

Tips for going on Erasmus in Poland

Money: I personally didn't use a Polish bank account. I opened one, but had real difficulty transferring money from my Natwest account. Instead, I just took money out every few weeks to minimise the transfer fee. If you do get a Polish account, they can be tricky to shut down, so ensure you leave time in the last few weeks amidst the partying!

Transport: For flying, it entirely depends where you're going. If you are going to Krakow, there are plenty of flights run by Easyjet, Ryanair and Wizzair. However, bear in mind Wizzair flies out of Katowice, which is a city about two hours away by airport bus. From Krakow airport, you can catch either a bus or a shuttle train into the centre of town. By bus from the airport, anything that goes to the Teatr Bagatela will place you about five minutes walk from the Rynek Glowny (the main square), and the way to the Rynek Glowny should be signposted. If you're going anywhere else in Poland, there is an airport for almost all major cities. Another method for getting about Poland generally is by Train, if you show your Polish student card you get a discount too. It also works for planning journeys outside of Poland too, which is really handy! The trains can be a bit rubbish, but unlike Britain, they actually turn up on time and are really cheap. A train to Gdansk from Krakow will cost you as little as £30 return if you book a short while before. For travelling, Eurolines (<http://www.eurolinespolska.pl/index.php?lang=en>) buses are also pretty good, as are Orangeways (<http://www.orangeways.com/en>), a company that operates out of Budapest. Within Krakow, once you're in the centre you shouldn't need to use public transport too often as everything is within walking distance. In Warsaw, you'll find yourself using trams and buses constantly as the city is really spread out. Wroclaw and Gdansk are basically the same as Krakow, unless you're visiting certain things (such as the Westerplatte memorial in Gdansk).

Housing: Contact your university ESN (Erasmus Student Network) to help with this, it can be a bit confusing. Basically, students in Poland tend to share rooms; sometimes up to three or four to a room. So when a landlord advertised a student flat for 4, it often means 2 bedrooms. As for university accommodation, in Krakow there are two halls of residence you might use. Zaczek is the main hall; it's really cheap and very central, but you will share a room and the facilities aren't brilliant. Piast is a bit better, again shared but with less people per bathroom. On the other hand, it's further away from the city centre and not as easy to get rooms in for Erasmus students. If in Krakow, I'd recommend avoiding the Rentsellers agency; several people I knew had trouble with them and I was warned off them before I even went to Krakow! <http://krakow.gumtree.pl/> is good, but there is no English translation so get a Polish speaker to help. As for where to live: Krazimierz, the old Jewish quarter is quite cheap and has plenty of good bars and restaurants, whilst the band around the city centre again is more expensive the closer you get to the Rynek Glowny, but very convenient for both university and going out. Rent prices seem to rise every year, so I can't give a definite figure for how much is reasonable per week. Talk to the ESN for tips on getting good value accommodation.

Eating: For eating out, Poland is inexpensive and generally good value for money. Polish food is based around basic meat and vegetable ingredients, but is filling and really tasty. I'd especially recommend a kind of filled dumpling called pierogi. In Krakow, anything directly in the Rynek Glowny is unsurprisingly geared at tourists and overpriced. However, several good restaurants exist. One thing to consider; on religious holidays EVERYTHING shuts down so ensure you have food prior to them!

Drinking: Something you will undoubtedly be doing a lot of in Poland. Most bars in Krakow are good, underground (genuinely), open until 1am or later and relatively cheap the further out of the city centre you go.

Uni stuff: This can be a hassle. At Jagiellonian University each department is autonomous and so can choose whether or not to accept Erasmus students onto their course. The Institute of Polish Studies (IPS) courses are pretty good, and generally allow Erasmus students onboard. If you study Humanities, this is really handy in particular. Thankfully, the International Office at Jagiellonian is a bit more organised these days and will publish lists of course in English as they get them. Sign up can be a bit of a rush, but don't despair, you'll find it easier to get a place than you might imagine.

Other: Buy a good winter coat, and have a scarf and gloves with you as it can drop to -20°C in winter. Take advantage of the free Polish classes offered by the university. Even if you don't fully get the language, try to learn the basics as it will be invaluable to your stay. Above all, take advantage of the experience. After all, it isn't every year the EU gives you a big cheque and sends you off to another country.