

Hi everyone! It is great to be with you again! I am coming to share the experience of Olga, who decided to choose Opole as her Erasmus destination. Let's read her story :)

Hi Olga! It is great to have you here with us today! Can I ask you to introduce yourself to our audience, please?

Hello everyone!! My name is Olga Katsika. I am 23 years old and I am from Creta, the biggest island of Greece. I study Science of Nutrition and Dietetics. I am quite sociable, optimistic and adaptable to new and different situations. I really like traveling, discovering new cultures and trying international food. Some of my hobbies are music and specifically playing the piano and taking photos especially from my travels.

It is great to have you here with us today! You are our first guest from Greece! :) Could you tell us what made you choose Opole as your studies destination?

I chose Poland as my studies destination, initially because of the university (University of Opole) which has a specialized department in Nutrition and Dietetics. I also knew that Poland is a beautiful country with many places worth visiting. Finally, Poland's central position in Europe played a very important role, which gives the opportunity for many trips to neighboring countries. The first day I arrived to Opole, I was disappointed because I have arrived on a Sunday night and all the shops were closed so it was really difficult to find a place to eat. I thought that maybe Opole was a boring city but then I later found that this wasn't true. Before I applied for the Erasmus program I have never heard of this city, but I did my research on the internet and I found out that it was very interesting, so I was very excited about this experience.

We are very happy to hear that! Do you remember what surprised you the most when you came here?

I was particularly impressed by the behavior of the drivers who respect pedestrians and always stop at pedestrian's crossings in order to give them priority. This, unfortunately, does not apply in my country and you must be very careful when crossing the streets. Also, the absence of stray animals and homeless people caught my attention, since the municipality takes care of the safety of both of them. Finally I should emphasize how clean the city is and how you never see garbage on the street.

I definitely agree! These are the things Opole should be proud of! What do you like the most about this city?

I really like the tranquility of this place, the beautiful colorful buildings, stone streets, bridges and canals which combined with the beautiful nature environment, create an impressive landscape. I also like that you don't have to make big distances and everything is close to each other; the market square (Rynek), the shopping center (Solaris) and the university.

It is a really beautiful city to live in or to visit, but also the center isn't so big, what can be an advantage for a lot of people! What would you recommend to do in Opole to visitors or other foreign students?

I definitely recommend renting a scooter and going around the city center so you can see all its beauty. Don't forget to pass by the picturesque central Market Square, by the beautiful bridges like the Green Bridge to see the river that crosses the city and finally to end up in a cozy cafe like those near the Młynówka Canal (Little Venice) to drink your coffee with a beautiful view. Also, I unreservedly recommend visiting the zoo of Opole, which is large and hosts many different animals. Polish Song Museum is worth visiting as well! In my free time, I liked to take walks in the city to eat an ice-cream, spend time with my friends on the university's campus where we used to play volleyball, but also try Polish food in traditional restaurants in the city.

It is really great that you have started this topic about Polish food because I was going to ask you about this! :D Tell us about your favorite Polish food, please! :)

My favorite polish food is zapiekanka with different types of cheese and mushrooms. I would suggest to non-Polish people, apart from zapiekanka, to also try pierogi, especially the fried ones with potato filling, gulasz and kotlet schabowy the well-known pork schnitzel. I would also definitely recommend tasting traditional sweets, such as Polish donuts stuffed with rose jam.

Pierogi with potato filling are my favorite ones as well – so tasty! Going a bit back to our conversation regarding Opole itself, could you tell us a bit more about places worth visiting in Opole? Did you have a chance to travel to any other city in Poland?

My favorite place in Opole is Kapielisko Bolko Beach. I liked to go there on Sundays with my friends to have a barbecue, listen to the music and relax in the nature next to the peaceful lake. Another city that I really enjoyed visiting is Wrocław, which is very close to Opole, specifically 40 minutes by train. Wrocław is a beautiful city full of life and students as it is famous for its night life and Erasmus parties. Surely anyone who is coming to Poland should visit this city, especially if they are students. Another place that for me is one of my favorite ones in Poland, is Kraków with the beautiful and picturesque old city. I have also visited Warsaw, a special city that combines modern and traditional elements (New and Old City) in an impressive way, Zakopane with the famous ski resort and Gdańsk with the impressive port. In general, Poland is a country that hides many surprises and surely one trip there is not enough to discover all of them.

I can see that you have traveled really a lot, which is really amazing! Was it hard for you to find buses, trains etc?

The transport inside the city of Opole is very easy as there are many buses and at every bus stop there is a lot of information about the schedules. Traveling outside the city is just as easy. You can use a train or a bus to travel to neighboring cities or countries. The truth is that I never had to use a plane for my travels during Erasmus because I always used a train or a bus (FlixBus) that cover many routes and you can find tickets easily and very cheaply even the day before. However, if you decide to use a plane, you can find many tickets at discounted prices, since Poland has several airports and some of them are near Opole, such as the airport in Wrocław.

As you said before the center of Opole is not very big, so you can just have a walk to reach many places, but if you need to go to a place located a bit further you can easily use buses as we have really a lot of them here! What do you think about the prices here? Should students be worried about them?

Compared to my country Greece, Poland is very cheap at all levels. The prices of the necessities, entertainment, nightlife and transportation are almost half of those that apply in my country. This makes Poland an ideal country for Erasmus and in general for students' life.

Regarding the students' life - why do you think it's a good idea to study in a different country?

I believe that it is a good idea to study in a different country, because in this way you can broaden your intellectual and cognitive horizons, come into contact with different educational systems and approach the subject of your studies from a different perspective. There are a lot of advantages of such decision, such as getting to know new countries and cultures, learning new languages, developing communication skills through meeting people from different countries and nations, as well as opportunities to travel to many places. Also, through this decision you can work on your character and be more mature as you learn to survive alone and adapt more easily to new and difficult situations. However, such decision has its disadvantages as well. For example, studying in another country requires a lot of money and it is an expensive decision. Also, many times you may feel that you miss your people from back home, especially in difficult moments, such as in moments of weakness.

You mentioned many advantages of staying abroad, but there are some disadvantages as well, which can be sometimes very challenging unfortunately, but that's why students decide to study abroad to learn how to overcome them, right? :) In your opinion, are there any disadvantages of studying in Opole?

In my opinion there are no disadvantages to choose Opole as the study destination. The calmness and peace of that place, which at first I might have seen as negative, later made me love this city with all my heart.

We are very happy to hear that you like this place so much :) How about Polish people? What is your impression of them?

My opinion about Polish people is very good. They are very hospitable, sociable and helpful, such as professors and staff of the Opole University who since the first day when I arrived to Opole were kind to me and willing to help me with every problem I was facing. Even before I came to Poland, the communication with them was excellent and they helped me a lot with the preparations of necessary documents for Erasmus. I also met local classmates who gladly tried to include us in the daily life of the university and in the night life of the city.

Was it difficult to communicate with Polish people in English?

The truth is that the communication with Polish people is quite difficult as they don't have knowledge of the English language. A lot of times I used google translate in order to communicate with them, especially when I did shopping in stores or when I went out to eat, since many times there was no English menu. The exception, however, were the younger ones who had knowledge of English. I don't think that any tourist coming to Poland on vacation for 4-5 days should know Polish to communicate with the locals, as with a simple translation application they could easily communicate. I have a lot of stories where misunderstandings occurred due to the inability to communicate with the locals. For example when I first arrived to Opole and during my first days I had quite a hard time finding mineral water. I spent several days buying the wrong water with gas until I found what I was looking for, as the sellers were unable to help me. So the "woda niegazowana" were the first Polish words I learned.

Thank you for sharing the story! Sometimes it can be really hard in a new country when local people don't know English, but on the other hand it is a good opportunity for us to learn a new foreign language! :) Let's change the topic a little bit right now. Could you tell us something about the university itself or the classes you had?

The courses at the University weren't too difficult. In my department, most of the courses were taught in Polish, so it was not obligatory for the Erasmus students to attend them. Instead of lectures, we had to hand assignments to professors in English within a specific period of time and from which our final course grade was judged. So, I didn't have any exams during my Erasmus.

Coming to the end of our interview, can I ask you to share your experience about the Erasmus Office? How was the communication between you and the staff?

My experience with the Erasmus staff was very positive from the beginning. Our communication was very good and reaching out to them was never challenging. If I faced any problems or had any questions and concerns every member of the Erasmus family was very helpful and always eager to help me.

I can agree they always do a great job :) Lastly, I would like to ask you whether you can recommend studying or visiting Opole to other students?

I would definitely recommend anyone to visit Opole and Poland in general and to study there. If you are looking for a quiet and peaceful place, with beautiful landscapes, lakes, trees, flowers, delicious food and cozy cafes, then Opole is definitely the place for you.

Thank you very much Olga for sharing your experience with us! I am sure it is going to be very helpful to many students!

Thank you so much for hosting me!