

University of Bologna

1. Country and typical of the country

Since much of my experience was perhaps quite different to me being a non-EU international student, I will include some of these details also. Comparing my experience with others, who were EU citizens, it was a little more complicated with some extra hurdles but definitely possible and still worth doing!

For each individual it may differ of course, but some of this information would have saved me some stress if I had known beforehand! For example, if you have a residence permit for the country of your home university (for me, Germany) then you may not need a student VISA for the country of your Erasmus if you are returning afterwards. For the case of Bologna, I needed to do a 'Declaration of Presence' at the local Questura (Police Station) where I brought my German residence permit and evidence that I was on Erasmus in Italy as part of these studies. I cannot speak Italian, so I brought a friend who could just in case, and this made things go a lot faster, so I would recommend doing the same.

2. Professional support

For my course, I had much more lecture-based classes at the university of Bologna which I had not had in a while which was a refreshing change. On my learning agreement, instead of doing three 10 ECTS courses, I started with five 6 ECTS courses. I felt like the workload in relation to credits was higher at the host university, since each course had a lot of content but only counted for 6 ECTS. I was there for one semester.

3. Language skills

I didn't take a language course. My studies were completely in English, like they are in Berlin, which there was no issue with. Since I was only there for a couple of months and knew no Italian at all, I decided to stick to learning German as I'd be returning soon.

4. Recommendation

I would recommend the University of Bologna to to choose modules from. others. I felt the lecturers were passionate and I enjoyed the range of topics Bologna is a popular Erasmus university for many other universities too, and there were many Erasmus students all in the same boat with similar mindsets and open to meeting new people and making connections.

5. Meals at the university

I did not use any of the university mensas while there, as there are many affordable cafes and restaurants offering paninis and woodfired pizzas, and I wanted to take advantage of my access to these while in Italy. In doing so I spent on average more than I would on lunches at a Mensa in Berlin, so I also would make packed lunches some days to even out the costs.

6. Public Transportation

Bologna is a small city in comparison to Berlin, and it is easily walkable. There are also buses, which you can tap on which is about 1.50 per trip. There are also many bikes around the city which you can easily rent with an app wherever you are, which is very convenient if you haven't got your own.

7. Housing

Much like Berlin, accommodation is not the easiest to obtain. The best thing to do is to start looking and applying as early as possible, but it can be difficult as you may not receive absolute confirmation until shortly before, and you shouldn't sign any contracts or pay any deposits unless you absolutely know you would go.

It is quite common to share rooms with other students in Bologna, so there are lots of 'double' rooms advertised which are cheaper than a single or private room. I did not plan on doing this but in the end I didn't have much choice, and it wasn't as bad as I thought.

Many Erasmus students I met struggled greatly with this, with many people starting off in AirBnBs for the first couple of weeks. There are housing agencies that exchange students end up going to, which is what I did, since it can be difficult to get a place in a student flat if you don't speak Italian and you only want to stay for one semester. These often offer what you are looking for, but are on the more pricey side and also usually require an 'agency fee' in addition to the higher rent and deposit.

8. Culture and Leisure

If you're going from Berlin to Italy, I would actually recommend exchanging during the winter semester. For my masters, the third semester was recommended for exchange, and many of the options were more North where there is even less sunlight hours. As someone whose mood can be influenced by this, going somewhere with more sunlight hours was definitely a priority for me in order to have an enjoyable experience. I was surprised at just how different the climate was, going from Berlin where I was wearing 3+ layers in early October to dresses and shorts in Bologna a few days later. Although it did get cold eventually, many days were still bright and sunny in addition to the cold which made the winter months much more bearable, as it wasn't a constant cover of grey. I think the high summer temperatures would be slightly too high to be comfortable and be able to concentrate on studies as well, so the winter semester is a good way to go.

There are really nice bars around the city, and it's definitely less of a club-scene than Berlin. There are some clubs, and Bologna clubs have a strange characteristic – for many of them you need to buy a membership card in addition to the entry cost. It can be worth it if you go to a couple of places frequently, but it can really add up with the membership cards. There are lots of nice bars with live music that don't need membership cards though.

It's very easy to get around Italy on the trains and they're very reasonably priced. I went on day trips to Florence and Venice, and I think a train to Venice cost only 15 euros or even less, so you would also get the opportunity to travel around and see other cities if you wanted to.

9. Foreign Financing

I ended up paying 550 euros for a shared/double room, so the funding definitely helped and I was able to get by. I would say the cost of living is higher than in Berlin, and I would not have been able to do it without the funding support.