Erasmus Experience Report

Field of study: Integrated European Studies

Host university: Uniwersytet Jagielloński

Winter semester 2024/2025

I spent my semester abroad in Krakow in the winter semester 2024/2025. First of all, I would like to encourage everyone to consider both Krakow and Poland as a whole as a destination for a semester abroad. It is a country with a great culture, geography and people. Krakow itself also has a lively, young and international atmosphere that is ideal for students.

Why Krakow?

I chose Krakow for several reasons, both personal and practical. An important factor was my family background. My family originally comes from Upper Silesia and emigrated to Germany in 1981. As some of my relatives still live in Poland, I have always had close ties to the country through holidays, family celebrations and regular visits. A particularly formative moment was a trip during my school days when we visited the Auschwitz concentration camp. At that time, I also had the opportunity to get to know Krakow. It is a city that immediately captivated me with its history, architecture and atmosphere. Since that visit, I knew that I wanted to live and study there one day. An additional bonus was the proximity to my great-aunts, with whom I was able to spend many weekends. This allowed me to learn about my ancestors' origins alongside my studies and gave me a little piece of home far away.

Living in Krakow

I found accommodation through an internet search using MyErasmus.pl. The website offers furnished flats in central locations specifically for international students. I opted for a small but cosy flat close to the Vistula River, which was perfect for the duration of my stay as it was within walking distance of the university and had lots of shopping facilities on the doorstep. The journey was uncomplicated, even though I arrived late in the evening. Nevertheless, I didn't have to stay in a hotel because an employee from the agency was already waiting for me. He gave me the keys and explained everything I needed to know about the flat. It was particularly helpful that he gave me a map of the city and useful tips for everyday life in Krakow.

Life in Krakow

Krakow more than lives up to its reputation as a student city. The city offers a wealth of leisure activities, ranging from lively nightlife to in-depth cultural exploration. Whether you're looking for bars, clubs or hangouts, there's something going on almost every day of the week, be it a jazz evening, an open mic night or an international gathering. The old town in particular exudes a very special flair with its Florentine-style architecture and historic buildings. In addition to the lively nightlife, the cultural diversity should not be underestimated: museums such as the MOCAK (Museum of Contemporary Art), the Oskar Schindler Museum and the underground museum beneath the main market square impressively convey the city's eventful history. A big plus for students: many of these institutions offer reduced or even free admission, so cultural education does not become a financial burden, but part of everyday student life. Personally, I can recommend a visit to Wawel Castle to everyone. Another positive thing to mention is that there is a Catholic community that offers a service in German every Sunday.

Studying in Krakow

Krakow itself is home to a large number of universities. I chose the Uniwersytet Jagielloński, the oldest university in Poland. In addition to its history, the university's excellent reputation for teaching politics and European studies was another factor in my decision. At the beginning, you had to register for courses via an online platform. The platform itself was not intuitive, but with a little effort, I managed to choose courses that did not overlap and reflected my field of study. Before the lecture period began, there was an orientation week where we were shown all the important buildings on campus. The focus was also on interacting with other international students. The ESN Office was a great point of contact and helped me a lot when I had to pick up my student ID. They also organized many evening events in Krakow and trips. The seminars were academically challenging, but at the same time characterized by an open atmosphere that encouraged discussion. I particularly appreciated that the professors placed great emphasis on actively involving all students. International guests were also specifically addressed and included in the discussions. In addition, consideration was always given to the fact that not all students were familiar with current political developments in Poland or certain national contexts. The lecturers explained such background information patiently and comprehensively, so that students felt well informed about the topics and were able to actively participate in discussions. Overall, the academic environment was very supportive and encouraging. The lecturers had excellent English skills, which made it much easier to understand even complex content. The support provided to international students was also particularly noteworthy, ranging from initial orientation to everyday student life, and was professional and helpful. I felt

well prepared for the exams and assignments. The professors were always available to answer questions and responded quickly to emails.

Conclusion

My semester abroad at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow was a formative and enriching experience in every aspect. Academically, culturally and personally. Not only did I benefit enormously in terms of my subject knowledge, but I was also able to significantly expand my language and intercultural skills. The seminars challenged me intellectually, while at the same time opening up new perspectives on European politics and Poland's role within these structures. Krakow proved to be the ideal place to study abroad, because it is a traditional university city with a modern, cosmopolitan character and a thriving student life. The numerous leisure activities, the lively cultural scene and the warmth of the people created an environment in which I quickly felt at home. Being close to my family in Poland also allowed me to develop a deeper connection to my own roots. It was a special feeling to combine academic further education and personal heritage in one place. The openness towards international students was palpable. I never felt like I was just a guest. Instead, I became part of a community where exchange and mutual learning were the norm. Looking back, I can say that my Erasmus semester in Krakow far exceeded my expectations. I am returning not only with new knowledge, but also with many valuable memories, contacts and a stronger sense of self-confidence. For anyone thinking about spending a semester abroad, Krakow is undoubtedly an excellent choice. And for me, it was exactly the right place at the right time.