

My Erasmus experience at the Dolfinarium

I spent 2 months in the summer of 2018 at the Dolfinarium in Harderwijk, the Netherlands.

Accommodation: I have family in Utrecht, so I stayed with them and commuted daily to Harderwijk. Finding a room or small flat in Harderwijk can be challenging, but it is my understanding that the Dolfinarium has a few connections to rent rooms for interns, so it is definitely worth it to ask them for help, when looking for accommodation. The cost of the room varies around 300-400 euros/month.

Travelling: Biking and walking is the best option within Harderwijk's mediaeval city center. I took the train daily from Utrecht, and biked from there. The Dolfinarium is approx. 3 kms from the railway station, and there are also buses available for this distance. If using public transportation is a part of the daily routine, it is worth to get an OV chip card, which is used to check in and out of trains and buses, and charge money on it when needed.

Shopping, going out: Harderwijk has an Albert Heijn and Jumbo stores, both being Dutch supermarket chains with wide variety of food, and well as an ALDI and HEMA. The city center has many smaller shops as well. There is a great variety of restaurants for eating out with a price range considered normal in the Netherlands. This is however a great deal more expensive than Hungary is.

Surroundings: Harderwijk has a historical city center with a few museums. There are many beach areas within and around the city. Just outside the city you can also find a beautiful forest, called Leuvenumse Bos, with a very rich wildlife and great hiking and biking routes; as well as Europe largest natural drift sand area, the Beekhuizerzand.

Education: The minimum required stay as a veterinary intern at the Dolfinarium is 2 months. Policy dictates that they can only have one intern at a time. Summer periods fill up fast, so planning years ahead is needed. However they also take students all-year around, and have a lot more open spaces then, so doing it as part of a gap year might also be an option. English is the working language with the veterinarians, but also almost all employees of the park communicate well in English. Knowledge of Dutch is, of course, a plus and helps with daily communications.

The daily work usually starts around 8 – 8:30 and goes on average to around 16:00 – 17:00. The intern works alongside the parks' two veterinarians, and assists with daily examinations of the animals, as well as with diagnostic procedures, such as bronchoscopies and gastroscopies in dolphins, or rhinoscopies in walruses. The intern also carries out regular blood analyses in the Dolfinarium's laboratory, and is involved in the cleaning and assembling of the endoscopes. You can also spend time with each of the animal departments, namely dolphins, pinnipeds, and harbor porpoises, and learn about the feeding and training the animals, and the daily routines of the trainers. The interns are required to prepare two case report presentations by the end of the stay, for one pinniped and one cetacean case, incorporating all examinations, tests, cultures and results of the animal regarding the case.

Organisation of Erasmus: The internship is voluntary, does not count for any school credit. There is no Erasmus coordinator at the facility. All communications go through the head veterinarian, Paulien Bunskoek.

The internship is a great opportunity to hands-on learn about the many unique characteristics of marine mammal medicine. I highly recommend it to students with specific interest of marine mammals!

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