

My Study Abroad Experience in Maastricht - Acorn Holmes

The idea of studying abroad was simultaneously exhilarating and daunting. I have always wanted to go on exchange overseas, so I was thrilled about this opportunity. However, I was also terrified of the unknown. Before I left home, my mind was consumed by a myriad of fears. Would I be able to strike a balance between academics, social life, and travel? What if I didn't get along with my roommate? I didn't know anyone else on the program and I was afraid that everyone else would already know each other. The thought of simultaneously studying, travelling, and making friends, was overwhelming. I also had practical concerns about getting enough sleep, food shopping, and cooking for myself. I had never travelled alone internationally, so I wasn't sure what to expect. Honestly, I was terrified to leave home, to step outside my comfort zone, and cut my summer holiday short.

Amidst these fears, I was super excited. I wanted to travel Europe, meet new people from diverse backgrounds, and learn about Maastricht's culture. Additionally, I was interested in the Positive Psychology course and Maastricht University's Problem-Based Learning technique. I was also keen to challenge myself and become more independent.

As someone with high academic standards, I was afraid that I would spend too much time studying and miss out on the experience as a whole. Consequently, my overarching goal was to make the most of the course, but to prioritise personal growth and cultural immersion. I made a personal commitment to embrace every opportunity that I could.

Once I got there, many of my fears dissipated. I met lots of people from all over the world, and immediately connected with my roommate. While some of the people did know each other previously, this made it easier for me to meet people in different courses. I quickly became comfortable in my dorm room, identified where the nearest shops were, and found the washing machines. Soon I realised that the language barrier did not matter because most Dutch people speak English! Throughout my program, I fell in love with Maastricht and thoroughly enjoyed my course. The content was taught so well, was super interesting, and nothing like I've ever learnt before.

Yet, of course there were some inevitable discomforts. The perpetual tiredness from jet lag and late nights, the challenges of sharing a confined space, and the daily chores of cooking and laundry. While the snow was magical, the Maastricht winter was cold and wet. Additionally, I missed my family and friends from home. Overall, I was craving the Australian summer, some alone time, sleep, clean clothes, and a home-cooked meal.

After returning home, I experienced some reverse culture shock. I missed my new friends, the excitement of travel, and my newfound independence. I was also physically and emotionally exhausted because I truly made the most of every experience. I felt a bit burnt out and was not quite ready to start uni again in February. However, I was also undeniably inspired. I returned home with a newfound appreciation for the transformative power of studying abroad. I cannot wait to go on a semester exchange in Europe!

My experience taught me the importance of embracing discomfort, seizing every opportunity, and making friends along the way. I would absolutely recommend a study abroad program to all my friends and family!