

My Erasmus experiences in Utrecht

I spent 2 months in the summer of 2018 in Utrecht University at the Companion Animal Clinic.

Accommodation: I have family in the Netherlands, so I got to stay with them a bit further from Utrecht – so I can't really give advice on this issue. However, from what I have heard, it is not the easiest to find a room around here.

Travelling: Bike. I think there is no question in that, it is the true type of Dutch public transportation anyways. I had to take the train and the bus every single day, which costed roughly 300 euros monthly. For public transportation it is worth to get an OV chipcard and charge money on it. You need to check in and check out every single time and there is a minimum amount that must be on the card to be allowed to use buses/trains.

Shopping: Generally, most Dutch go to Albert Heijn, which is THE Dutch supermarket chain. It has a wide variety of food; however, it is not the cheapest. There are some Lidl shops around, which are cheaper, and it is worth checking out markets, as veggies and fruits are much cheaper there. HEMA is also a very typical Dutch shop, it has a bit of everything and generally good quality products. There is also a huge shopping mall at the Utrecht Central Station.

Going out: As I stayed closer to Amsterdam, I was a more regular visitor there, however the centre of Utrecht has a wide variety of cute cafés and bars. Prices are much higher than in Hungary in general. Tea or coffee is around 2-4 euros, regular small beer is also about 4 euros, slice of cake 4 euros as well.

Culture: There is a product called Museumjaarkaart, which is worth getting, if you plan to visit several museums. At some museums there are students' discounts, but entry tickets are still around 8 euros. I recommend travelling around the country a bit, especially that there are usually good weekend train ticket deals.

Dogs: In general, the Netherlands is a very pet friendly country. Dogs must be kept on leash on the streets, but there are plenty of dog walking areas. They are welcome in most restaurants, bars, cafés.

The university has kennels available for the students.

Education: The education system in Utrecht is different from ours. It consists of 3 years of bachelors and 3 years of masters, and in the later one they specialise in small animal/farm animal/equine medicine or one health. Some students spend a year in between with research as part of the honours program. The masters degree is mainly made up from clinical shifts rotating around in the various disciplines of the clinic and some lectures/practical/self-study time/groupworks/essays.

In the clinic students have access to patient files and are expected to prepare the day before for their cases. They are assigned in small groups to vets (2-5 students). In general students take the anamnesis, perform physical examinations and then consult with the specialists. Students are also expected to take part actively in decision making, communicating with the owners, handling the patients and managing patients' files. Students are also expected to make a list of differential diagnosis and to read the newest literature on the issues. In general in my impression the students were well-prepared and they could confidently, professionally handle their responsibilities.

The clinic: It is a well-equipped 3rd line clinic with excellent specialists. They really focus on evidenced based medicine and to provide the best care for the patients and the best choice for the owners. Animal welfare is also in the focus, for example the reproduction clinic doesn't offer AI services or progesterone tests for extremely brachycephalic dogs.

Veterinarians and students all spoke excellent English, which I found really helpful. I got access to Vetware, so I could check the patient files. Of course, the majority of these were in Dutch, but as I speak the language that wasn't an issue for me.

My working hours in general were quite nice but varied on the day. I usually had to start at 8 am and finished in the afternoon. There is a possibility to take part in night or weekend shifts, but I didn't join because I lived quite far. After finishing in the clinic, I usually spent a few hours in the evenings studying the patients for the next day.

The environment and atmosphere in the clinic was quite relaxed.

Organisation of my Erasmus: Communication with the Erasmus coordinator in Utrecht went slowly...

I recommend applying in time, as they have limited spots.

Staff was extremely helpful, answered quickly my e-mails, arranged my schedule according my requests for me.

In conclusion I highly recommend visiting this university!

Darinka Tóth

2018