



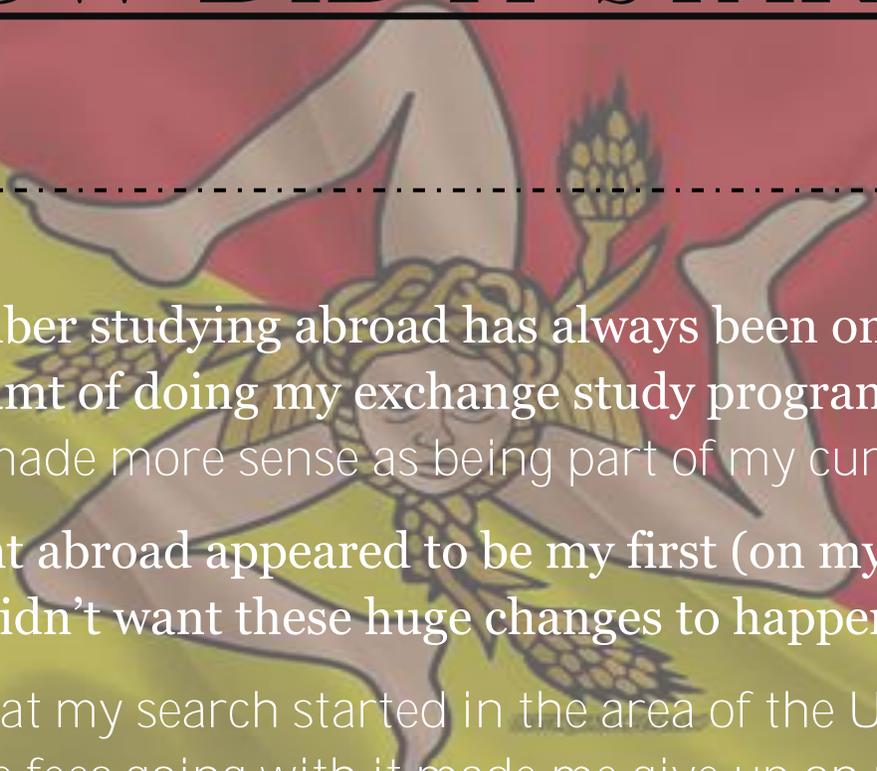
PALERMO

Erasmus 2023



THE PEDAGOGICAL

HOW DID IT START ?



As far back as I can remember studying abroad has always been on my “bucket list”. I must admit that I’ve always dreamt of doing my exchange study program in an English-speaking country, and later it even made more sense as being part of my curriculum at the university.

Given that this period spent abroad appeared to be my first (on my own) I’ve preferred to open my horizons to Europe. I didn’t want these huge changes to happen all at once.

It is thus quite naturally that my search started in the area of the United Kingdom. However, the Brexit situation and the fees going with it made me give up on my first choice.

Why Italy?

Nevertheless it was not enough to discourage me from carrying out my project.

If I could not have British people...I would have the sun!

As a consequence, I started looking at the partnerships between my university and Italian ones. There were not many options:

Macerata; Palermo and the last one I can't remember its name and it's no longer a partner of the university.

Why now?

I didn't want to do it after my degree and within my curriculum at the University of Burgundy I figured it was the right time to give it a try. I also realised that I was personally in the right place to leave for another country.

I didn't want to miss the boat!

More specifically, why Palermo?

I spent some time getting information concerning the three cities and also the 3 universities to be absolutely sure about my choice and to have no regrets. Palermo and Unipa (the University of Palermo) were by far my favorites. The city just as well as the university were perfect for me. I had made my decision! I would be **“Palermitana” for a semester.**

When people around me heard about my decision of going to Sicily, I can assure you that not a single one of **them didn't make a joke about it. Indeed, in their opinion it was odd. As a French student studying English to go to a non-English speaking country to study English.**

I told them that of course, it was an Italian-speaking city but also that my decision was smart, as 2 languages would be involved:

- **“I will practice my English” as most of my interactions with people would be in this language (roommates, organised trips...) and also my lessons at the university were taught in English.**
- **“I will learn Italian”. Living in Palermo, I couldn't avoid learning a few words. And now I can make myself understood when going to the market, to the restaurant or to the coffee place.**

Actually you can even manage to catch a few words in Sicilian ☐

Palermo in (more than) a word

Palermo is the capital of Sicily and 850 000 people are living here. This is the ultimate cosmopolitan city.

Over the centuries, many civilisations left their imprint in Sicily: the Greeks; the Romans; the Normans; the Byzantines; the Arabs and the Spanish. All of them have dominated the region at some point. It can easily be explained when looking at the strategic geographical location of the island. Indeed, the region is located in the middle of the Mediterranean and makes the connection between the oriental and the occidental part but also **between Europe and North Africa. It's a strategic crossroads.**

If you travel across Sicily you can easily spot how these different styles and influences coexist. Actually, you can **spot it right in the city of Palermo. If you take a look at one of the main monuments, the cathedral, you'll see the Arab style on the right part of the building and then, when looking up towards the towers you'll notice the Gothic influence.**

The edifice was built on a former Byzantine basilica converted in a mosque back in the 9th century. It was initially constructed in the Arabo-Norman style (12th century) but for example, the dome and the nave belong to the Baroque style and date back from the 18th century.



MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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My Erasmus journey has been punctuated by amazing ups but also really bad downs; at least this is how I felt. I also believe that it is so important to speak about the picture that **isn't shown when it comes to Erasmus, things I've experienced and which might have made me feel guilty about myself at some point.** Now I remember that in the very beginning, less than a week after arriving in Palermo I wanted to go back to France because for me I had **been left by myself, in a country I didn't know and of which I didn't speak the language.** My main concern was not being able to pass the semester, therefore the year and thus also failing my degree. In my mind this was the only reasonable decision to make.

Eventually (step by step), every problem was solved and I could peacefully begin the **journey. At any moment I felt supported by my teachers and it's one of the reasons I didn't** give up, found the strength to pursue and in the end managed to achieve the aim I came for.

I will give more details in the next part, when I'll speak about the problems I've faced.

SOME OF THE ISSUES I HAVE FACED

In this part I will mention some questions I have been confronted to before leaving for Italy, and while being there as well, of course. These are the things to expect and for some of them to anticipate if you decide to study abroad in the near future. I also added some advice that coul've been helpful for me to know.



PROBLEM I'VE ENCOUNTERED

FIND AN ACCOMMODATION

You will need more than willingness to find your accommodation. Add a little bit of patience and that should do it. Indeed, in Palermo there are no student residences.

For me, that might have been the most stressful part before leaving France. I like to be organised and anticipate. In this case it was almost impossible. I found my apartment a week before landing in Palermo.

I started looking around January but that was too early and people from the first semester had not left **their apartments yet. The fact that I didn't have a date for the beginning of the semester in Palermo made my search a little bit more complicated.**

HOW I DEALT WITH IT

- Word of mouth & online Discussion groups (in my opinion Facebook is the best one so far to find anything you need!)

If you're looking for an accommodation;

If you're looking for expatriates or foreign students to hang out with;

If you're looking for locals to learn more about the culture, to have good addresses...

I eventually found my place thanks to a French guy. He lived in my room and had seen one of the messages I posted on Facebook.

I was not even disappointed, the apartment met all my requirements.

PROBLEM I'VE ENCOUNTERED

MEET NEW PEOPLE

This might be a point on which I struggled a lot **because even if I don't mind and even quite enjoy** the alone time I have to do a lot of things, sometimes it feels lonely and in Palermo it did. Even though I was meeting plenty of new people, we were not looking for the same things and I always ended up frustrated.

But don't worry, it is not a reason not to leave! Of course I eventually found my people, it's just that it took more time than I thought ☐

HOW I DEALT WITH IT

- ESN « the Erasmus Student Network » is given the task to entertain the incoming Erasmus students. They frequently organise parties, **intercultural events but also trips! That's a nice way to meet young people.**
- The community « Expats living in Palermo » is perfect! They always organise dinners in the city, activities on the weekend, and they also plan trips around Sicily (really cheap!). At least one of the events will suit you. This community also is a really nice way to connect with a lot of people from different horizons and of all ages, on the contrary to the ESN. They are lovely people and everyone is here for the same reasons as you: meet new people and discover Sicily.

PROBLEM I'VE ENCOUNTERED

LIVING ALONE AND FAR FROM THE PEOPLE I LOVE

Once again, I was new in this field too. For **example, I had to force me to cook so that I won't starve.**

Now, can you guess how much I spent in restaurants or in food delivery ?

HOW I DEALT WITH IT

- **I didn't put too much pressure on myself and** cooked basic things, basic vegetables or food. As I said in the first column, I allowed me to go to the restaurant or to order from food delivery apps.
- As far as the long distance: I called my family regularly, at least in the beginning. Besides, it was a way to reassure them. I also flew back to France for Easter but I was really glad to come back to Palermo after that.
- My boyfriend came visiting me for a week. I became a guide during this week, and I must say I really enjoyed the exercise.

PROBLEM I'VE ENCOUNTERED

MONEY

Again, I was a novice. For me it was like living the adult life while being a student. Even if I know that a lot of students already experience and I could say « go through it » **in France, it wasn't something usual as far as I'm concerned.**

HOW I DEALT WITH IT

- I knew that I was eligible for European, regional and academic grants. Even the tiniest amount of money could make a difference.
- I had anticipated my Erasmus. One year from **taking off I've had time to save up enough** money so I knew that I could rely on my **savings if grants weren't enough.**
- In the beginning of your stay you might want to budget for your future expenses. Just to have an overall view (rent; everyday life; going out..etc)

MY LIST OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE POINTS

Let's start by the positive!

Positive points

Food



Street food is the best in Palermo! But still, if you go to the restaurant you can manage to get your meal for a good price.

Weather/Beach



You'll be lucky to go to the beach in April and brag to your family about the Sicilian weather

Another culture



We might think that Italy is a country pretty similar to **France and that isn't worth it but it is actually different as you're not in Italy but in Sicily ;)**

No family duty

You'll be spared weekly visits to your own family or your in-laws. No family events you must attend. It may appear to be selfish and I don't know if it's just me but that was definitely to put in this list.

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Positive points



■ Me time

Coming out of my last point: I had
time for myself and it's not
something to be ignored.
Don't forget to treat yourself!

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Negative points

Communication with the administration department



The concept of time isn't understood



From my very first to my very last day I needed the administration department to provide me with specific information. The reply **was most of the time "I'm not the one in charge of..."**

They seemed to offload the burden onto the other. But eventually, 3 days and a few emails later I was given the right contact.

It was the worst part I had to go through because I felt helpless.

Waiting was the only thing to do.

I put it in the negative list as a joke. I've been told it's something particular to Sicily but I thought that was noteworthy.

As an example, my landlord was late every time he came to **pick the rent. Not ONCE he came on time. I'm not talking** about 30 minutes here, but rather 2 or 3 hours.

Sometimes he would be so late that he'd postponed the appointment with us to another day.

My 4 favorites monuments

Places I was fond of and I never forgot to take pictures of them, even after 4 months!



Palazzo dei Normanni

A royal home once, it is now the seat of the Sicilian Regional Assembly. The Norman Palace along with the « Cappella Palatina » are registered on UNESCO'S World Heritage List.



Cappella Palatina

Cattedrale di Palermo

This cathedral is splendid! I was amazed the first time I saw it and immediately fell in love with the architecture. If you don't want to go inside, please make a detour to « Via Vittorio Emmanuele » to get a glimpse of the edifice.



Villa Giulia

« La Fontana del Genio » is my favorite place in this public park.
« Il Genio » (the Genius) is the allegory of Palermo. He is represented with his sceptre and a crown which remind us of sovereignty; an eagle with its wings spread, also an emblem of the city; moreover the dog lying at his feet stands as a symbol of fidelity.
Not to be confused with « la fontana del Genio » located on Piazza Rivoluzione.



Fontana del Genio

Piazza Pretoria

It was renamed « Piazza della Vergogna » (Square of shame)

→ It shows a lot of nudity

→ It denounces the context of corruption in which the fountain was acquired by the Senate in 1573

The fountain shows Greek divinities; the 4 rivers crossing Palermo and you can actually notice the Genius.

There is a funny rumor saying that from the monastery, nuns could see the fountain, therefore they could see these naked human bodies. It is said that one night they left their rooms to remove the statues' genitals.



Grazie !

- Despite the little inconveniences I mentioned previously I **don't regret my decision, and if I had another opportunity to study abroad, I would do it.**
- **That's why I definitely recommend to jump in with both feet!**