

ERASMUS+ EXCHANGE PROGRAM TERMINAL REPORT

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5 MONTHS WITH 3 SEASONS IN BETWEEN, I'D LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT THE TOP 5 MEMORIES I HAD AS AN ERASMUS STUDENT.

1. Encounter with the President of Latvia

One of my unforgettable moments in Daugavpils was when we met the President of Latvia, His Excellency Egils Levits, at the most unexpected time. Last April 5, he was in Daugavpils for a visit before the end of his term, and he was in the university for a conference or forum with the press and townspeople. Just in time when our class ended was when the President came down after his event in the university's conference room, just two floors above our classroom.

We were there standing at the hallway and mighty he came down the flight of stairs, right just in front of our starstruck faces. When he saw us, he probably knew that we were international students, so he walked towards us, as if ready to strike a chat.

It was a brief encounter - he asked us where we are from and which city exactly in the Philippines, what we were studying, etc. You would never imagine a man of his stature to be so unassuming and humble. Even Liene, our Erasmus coordinator who was there next to us, couldn't hide her fangirl moment to be standing that close next to one of the country's most powerful people.



2. 1st International Paper Presentation

Last April 21, I presented my MA thesis on “*Disaster Communication: Strategies and Challenges of Davao City*” during the 64th International Scientific Conference of Daugavpils University. I’ve always dreamed of presenting my paper internationally, and DU’s call for paper presentation was an opportunity I could not ignore. I submitted my paper under the “Management” category, and since there were not many of us presenting, the organizers opted that we had it in hybrid mode - meaning some would present in-person, while others who were unable to travel would present virtually.

Of course, I chose to present it in person, together with my fellow exchange students from Tajikistan and Jamaica. Overall, my paper presentation was successful; cherry on top were praises from my colleagues who said that my topic is unique and something they’ve heard for the first time. This experience inspired me to do more researches and aim to share the results in form of conferences, be it in a local or international stage.



Photo with fellow student presenters from Jamaica and Tajikistan.

3. English Lessons with Ukrainian Kids

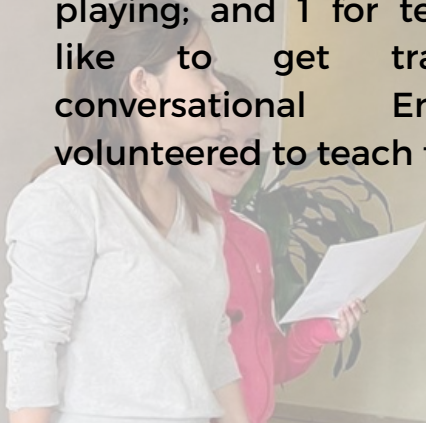
Since the Russia-Ukraine war broke out in mid-February, many countries in Europe have opened borders to accept Ukrainian refugees. Latvia, of course, is one of them, and we had some Ukrainian moms and kids in our dorm for quite some time. Seeing how the kids got bored without doing anything in most times, #TeamPhilippines proposed to our Erasmus coordinator if it would be possible for us to conduct at least 2-hour English classes on weekends.

The kids were aged 7-15 years old; some can't speak English, while others have a basic foundation. We divided the group of learners into two: 1 for children whose energy are devoted more on drawing and playing; and 1 for teens who'd like to get trained on conversational English. I volunteered to teach the latter.



Group photo with Ukrainian kids during the 1st session of our English class.

In the couple of weekends we spent with them, these kids made me realize about the more privileged part of the world I came from - that I never had to live as a child forced to be away from my father who had to fight for my country; I never had to spend a piece of my childhood in packed rooms because there's no place to actually call home. It was a humbling moment for me to have met these children and I only pray for better days ahead to everyone affected by the war.



4. Travel to Western Europe

One privilege of being an Erasmus scholar is the easy access to traveling to countries across Europe. Since most of our classes were held online, students had the luxury of attending classes while being a travel bug, and we did just the same. In mid-May, I and my fellow Filipino students went to France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and Vatican City for 2 weeks. We visited the touristy areas, went to art museums, and learned a great deal about the countries' history, arts and culture.

It felt surreal to actually see in person the artworks I have only taught in Arts Appreciation class: *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo Da Vinci in Louvre Museum; *La Pieta* by Michelangelo in St Peter's Basilica; the famous Olive Grove painting collection of Van Gogh in Amsterdam, to name a few. I gaped in awe and disbelief that the artworks I've just read about in books are now right before my eyes. As a culture vulture, my wanderlust just grew even intensely after I've had a taste of what traveling in my dream countries feels like.





5. Celebration of Midsummer Festival

I knew of the term “midsummer” from Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, but to actually experience its celebration the traditional way was something I never thought of including in my personal bucket list. We were lucky to still be in Latvia in the last days of June and thus were able to experience how the country celebrates its Midsummer Festival, a celebration of the season of summer that has pagan pre-Christian roots in Europe.

I love witnessing other culture’s festivals and traditions because in introspection, it makes you appreciate your own culture back home even more. Last June 23, a Latvian local invited us to go to Višķi, a village 30 minutes away from Daugavpils, to celebrate Midsummer the traditional way: concerts, performances, local music, bonfire and dancing till dawn to greet the sunrise. I couldn't think of a better way to wrap up my adventures in Latvia.



Celebrating midsummer festival with fellow Erasmus students from Jamaica, Turkey and India.

MORE PHOTOS



Photo Numbers 1-3: Taken during excursions for international students as organized by the university; Numbers 5-6: Taken during visits to a local technical school and local museum as part of our Education for Sustainable Development class.

MORE PHOTOS



Pics from top to bottom: (1) - City marathon participated by Erasmus students of Daugavpils University; (2) -Tour in the local library; (3) - Erasmus and DU students during the photoshoot for the university's promotional materials.

MORE PHOTOS



Photos:
1-2: UM students during their travel to France and Italy;
3 - Finisher in the Daugavpils Marathon;
4 - Photo with Latvia's President;
5 - First f2f meeting in the Education for Sustainable Development course;
6 - Group photo with classmates for the Latvian Language and Culture course;
7 - UM students in front of DU building.