

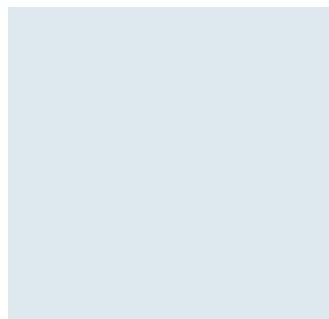
# DUETE REPORT

*an Erasmus Year*



## University of Dubrovnik CROATIA

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# ANNABELLE FABREGAL

School Year: 2019/2020





## Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the Paul Sabatier University for this amazing opportunity that allowed me to discover a new culture and challenge myself. I want to thank especially Mrs. Chatain, my home coordinator, for her support, her availability and advice whenever I had a question. I would also like to thank all the teaching team of the University that contributed to this experience on an academic level.

Secondly, I would like to thank all the coordinators at the University of Dubrovnik and the international teams who were there to welcome us at the beginning of the year and for their help and guidance through the administrative tasks.

Finally, I would like to thank the ESN (Erasmus Student Network) team and all of the Erasmus students I met this year that transformed this adventure into an unforgettable year and wonderful memory.



## Introduction

Doing a year abroad has always been part of my study project so the opportunity to realize the third year of my bachelor studies in a foreign partner university was perfect for me. Indeed, doing this DUETE is for me an opportunity to open myself up to the world, learn from new experiences and different cultures, challenge myself to live an adventure on my own while studying in a foreign language.

Croatia was my favorite destination because I have never visited this country and discovering the Balkan culture was intriguing to me. Moreover, the university program was centered around tourism, management and marketing, subjects that I wanted to improve and that are necessary to study for my future professional project. Of course, the beautiful landscapes and the feedback from previous students that were very happy with their DUETE in Dubrovnik was a part of my decision. Furthermore, the location of this country could give me an opportunity to discover countries that I would never choose to visit on my own and thus discover new cultures.

With this year I wanted to improve my English, understand better the world with this culture mix and learn from it, discover new places, gain independence and autonomy and add an international dimension to my studies. The tourism courses were the occasion for me to develop skills as I want to pursue a career in this sector. I also was looking for to meeting new people with different cultural background and create great memories with them.

After these lasts 8 months I can say that it has been one of the most amazing and rewarding experience of my life. I grew up on a personal level, developed skills on an academic level, explored Dubrovnik and many others places, discovered new cultures and met wonderful people with whom I will stay friend for life.

In this report, you will first find a presentation of Croatia and the city I lived in, Dubrovnik. I will then explain life in Dubrovnik along with the travels I realized and the differences I noticed with France. I will after give tips and advices for future students that will choose this destination, but I will also give advices throughout the all report to help them as much as I can. Afterwards, I will develop the student life on an academic level. Finally, I will explain the benefits of this experience and some challenges I faced during the year before finishing with a conclusion.



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## I. Croatia and life in Dubrovnik

### 1. Presentation of Croatia

#### a. Facts about Croatia

Croatia, Hrvatska in Croatian, is located in the southeast and central Europe by the Adriatic Sea and is part of the Balkans. It has borders with 5 countries: Hungary, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. Croatia, which seems to have a dragon shaped, is divided in 20 counties such as Istria, Split-Dalmatia or Dubrovnik-Neretva and one city-county, Zagreb, which is the capital of Croatia. The country is in the same time zone as France.



*Caption 1 - Map of Croatia*



*Caption 2 - Croatian currency*

The Croatian population is a little higher than 4 million. The official language is Croatian but most people know how to speak English (minimum level). The national currency is the Croatian Kuna (HRK), approximately 1€ equals 7,5 HRK (by choosing this destination you will work on your table of 7!).

The flag of Croatia features red, white and blue stripes and a coat of arms in the center. The 5 small shields on top of the main shield represent the five historical regions of Croatia and then there is the “šahovnica” which is the red and white chessboard.



*Caption 3 - Flag of Croatia*

The history of Croatia is very rich and full of changes throughout the years. Indeed, the territory of Croatia was not always as it is today. From Roman territory to Croatian Kingdom, union with Hungary, then Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Yugoslavia and finally Croatia, the Croatian culture is full of these historical changes. In 1991 Croatia proclaimed its independence which triggered another war with Yugoslav army that affected the country deeply until 1995. In 2013, the country joined the European Union. I think it is very interesting to learn about the rich history of Croatia. If you are interested in knowing more, I can advise to watch the following video that presents the history of Croatia in detail and in a simply way:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TABlbP-tTkk>



Today Croatia's political leader is a president, Zoran Milanović, who was elected last February (2020). Croatia is a Republic based on parliamentary democracy; the country has a multi-party system.

Tourism is a very important part of the Croatian economy. In the past ten years, the country gain in popularity and became one of the top's vacation destination for European and global visitors alike. The country is relying a lot on tourism, for example, in 2016, the share of tourism in the GDP was 18 percent! Indeed, there are a lot of tourist activities to do and landscapes to discover in Croatia. From the costal cities of Split or Dubrovnik to the national parks such as Plitvice Lakes, the country has a lot to offer.

#### b. The city of Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik, where I studied this year, is one of the most touristic cities of Croatia. Its nickname is "The Pearl of the Adriatic". It is a small city of around 50,000 inhabitants located at the very south of the country and is part of the Dubrovnik-Neretva county. Dubrovnik is a city with a unique political and cultural history and is world famous for its heritage and beauty.



Caption 4 - Map of Dubrovnik

Effectively, the city of Dubrovnik evolved along with the changes in the history of Croatia but the city itself knew some history if its own. Indeed, in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Dubrovnik, called the Republic of Ragusa at that time, came under the sovereignty of Venice until the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. The Republic had a motto that still can be found in the city nowadays "*Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro*" translated as "Liberty is not sold for all the gold in the world". Its prosperity was historically based on maritime trade. Furthermore, another history fact about Dubrovnik is the catastrophic earthquake that impacted deeply the city in 1667, which created the current appearance of the famous Old Town's street Stradun.

Recently, the city knew a larger success after becoming an open-air studio for some famous movies and series such as Game of Thrones, Star Wars or the new Robin Hood. The tourism increased so much after their success that some touristic activities or shops have emerged with Game of Throne as main theme.



Caption 5 - Game of Throne store



## 2. Life in Dubrovnik

In this part, I will detail some key points that in my opinion are useful to know before going to Dubrovnik and enjoy your time there even more!

### a. Accommodation

Finding your accommodation before arriving to Dubrovnik can be seen as one of the first challenges in your DUETE adventure. Indeed, Dubrovnik still doesn't have a student dormitory. However, a dormitory is supposed to open next year, so keep an eye on that so it can be easier for you!

It is preferable to search an accommodation in summer to be sure to have a choice, so you have to decide everything from afar. Usually, the university will send you an Excel file with a list of contacts of apartments' owners where former Erasmus students were living and were satisfied with the accommodation. If you have a negative answer or if you don't find what you are looking for don't hesitate to search on other platforms such as Airbnb and negotiate a monthly rent. Once you arrived in your apartment the owner will register you on the e-visitor system and give you a confirmation to keep for your temporary stay permit.

Concerning living alone or with roommates I recommend to live with international roommates because it forces you to speak English and thus improve but also makes the experience more special. In that case, if you are searching for roommates you can follow two "strategies", either find an apartment on your own and then post on the Facebook group that will be created and say you are searching for a roommate, or, wait for an announcement on this group and contact your perhaps future roommate.

In my case, I found an apartment on Airbnb, contacted the owner and asked if it was possible to rent this apartment until the end of May and then posted on the Facebook group to find roommates. At the end, I was contacted by a Polish girl and an Italian boy and we signed a contract for this apartment. I highly advise to specifically ask for a contract when renting your apartment because it is not always done naturally by the owners. However, a challenge was for me and the Italian student to find another roommate for the second semester because as most of the students, the Polish student was to leave after the Winter semester. Fortunately, I was able to find a new roommate. We all had our own bedroom and shared the rest of the apartment which was located next to the Old Town and a bus station.

Concerning the price, as Dubrovnik is the most expensive city of Croatia, in general, you can expect to pay as much as you do for an apartment in France.

### b. Different areas in Dubrovnik

Now let's discover different areas of the city.



*Caption 6 - Areas of Dubrovnik*

First there is the Old Town (red on the map), the most touristic area of the city, where there is the port and many things to discover. Then there are mainly two “gates area” to enter the Old Town, Pile Gate (orange), where I lived, which is close to the main campus of the University, and Ploče Gate (yellow). Another area is Boninovo (pink), with a few shops and accommodations. Moreover, there is Gruž (green) which is the second port of the city and Lapad (blue) where most of the students live, restaurants, beaches... Finally, there is Babin Kuk area (purple) with beaches, resort zones and a park to play sports and take a walk.

### c. Transport

Dubrovnik is a small city so you can walk easily to go from one part of the city to the other. However, as there are a lot of stairs you will find the bus quite pleasant and useful. At the beginning of the year, the university took care of our bus card and create it for us. We just had to pick it up at one bus office “Libertas Dubrovnik” and pay for it plus the first month payment. Because we are student at the University of Dubrovnik, we only pay 50kn per month, which is quite cheap. This is the main transport students use.



*Caption 7 - Pile Gate bus stop*



*As future student of the University of Dubrovnik, you will probably have most of your courses at the Economic Department which is located at Gruž Port. To go there by bus, you will have to take bus 6 or 9 and drop off at Lapadska Obala 2 stop, right in front of the department.*





Nevertheless, as buses do not work 24 hours a day, we usually take an Uber to come home at night when we don't want to walk. The prices are very affordable in Dubrovnik and there are a lot of Uber drivers. We have been advised to prefer Uber than taxis because it is cheaper.

Concerning flights, Dubrovnik Airport is located at around 30 minutes by car from the center of city. It is a small airport and direct flights to France are rare, so if you want to go back to France during winter, you will probably have several stops.

As for train connection, there are no railways in this part of Croatia.

#### *d. Security*

In my opinion, Dubrovnik is a very safe city. The criminal rate is very low, I felt safe walking home alone during the night. Of course, you always have to be careful. Moreover, when the touristic season is here, be extra careful with your personal things because it is very crowded so pickpockets will most likely be around.

Another risk will be the mined areas left from the recent war in Croatia which are of course marked with a sign but this risk should only be taken into account when planning on travelling. I advise to check on internet a map of the risk, but in my case, for all the travels I did, this risk was never a problem.

Furthermore, there are some natural risks. One of the most important one has to be the seismic risk. Indeed, as written on the official French government website "The average seismic risk is 3 to 4 on a scale of 5. Each year, tremors of low to moderate intensity are recorded". However, the most dangerous ones are very rare. During this year, we felt some shakes of earthquakes more or less away from Dubrovnik but it was very light. Croatia is not located in the most exposed seismic zone.

Concerning more specifically Dubrovnik and the littoral cost, I advise to just be careful when swimming in the sea because the beaches are rocky and there are sea urchins. If you have special shoes to go in the water you can take them.

There are also some forest fires risks during the summer season, especially along the coast, so you have to be cautious as the climate can increase the risk.

#### *e. Weather*

Concerning the weather in Dubrovnik, it is very pleasant to live in this city as it is sunny and warm most of the year. Until the end of October, it is still possible to go for a swim in the Adriatic Sea!

On another hand, when winter comes, on the bad days there are two types of typical weather that are quite intense. First, there is “Jugo”, it is a windy weather accompanied with clouds, rain and storms. The streets can be easily filled with water and the sea is rough on these days. Then, there is “Bura” which is characterized by a strong wind that clears the sky but make the weather quite cold. But in general, winter in Dubrovnik is mild. Also, I noticed the sun sets and rises earlier than in Toulouse.

#### f. Local observation

The local inhabitants are not very open at first but are very kind once you know them. In general, I also noticed the culture is more around being cool, not in the rush, sometimes being late. As Dubrovnik is a very touristic city, if you talk English to someone they will understand almost every time and most of the written signs are also in English.

I renamed Dubrovnik as “the city of cats” because there are a lot of stray cats all over the city. They are not mean and fed by locals. Originally, I have been told that cats were brought to the city to get rid of the rats.

Moreover, because it is a small city that wasn’t built to have that many inhabitants with cars, a lot of roads are used as parking spaces in the streets so I recommend to be careful when walking around because drivers are sometimes not very cautious.

#### g. Where and what to eat?

The student “menza”, the university restaurant, was not available because of bankruptcy. So exceptionally this year, the student restaurant was for us the restaurant Tutto Bene, located near the Economic Department. The university negotiated with them some student prices so a meal was only 7kn for us, 1 euro. We were able to have lunch and dinner there at given hours. In comparison with France, the prices are really low for a meal so it was interesting to reduce the expenses on that side.



*Caption 8 - Tutto Bene restaurant*

However, if the dormitory opens next year, a student restaurant is also supposed to open.



*Caption 9 - Burek in a bakery*

I would like to mention some typical food and drinks to taste from Dubrovnik or Croatia. In the bakeries you can find different types of “burek” which can be sweet or salty. So, you can buy it as a pastry or a quick meal.

Another food to try will be seafood. Indeed, as the city is by the sea the seafood (such as a black risotto or an octopus salad) is a must-try if you like it. If you want to have an “apéritif” you can try the traditional Dalmatian cuisine combo: red wine, cheese and “pršut” (dalmatian ham) and sausages.

For some sweet recommendation, the dessert from Dubrovnik to try is called “Rožata” which is similar to a flan. Another sweet must-try is the “arancini” which are candied sour and sweet orange peel, made from organically grown oranges from Dubrovnik.

Finally, some drinks recommendations. You can find easily the traditional Croatian alcoholic drink called “Rakija” which is used as an appetizer. In my case, I did not like it. Another alcoholic drink to try will be a beer from the brand “Ožujsko”.

Furthermore, I would like to recommend some restaurants I tried in Dubrovnik to spend a nice evening with either local or foreign cuisine:

- **Restaurant ORSAN**: Local and typical seafood cuisine located near the Economic Department, around 15€ a plate.
- **Kuća Pršuta, Sira, Vina I Maslina**: Local and typical restaurant in Lapad serving the “apéritif” combo I explained above, medium prices.
- **Shizuku - Japanese cuisine**: Japanese restaurant in Lapad with tasty sushi and cheap prices compared to France.
- **Pizzeria Scala**: Italian restaurant in Lapad with large choice of pizzas, medium prices.
- **Chihuahua Cantina Mexicana**: Tasty Mexican restaurant in Lapad, medium prices.
- **GreenGarden**: Cozy fast-food bar next to the Economic Department, medium prices.



*Caption 10 - Kuća Pršuta*

#### *h. Where to go out?*

As an Erasmus student, night activities are an important part of the experience to get to know each other and have a good time. Throughout the year the ESN group (that I will present later in this report) organized several parties and get together or recommended us to join some organized events. In my opinion, it is nice to participate to at least some of this parties because you can bond with your fellow Erasmus students, improve your English and create amazing memories.

One of the main places Erasmus students get together is the Time Out bar, located near Lapad area. The ESN organization has a partnership with the bar so we often have private parties with discount there. It is a great bar because we can just hang out playing pool, darts or table football, but also have karaoke nights or dance along the music until late.



*Caption 11 - Goodbye party at Time Out*

Additionally, there is the Love Bar in Gruž area which is cheap but also an Irish Pub, Cave bar by the Sunset Beach and some others bars between Lapad and Boninovo. Mostly, we used to join in small groups at each other places to start the evening and then go out.

When we wanted to go dance in nightclubs, we used to go to three different ones, SkyBar located at Pile Gate, Revelin, the most famous one, next to Ploče Gate, and Lazareti in the same area. Often, they would organize some theme events like Halloween for example.

What's more, when we wanted to drink something to relax and talk or work on a group project we used to go to different café bar like Caffè bar Orka right next to the Economic Department or the café bar inside the campus, Caffè Bar Mabelle in Lapad, Irish Pub the Gaffe or any café bar on the Stradun street in the Old Town. Also, any café bar near the Sunset Beach in Lapad is a great place.

#### *i. What to visit?*

Dubrovnik is a beautiful city with many places to discover and landscapes to admire. In this part I will present my favorite spots from the city that in my opinion are a must-see when visiting the city.



*Caption 12 - Stradun Street*

The Old Town, protected by the UNESCO, is definitely a must-see as it is possible to admire the cultural history of the city with its religious monuments, museums, the famous city walls surrounding it. It is also nice to have a walk on the main street Stradun, with its souvenir shops and restaurants, until the port listening to the peaceful sound of the sea.

Next to the Old Town is the Fort Lovrijenac which is quick to visit but gives a beautiful view over the Old Town and the Adriatic Sea.



*Caption 13 - View from the fort*



*Caption 14 - Lokrum Island*

A day trip I loved to do was to the island of Lokrum which is only 10min away by boat from the Old Town's port. The island is rich with fauna and flora and swimming there is fantastic. It is also possible to hike at the top of the island and visit the small museum and learn about its legends.

This time it is more a view to admire, the breathtaking view from Mount Srđ, the highest point of the city. It is possible to go there hiking, by car or by using a short cable car. From there you can have a drink or just admire the view of Dubrovnik.



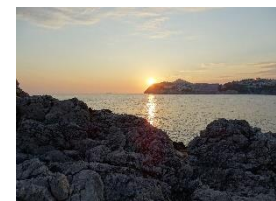
*Caption 15 - Mount Srđ's view*



*Caption 16 - The pathway*

I also enjoyed to walk by the sea in Babin Kuk area, the pathway is called "Ulica Ivana pl. Zajca", it is peaceful and awesome to be able to walk everyday over there by the crystal-clear sea and rest on one of the numerous beaches.

Finally, I enjoyed watching the sunset from different spots in the city so I would advise to watch it from Mount Srđ, the Sunset Beach, from the rocks near Gradac park, from Orsula park and also from the beaches of Babin Kuk area. It is a real show to admire.



*Caption 17 - Sunset on the rocks*

Of course, there are more things to discover in Dubrovnik such as the abandoned Belvedere Hotel still in ruins, Gruž port, any museum you can find Franjo Tuđman Bridge, sunbathing by the beach... I would advise the following beaches: Banje Beach, Sulić Beach, Danče Beach, Bellevue Beach, Coral Beach and Dog's Beach.

#### j. *Activities recommendation*

In this part, I will present the leisure activities I had the chance to do that I recommend to do if you have the opportunity.



*Caption 18 - Kayak tour*

The first activity I would recommend is kayaking. A lot of kayak tours exist during the summer season and it was really fun for me to do. I chose a sunset tour (via TripAdvisor) with a couple of friends to watch the sunset from the kayak and we were very satisfied.

Another water activity I loved to do is diving. With two Erasmus friend we chose the organization Blue Planet to do our first diving and it was amazing. The monitor spoke well English so it was perfect.

*Caption 19 - Diving photo**Caption 20 - Escape Room photo*

The next activity is more for rainy days, it is the “Puzzle Punks - Dubrovnik Escape Room”, located in Lapad. The experience is available in English. I recommend the Game of Thrones room as the city is famous for it, even if you are not a fan.

Another activity that I recommend is to go the cinema watch a movie. Indeed, as students from the University of Dubrovnik, the cinema is free for us so it was a nice activity to do in winter every now and then.

*Caption 21 - Kinematografi Dubrovnik**Caption 22- Ice skating photo*

The next activity will be available only in the winter period as it is the skating-rink in Lapad. It is very small but it guarantees you a fun couple of hours with your friends.

The last activity I did that I recommend is to go see a water polo match of the local team which is very famous. Even though you are not a fan of this sport it is interesting to discover the local sport.

*Caption 23 - Water polo match*

Finally, I think it is interesting to keep an eye on the local events organized in the city as it is a nice way to discover the local culture or simply spend a nice evening out. For my part, I enjoyed the Christmas' events such as concerts, orchestras or the local celebrations like St Blaise day who is the patron saint of Dubrovnik.

### 3. Travel & excursions

Travelling is a big part of the DUETE experience and a nice way to discover new cultures and create amazing memories with Erasmus students. Throughout the year, I had the opportunity to travel around Croatia and in the country itself.

One of the most memorable weekends for me this year was my trip to Kotor in Montenegro with my German and Polish friends. We went there mid-October by bus and for two days. Kotor is a very small city so it is quick to visit. We visited the Old Town the first day and climb up the city walls and met other Erasmus students.



*Caption 24 - Kotor*

We stayed the night at a hostel and the next day rented a boat and discovered some beautiful hidden spots. It was an amazing moment and a great week-end living our best Erasmus life!



*The currency of Montenegro is euro so save some if you plan on going there! Kotor is just about 2 hours away from Dubrovnik by bus.*



*Caption 25 – Sarajevo*

Another country I had the chance to discover is Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was there twice, once with a bunch of Erasmus students on our own via a day trip excursion offered by TripAdvisor, the second time it was with the ESN organization. I discovered the capital, Sarajevo and Mostar, a famous city not very far from Dubrovnik. We can still see the impact of the war in Sarajevo. It also interesting as different religions cohabit in one city, the capital. I enjoyed my time discovering Bosnia and Herzegovina.

And of course, I tried to discover every bit of Croatia I could outside Dubrovnik. I first visited Split, Trogir and Krka National Park with my family just before the beginning of the semester. Both cities are very interesting to learn more about the culture and the national park is just beautiful. It was a perfect way to discover the country!



*Caption 26 - Krka national park*

*Caption 27 - Christmas market*

I visited the capital, Zagreb, in winter, with an organized trip by the ESN group. We first stopped at the most famous national park in Croatia, Plitvice Lakes National Park. As it was winter there was not so many people which was enjoyable. We then spent our time in Zagreb where the Christmas season was just beginning so it was even more delightful to me. The capital is very different from the coastal cities yet it was nice to discover it.

The last trip I was able to do was in Croatia in the city of Zadar and Hvar island. I travelled along with another French Erasmus friend this time and we rented a car for 3 days. Zadar is quick to visit but I really enjoyed its famous “Sea organ” that create music sounds according to the waves. As for Hvar Island I recommend the car if wanting to visit the whole island but if not just taking a ferry and stay in one city is perfect. I would describe Hvar island as paradisiacal!

*Caption 28 - Beach near Jelsa**Caption 29 - Cavtat*

Moreover, I had the opportunity to explore areas close to Dubrovnik on one day excursion trips. The first one was organized by the ESN team, it was an excursion to the city of Cavtat and not so far away from it, Sokol Tower with an amazing view at the top. It is always nice to participate to the excursions the ESN organizes and often it is very cheap or even free!

Another excursion I did was Lopud Island which is one hour away by boat from Dubrovnik. It is known for its sand beaches because in Dubrovnik beaches are rocky. It is a good excursion to do to on a free sunny day. We went at the top of the island to admire the view and also took a mini car to cross the island from one side to another.

*Caption 30 - On top of Lopud*

I am really grateful for all the amazing travels and excursions I did throughout the year; I discovered many new places and I will cherish the memories I created forever!

## 4. Budget and financial aspect

In this part I would like to focus a little on the financial aspect of my DUETE year. As I said before, Dubrovnik is the most expensive city of Croatia, so even if prices in Croatia are usually lower than in France, Dubrovnik is very similar to French prices in many aspects.

Here is a list of approximatively all my expenses per month to help future students visualize what to expect:

- Accommodation = 300€ all included
- Transport = 50kn ( $\approx 6.5\text{€}$ ) for the bus card and sometimes Uber (around 30kn-40kn for a single ride). For flights tickets, at the beginning and end of the year it is easy to find a ticket around 100€, however, going back for Christmas is more than 300€ because direct flights don't exist at this time of the year.
- Food = 14kn ( $\approx 2\text{€}$ ) per day if eating at Tutto Bene at lunch and dinner. Concerning grocery shopping (including cleaning and everyday necessities), it was around 120€ for my part per month, but I didn't do two meals at Tutto Bene every day.
- Leisure = around 40€ this section includes expenses when going out (bars, coffee bars, restaurants...)

As for the expenses concerning travels, it wasn't monthly but for the ESN's travels it was around 100€ all included (just without the meals). For when travelling on our own there are some cheap bus tickets offers and it is easy to find a cheap hostel anywhere, adding food and activities it is around the same price. When renting a car, it is more expensive than a bus tickets but still affordable.

Finally, activities expenses weren't monthly but I will detail a few worth mentioning: the kayak tour was 35€, diving around 70€ and the escape room around 14€.

In general, I will advise to expect quite some expenses during the DUETE experience, especially at the beginning of the year because it is the moment where you discover everything, meet people, enjoy the good weather... Fortunately, as students from the University of Dubrovnik, you can enjoy discounts and free entrances in many places!



## 5. Difference between Croatia/Dubrovnik and France

Leaving abroad for a year, you have the time to notice a few differences with the French culture. Therefore, I will now detail some differences I noticed between Croatia and France but more specifically Dubrovnik and France.

First of all, concerning safety to me Dubrovnik is a safer city to live in compared to many French cities. As I said before, the criminal rate is very low (3.12) whereas in French cities such as Toulouse or Paris it is higher (around 50.0). The difference is the same for the safety walking home alone during the night (90.62 for Dubrovnik and 40.80 for Toulouse). I felt definitely safer in Dubrovnik at any time period than in France.

Another difference I observed is the easiness to find information in English. Indeed, most of the signs and information papers are automatically in both languages if not only in English. Moreover, as Dubrovnik is a popular touristic destination it is very easy to being understood when speaking English, people will know the basics to provide some information in almost every case. In my opinion, it is not as easy in France.

Concerning Dubrovnik more specifically I noticed a large difference with the international dimension of the city compared to the French cities. Indeed, major brands and big shopping centers do not exist within the city of Dubrovnik. Shopping clothes is not something you can easily do for example; you will have to take a bus to other areas. Personally, I enjoyed living in this “isolated” city for a year it was nice being away from all the usual international brands or big cities facilities.

One very big difference I noticed was the tenant-landlord relationship. Firstly, the procedure when renting an apartment is way stricter in France. You don’t need to provide many documents before making the contract, if there is a contract at all. Also, the check-in and check-out of the apartments are not done or are very superficial. Finally, landlords usually live close to their renting apartment and they come check if everything is fine without warning the renter and even when the renter is absent.

Another difference is the first impression from Croatian. At first sight, they don’t seem to be the more friendly people but once you get to know them, they will warm up to you. For example, Croatian students are very nice but they didn’t hang out with us a lot during the year.

What’s more is the university behavior difference, the way of teaching. The atmosphere was to me more relaxed than the French one, less rushed. It is very rare for a class to begin on time, usually teachers are 10 minutes late, some teachers can easily arrive with 20-30 minutes of delay, which is frustrating when used to the French culture. Concerning the schedule, classes



are one after the other with no lunch time break taking into account. That means that if you chose 3 courses of 4 hours on one day you will only have the breaks the teacher gives to have lunch. Indeed, there are not any break time, the teacher decides and allows breaks upon his preference. However, teachers usually give enough breaks and enough time. 4 hours classes usually end before. As for the exam system, they offer to do two colloquiums (small tests) during the semester and if successful we don't need to do the final exam at the end of the semester.

Another small difference concerns grocery shopping, in general there are more products in France and more variety but nonetheless it is very easy to find the necessary and eat properly.

Finally, one last difference I would like to mention is the sense of ecology of Croatian. The way I see it is that France is more advanced toward a more ecological and responsible behavior than Croatia. Indeed, just finding a recycling bin in the streets is difficult, plastic bags are still very present, etc.

## 6. More tips and advices for future students

In this section, I will give tips and advices that I didn't mention before for future students. My first advice will be concerning all preparations before going to the destination. Finding an accommodation before will surely ease your mind and give you all the time you need to find the perfect place because there are not many offers. Then, I recommend to print a copy of important papers such as your EU health card or your passport/identity card to keep with you because you will need some for the paperwork when arriving. Good news is that the university helps you a lot with the paperwork and will guide you through the process. The university will also give you a small guide with useful information such as doctors' addresses, important phone numbers, links, etc.

Moreover, the first weeks I recommend to wait a bit before doing some activities or visiting some places because once you will have your "X-card", which is your student card, you can have free access or very interesting discounts in some places, here is a short list of these places: the city walls, the funicular to go to Mount Srđ, museums, cinemas, symphony orchestra, discounts in some bakeries also...

During the integration week, I advise students to go to all events if possible because it is the best way to get know all Erasmus students and embrace the Erasmus experience.

Concerning classes, before going you have to choose the courses you want to study but you will have two weeks when arriving to change your mind and try out each of them. The best is to keep the classes you are interested in and trying at the same time to organize a good



schedule with maybe one day or two of free time. Attendance is less strict than in France so it is alright if you miss a few classes but still some teachers expects students to come every week, so beware when planning some trip.

When travelling to the border countries of Croatia, it is really important not to forget your identity papers because to cross the border you will always have to show your papers. The identity card normally is enough but if you have a passport it is even better.

Concerning transport, to go to Croatia from Toulouse, usually Volotea offers some cheap direct flights at the beginning and end of the year so I recommend to compare prices with that company. What's more, if you rented a car and plan to take a ferry to go to one of the many Croatian Island (Hvar in my case), it is important to arrive in advance because having a ticket for one specific hour doesn't mean you will have a spot for sure, first arrived, first to go.

If you take the ESN card you get have small discounts with some companies like Ryanair or Eurosender (very small discount though). The latest is very practical when wanting to send your luggage from your destination to your home and vice versa.

Some tips concerning the daily life in Dubrovnik, where to shop I advise to go to their "big" markets Konzum or Tommy (in Gruž or Lapad) to have as much choice as possible, and to withdrawal cash I recommend at the bank machine from Otp bank and chose without conversion to not have extra costs.

Furthermore, if you have the same opportunity as I did, which is to help teach French in an association named "Alliance Française", I recommend to participate because it is a nice way to bond with local inhabitants and help!

Finally, I would like to give some useful Croatian vocabulary to master the basics and handle a daily life situation:

Good afternoon = Dobar dan

Please = Molim

Good morning = Dobro jutro

Goodbye = Doviđenja / Adio (in Dubrovnik only)

Good evening = Dobra večer

Thank you = Hvala

## II. Student life at the University

In this part, I will present in detail the University of Dubrovnik and my classes.

### 1. General presentation of the University of Dubrovnik

The University of Dubrovnik (UNIDU) is the only public university on the Dubrovnik-Neretva county. It is comprised of 6 departments that educate students in the following fields: economics and business economics, mass communication, maritime affairs, electrical engineering, computing, aquaculture, conservation and restoration, history and nursing. The university offers 17 bachelors and 14 masters programs. Coming from Polytechnics degree, students will probably only have courses at the campus and at the Economic Department.

Throughout the year the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) team will help students adapt to their new life, give advice and guide students in case of a problem... Mostly the ESN team will organize parties such as karaoke nights or Eurodinners and trips that will make your Erasmus experience more memorable. You can also create your ESN card which will give you discounts for a year in all of the partner companies.

There are more than 120 courses taught in English at the UNIDU. Some teachers are the same for several courses. In general teachers speak good English but some of them still have a very strong accent. As previously mentioned, punctuality is not as strict as in France and the schedule is not organized in the same way.

### 2. The classes

You have thus two weeks to chose your final classes so you have the time to go on each class one time to see if you are interested. Because you create your schedule by choosing your classes, you have to make sure there are not two classes overlapping.

I will now present briefly each course I took giving my opinion on the class and the teacher:

- Basics of Management (winter) – Mrs. Vrdoljak Raguž

It was one of my favorite classes this year. The teacher spoke very well English and explained clearly, we learned the basics of all type of management. Each student had to prepare a presentation on one specific type of management which was very interesting. We had questions to prepare for the colloquiums and a few of them were asked.

- Basics of Marketing (winter) – Mrs. Mihajlović

Interesting topic that sums up what we learned in polytechnics however the way the teacher teaches is very confusing because she reads the presentation and is not very clear. We had one presentation to prepare. The subject is not difficult but it is hard to follow the class.

- Business economics in international environment (winter) – Mrs. Dragičević

Interesting class where you learn more about international environment and quality aspect, easy to follow with the teacher who offers to visit some local places to illustrate her class. Easy colloquium with multiple choice answers.

- History of Croatian Tourism (winter) – Mrs. Benić Penava & Mr. Daniel Dujmić

I chose this topic out of curiosity and I wasn't disappointed, I learned more about the history of Croatia through a touristic vision, it was very interesting. Easy colloquium with questions given before. Both teachers are very nice.

- Management of tourist agencies (winter) – Mrs. Mihajlović

First approach to a touristic subject, interesting topic but same remark concerning the teacher as Basics of Marketing... We also had to prepare one presentation.

- Public Finance (winter) – Mrs. Šuman Tolić

This subject was one of the most difficult for me because I never studied finance before and there are a lot of information. However, it was interesting to know more about this subject and the teachers speaks well English and explains well. We had questions to prepare before the colloquiums and a few were asked.

- Italian language (winter) – Mrs. Režić Tolj

I already studied Italian before so it was an easy class for me but in general it is quite easy for French speakers; the teacher is very good and explains well. You learn the basics of Italian language. As Dubrovnik as some Italian history it is not rare that some locals know Italian.

- Advertising Techniques and Media Marketing (summer) – Mr. Maldini

I really enjoyed this course as the final exam was the making of a publicity of any type and any subject. The teacher explains well and teaches some basics of advertising, it was a good practice for communication.

- Financial institutions and markets (summer) – Mrs. Šuman Tolić

Same as Public Finance, a subject that I am not familiar with so it was a bit difficult but still very interesting to learn more about virtual markets and the use of Forex for example. The teacher was the same as Public Finance, she always made us compare the information with our country which was interesting.

- Quality Management (summer) – Mrs. Dragičević

We learned the basics about quality management; however, I think it was quite similar as the class the teacher taught us in the first semester... It was still interesting and not very difficult.

- International Marketing (summer) – Mrs. Martinović

Interesting class, the teacher is strict but explains well the subject. She does a small test every week plus a big final project which was to realize the marketing plan of an enterprise. There are a lot of information so I would describe this class as medium difficult.

- Strategic Marketing Management (summer) – Mrs. Puh

My favorite class from the summer semester. The teacher speaks well English and the class was interesting, easy to understand and complete. We had small projects/exercises to do every week and one last final project to apply everything we learned on one company.

- Tourism Marketing (summer) – Mrs. Mihajlović

Interesting topic with some basics of tourism but with the same teacher as Basics of Marketing and Management of Tourist agencies. However, because of Covid-19 the final exam was replaced by a critical essay to write and it was very interesting to me.

As mentioned before, there are no final exam in most classes because there are two colloquiums, even though with the Covid-19 situation, the assessment was done differently. On another hand, I was a bit disappointed with the courses offer because when I chose this destination, I expected more communication and marketing classes.

You can visualize some of the projects I realized this year on my E-portfolio with the following link: <https://annabelle-fabregal.wixsite.com/eportfolio/realisations-duete>



After one year of studying abroad, I can say that I developed my skills and my knowledge with the classes I chose. Moreover, I learnt new ways of working, by learning in English and working in group with other Erasmus students. I also discovered new ways of teaching with the schedule difference compared to France and the exam replaced by two colloquiums.

### III. Benefits from this year and conclusion

#### 1. What I learned from this year

This experience abroad was really rewarding on a personal level as well as on a professional level. Indeed, I was in a different environment and culture for a year so it gave me the opportunity to grow as person, be more open-minded, flexible around this multi-cultural environment. For example, with my Polish roommate we didn't have the same habit concerning dinners hours (4 p.m. for her) so we find a compromise. I became more aware of the world around me, made some discoveries with my travels and visits. It was also a challenge for me to go alone and be this far away from my closed ones, I became more autonomous and independent. Of course, I created beautiful memories from each and every moment of this adventure and I will cherish them. I became very close with a few Erasmus student and I can safely say that I will stay friends with them and I am very glad. Living in an unfamiliar environment with strangers has help me to become more self-confident which was one of my main goals. I can now call Dubrovnik a home that I will gladly visit in the future to remember this amazing year.

On a professional level I improved my vocabulary in English and mastered more specific subjects. I learnt how to adapt to a new culture when working in group and gain or improve some theoretical knowledge. I mostly developed my knowledge in tourism, a sector I am particularly interested in.

I also learnt how to overcome some difficulties encountered during this year. Effectively, I had a difficult relationship with my owners. They were not very honest and it was very difficult to handle but I learnt from it. Another difficulty was the Covid-19 situation that changed my daily life for a few months which was challenging when being apart from my family and friends. Finally, one last difficulty was the first semester departures because I was finally used to this new environment and I had to start all over again. Nonetheless, it was a good challenge to gain confidence, create new friendships and make this experience greater.



## 2. Conclusion

To conclude, this year studying at the University of Dubrovnik in Croatia was by far the most rewarding experience of my life, on a personal and professional level. I already knew I wanted to live this adventure before doing my polytechnics degree but I never imagined such an amazing ride.

I discovered the beautiful country of Croatia, the wonders it offers and adapted to its culture. Living alone abroad was very formative and fulfilling, I got out of my comfort zone. My love for travelling increased even more during this year, I will now take any opportunity to go discover the world.

This year in another formation helped me open myself to new knowledge and developed new skills. It was very effective to study in English to improve my level of English and interesting to discover new ways of teaching. It was also the opportunity to take real touristic courses because I want to work in that field in the future.

Indeed, I applied to a master in tourism next year and was accepted at the university of Angers (ISTHIA) in the program “Touristic Planning and Destination Development”. I would like to associate my knowledge in marketing and communication to the tourism sector and adapt it. I would like to find a job that participates in a responsible and sustainable tourism. This year abroad created a new wish for me which is to do a gap year to explore the world more and improve my skills so I will now work to make this wish come true.

It was one of the best decisions I ever took and I will cherish this year all my life. I am grateful for all these memories I can look back to!<sup>i</sup>



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## Appendix

Nothing to mention in particular.

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<sup>i</sup> To any future student going to the University of Dubrovnik, I will be happy to help or answer any question. You can contact me at this mail: [annabelle-fabregal@outlook.com](mailto:annabelle-fabregal@outlook.com)