get there.
From the CiDIS office you can also buy a chip card (5€), which grants you student discount not only in the canine, but also some other restaurants and cafes. You will get a list with the places in question, but it is only in Italian.

Next, you have to find the Political science department, where all of our classes took place. It is in a different building on Via Conservatorio 7. There you have a cafetería, where you can get coffee and sandwiches. In the basement, there is a copy shop, probably the cheapest in Milan – between 5 and 7 cents for a copy. You can also print some stuff there.

There is also a library there, which is always crowded. We tried to find more about what can we do there but did not had any luck, as the people that worked there did not speak any English. About the internet: via Eduroam and your home University registration, you will be able to access the internet in any of the university's buildings. You can also use the home university's provider – the unimi network.

There were four courses provided for the MEST students at the time we were there. I personally found all four of them very interesting. It is not necessary to take all courses provided. You can choose any combination of them. Our program was really intense as we had to cover all of the material for one term instead of one semester. Basically we had to be at university Monday to Wednesday from 8.30 am to 6 pm with a two hour lunch break. For every course, we had to do at least two of the following tasks in different combinations – presentation, midterm exam, and essay. Some of the professors also kept a presence lists. The upside to this schedule is that it allows you to take a long weekend and travel around Italy for example.

A beginner's Italian language course was provided for us the MEST students at a different time, because of courses overlapping. Nevertheless, I strongly advise you to take some language course before you come to Milan if you want to avoid stressful situations. Keep in mind that people in Milan usually do not speak English, even at the bank, or at the library, shops, public transportation offices etc.

3. Accommodation and living in Milan

First, it is important to note that if you want to rent a dorm room you have to register at the web site above. Then you have to pay the deposit and the first month rent in advance. I did this via bank transfer. According to the web site a single room costs 500€ and a shared room 300€ monthly, which was not exactly our case. My colleagues and me, we paid for shared rooms, but ended up in single rooms for the same price in the Ripamonti residence. I am not sure if this was not just a pure luck, because the residence is relatively new and maybe they had spare rooms there.

Starting from the beginning, I flew with Ryanair from Bremen to Bergamo Airport. In my opinion, this is the cheapest and most convenient way to get to Milan. There are three different companies offering shuttle services between Orio Airport in Bergamo and Milan city center for the price of 5€. Therefore, you do not need to worry about getting from Bergamo to Milan. For me this was the easiest part. The hard part was getting around in Milan. My advice is to buy a really good, detailed city map, as Milan is a big city and sometimes the maps only include the central parts and leave out namely the quarters where the dorm residences are situated. In addition, the public transportation in Milan can look really confusing at first,
especially if you have to use trams and buses. Most of the public transportation vehicles are not suited for carrying luggage around. Be sure to buy some tickets in advance from some newspaper stand or tobacco shop. Note that you cannot buy tickets from the bus stop in the buses. Erasmus students can apply for student card for public transportation at the ATM (Azienda Transporti Milanesi) offices. You have to pay 17€ for a monthly card and 10€ for the plastic itself (this is not a deposit). The card must be recharged every month. You can find some useful information on this web site http://www.atm-mi.it/en/Pages/default.aspx.

As already said, if you rented a dorm room one of the first things you should do, besides going to the Erasmus office, is to go to the CiDIS office. There they will assign you a room randomly; preferences are rarely taken into account (if ever). Most of the residences are situated away from the city center. My residence was Ripamonti (at Via Ripamonti). It is the newest one. All of the residences have 24h. receptions. You are obligated to leave your room key whenever you leave the residence. You can enter and leave the residence only via a special magnet key card. Be careful not to lose any of your cards (even key card, ATM card etc.) For every card that you lose, you have to go the police first, and get the "lost card report". Without this report, you won’t get your card replaced. This is very unpleasant, especially if you do not speak Italian, as the carabinieri (police) in Italy do not speak English. Italian dorm residences are pretty strict when it comes to visitors or short time leaving policies. Visitors are only allowed from 8am to 12am. They keep lists on visitors and collect ID cards. As opposed to German dormitories, you are not allowed to have overnight guests, not even family members. So if your family or friends are planning to visit you in Milan, be sure to book a hotel, hostel, private apartment or etc. If you want to leave the residence overnight, you must sign out for the period you are not going to sleep there and leave your key card at the reception until you come back. Every residence there is an internet connection. In Ripamonti you could only connect to the web via LAN cable as opposed to other residences where they have Wi-Fi connections. I bought my LAN cable from a PC shop near the residence and paid 8€ for it. However, if you already have a LAN cable you can bring it with you, just to be on the safe side. Internet access in the residences is limited. You only have 500MB daily, so be careful not to reach your limit too early. There are also laundry rooms in the dorms. You can get a laundry key from the reception, you just have to pay 10€ deposit and then charge it with 5€, 10€, 15€ etc. Do not recharge your key if you cannot use up the amount, as you will not get anything else besides the deposit back. It is also useful to say that the people, working at the residences rarely speak English. About the payment: every month you will get an invoice from CiDIS per email with the amount you have to pay. Once you print the invoice in theory, you can pay your rent in every bank you want. This is not exactly true. Once I tried to pay my rent at a Unicredit Bullbank office where I was told I need a codici fiscale in order to pay my rent there. As far as I know this is some sort of personal number that only Italian residents have. So my advice is to stick with the Italian banks. Also, rent can only be paid in cash, no bank transfers possible. The same applies for your deposit; you will get it back in cash.

My dorm room was part of a triple apartment. There three single rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. They were furnished with everything that you might need basically. In the room, there was a bed, a nightstand, a desk with a chair, a wardrobe and a shelf. In the kitchen, you have a stove, fridge and a table with chairs. If there are already people living there, they will probably also have pots, cutlery, plates, cups, glasses etc.
otherwise, it is not likely to find anything of the kind there. Therefore, if you want to be on the safe side it is best to bring some kind of plates, cutlery and a mug for example with you. Be careful with the electrical plugs, as they are not the same as in Germany. If you have any problems with your plugs, you can buy an adapter from Billa for example. This brings me to my next point – grocery shopping. I did mine mostly in Lidl and Billa as these were the cheapest and the closest once to my dorm. The entire dorm apartment is cleaned once a month by the residence cleaning personnel. Linens are provided and are being changed every week.

At the end of your stay in Milan, make sure you have all of your marks, or that Massimo costa has them, so that you can get your Transcript of records. You have to visit the Erasmus office one more time to get all the documents needed. You have to make an appointment with receptionists at the dormitory, so that they can supervise your room. If everything is ok, you can go to the CiDIS office and get your deposit back. This has to be done on the day you leave and not before that. So plan your departure carefully.

My personal advice for your stay in Italy is travel around. Milan is not representative for all the beauties Italy has to offer. And definitely try the Italian gelato!