

ERASMUS report, University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Austria, summer semester 2020

At the beginning of my report it should be mentioned that – when it comes to my experiences in the host country – it can hardly provide a good insight. Barely two weeks after my arrival in Graz, the coronavirus arrived in Europe and to date the situation has only partially normalised. But more on that later.

The ERASMUS+ programme was nothing new for me when I started my master's degree in Bremen. I had already spent a semester at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London during my bachelor's degree and was somewhat familiar with the broad outlines, advantages and procedures of the programme.

However, it is worth mentioning here that every university runs the details of the process differently and it is therefore helpful to talk to your coordinator right at the beginning about the exact application process and find out which steps the student has to complete.

The desire to go abroad again during my master's degree came when I got to know the Graz University of Art (KUG for short) through friends. This is not only a significantly larger university than Bremen, but also offers significantly broader choices, especially in the Singing Faculty with a total of 9 professorships. What was particularly interesting for me was the opportunity to delve deeper into song creation and contemporary music. World-famous artists teach at KUG in both areas.

However, more important than the artistic subjects was finding a suitable professor for my major. I was very lucky to meet a professor who was willing to take me into his class.

I would like to go into the topic of core subject teaching in more detail. I am convinced that an ERASMUS semester can only really work well if it takes place in consultation with the main subject teacher and is at least accepted there. Both times I communicated very openly with my professors in Bremen about my desire to go abroad. We talked together about possible teachers at the universities in question and selected suitable candidates. Especially in the bachelor's degree, when there is still a lot of technical work involved, it can make sense to work with the main subject teacher to see which professor would be best suited for your own development. If you have one or more candidates with whom you would like to study, it makes sense – if possible – to get to know them before applying for an ERASMUS semester. You can get to know their teaching style and discuss directly whether you would be willing to take a student into your class for a semester. Depending on the university and the teacher, it may be that the mandatory recording, which must be submitted when applying, is no longer necessary and rather exists pro forma.

So once you have found a professor with whom you would like to study and, ideally, they have already indicated that they are willing to accept you as an ERASMUS student, you can now apply.

Here, it is extremely important to note that, depending on the recipient institution, application deadlines can end a fairly long period before the actual stay. It may also be the case that some universities only accept students for the winter or summer semester. It is therefore advisable to check the deadlines as soon as you are interested in a university.

The application process itself is actually relatively clear cut and the International Office can help very well with any questions you may have. As described above, I had contacted a professor before I applied, had lessons with him a few times and talked about the possibility of an ERASMUS

semester. He signalled to me that he was interested in having me in his class, and I applied to the Austrian university for the 2020 summer semester.

After a successful application comes the probably most complicated part: you have to decide which courses you want to take at the host university. In Graz, the course selection takes place online, but the courses for the summer semester were uploaded so late that I could only refer to previous semesters in order to submit my Learning Agreement on time. However, it is usually not a problem to have the agreement adjusted at the beginning of the stay abroad.

But now to my actual stay:

In addition to the university, Graz itself was also a reason for me to apply here. The city has a pretty southern flair, with lots of outdoor seating in the countless bars and cafés. There is also at least one festival for film, music, cultures, art, etc. every month.

So I was looking forward to an intensive time, filled with culture and art (and splashes of “weisse Spritzer” – the Austrian word for white wine spritzer and the national drink of the Styrians).

But things were to turn out differently...

When I arrived in Austria at the end of February, the first municipalities in Italy had just been sealed off, but it still looked as if the horror could pass quickly.

But on March 16th, the Austrian government announced the complete lock-down.

From that moment on, the University's operations were completely stopped. Since the situation caught most professors unprepared, many lectures fell by the wayside. Individual lessons were gradually moved to Zoom, but we all know from bitter experience that this cannot replace face-to-face lessons. The KUG rectorate was also extremely cautious compared to other Austrian music universities, so that practicing at their facilities was not possible until the summer.

Unfortunately, I can therefore hardly say anything about life at the KUG.

I have only tried the cafeteria once; with prices at around 5-6 euros for a simple main course, I would rather tend to cook myself.

However, what definitely has a positive influence on daily studies is the library. I heard that the music collection is the largest in Austria, which sounds quite plausible.

The available spaces cannot be compared to Bremen either, but this is also due to the size of the university. There are 4 university locations in Graz, which are a maximum of five minutes apart by bike. There are various concert rooms, a drama stage and a large event room used for opera productions and contemporary performances. In general, Graz is a growing location for contemporary music and a course in contemporary vocal performance was introduced in the winter semester 20/21.

I would first like to say a few general things about life in Austria and then add a few things about Graz.

The first thing you notice – and that may lead to problems – is that grocery stores close much earlier here than in Germany. Shopping for the weekend after 6 p.m. on Saturdays is virtually

impossible – except at the main train station. You should also get used to the fact that food costs a little more in Austria than in Germany.

In Austria it is mandatory to register your place of residence. But you also have to register your place of residence with the immigration authorities – even as an EU citizen. If you don't do this, it can cost you quite a bit of money.

It can also be expensive if you rent an apartment and have to pay extra for previous year's bill for utilities. The current tenant has to take responsibility for this! In my case, I moved into an apartment in May and the bill for 2019 came in June with a hefty additional payment. On the other hand, you would also get the repayment if there was any due...

Although Graz is the second largest city in Austria, it is still smaller than Bremen. But this is hardly noticeable, as the city centre here is much larger and the number of small shops, bars and restaurants is also much larger here.

Although there is extensive public transport, you can still get around faster by bike. Graz itself is also pretty flat, the hills and mountains only start outside the city.

Incidentally, these hills mainly are reserved for vineyards and, especially in autumn, you can wonderfully hike from Buschenschank to Buschenschank (taverns where vintners serve their own products).

In summer, however, you're more likely to lie in one of the many parks along the Mur river and get the best (vegan) ice cream I have ever tasted from one of the Eisperle branches – but watch out! – waiting times of 10 minutes are normal here.

All in all, I am very happy about the experiences I was able to have here in Graz. The KUG offers a wide variety of study programmes and great opportunities to develop artistically. Graz is also a small but quite interesting city with many students. The only disadvantage is that there are hardly any good long-distance connections to Germany.

For me, however, the positive sides outweigh the negatives and so I decided to stay here in Graz for further studies.