

Venice, Università Iuav di Venezia, summer semester 2019

Preparation

The first and most important step in planning the semester abroad had to be taken about a year before departure. Before Christmas, the form must be submitted to the International Office in which you specify your desired universities. This is not a big effort at first, you just have to be aware about this deadline early on. Within a few weeks you will receive a confirmation or rejection from your home university as to whether you will be supported for the semester abroad. Unfortunately, not everything is certain, as you still have to apply to the partner university. Some partner universities require a more extensive application, including a portfolio. At the architectural school Università Iuav di Venezia (IUAV) in Venice, however, the process is different and therefore easier for the applicant. The International Office nominates the applicant to the partner university and after a few weeks you will receive an acceptance or rejection and in the next step you submit your forms there. Among other things, this includes the provisional Learning Agreement, which was a bit overwhelming for me because I had to decide on the courses I wanted to take a long time before the actual time of the studies. But you don't need to let this stress you out too much because, as I said, it is only temporary and a completely new one set of courses can actually be created after you arrive at the partner university.

Accommodation

It quickly became clear to me that I would rather live in a shared apartment than in a student residence so that I could perhaps come into contact with Italian-speaking students.

However, if you are satisfied with the student residence, you should remember to contact the housing service of the partner university as early as possible. Then it should not be a problem to find accommodations there.

Finding a room in Venice initially seemed like one of the most difficult tasks. First of all, I should say that you should not worry too much, as you can easily find a room on short notice even after you arrive, if not even better. The International Office of the IUAV is also available to assist you. My tip when looking for an apartment/room is definitely a number of Facebook groups. There are also other websites connecting landlords with people looking for accommodation, but they often charge a fee. In a panic that I couldn't find anything, I started searching the groups on a regular basis as early as November. In retrospect, I think that would not have been necessary.

I found a room in a shared apartment in Mestre on the mainland in advance and was initially happy with it. I moved again during the semester, which fortunately didn't cause me any problems as I had very easy-going landlords. Unfortunately, I have heard less positive stories from other Erasmus students about dealing with landlords and especially their rental contracts.

Many of the other Erasmus students actually lived on the island in Venice. The advantage of this is, of course, that you are in the middle of the action. On the other hand, you have to accept the high cost of rent and living and the poor housing conditions.

In one of the outlying parts of the city you can find some peace and quiet from the hustle and bustle of tourism every now and then. This benefit definitely should not be underestimated.

Arrival

If you travel to Venice by plane you have two different airports to choose from – the Treviso airport, which is served by Ryanair and EasyJet, and Venice Marco Polo. There is a shuttle bus to the island from both airports, which costs around 10 euros. However, Treviso is a little further away.

Once you arrive, you should take care of obtaining the Codice Fiscale as quickly as possible. This code is usually required for a rental agreement and is also important if you have to go to the hospital or have other health problems that require you to see a doctor.

I didn't open an Italian bank account for my time abroad because you can get by just as well with a credit card. I kept my German cell phone contract as it was, as most tariffs now cover the whole of Europe.

Depending on whether you live on the main island or outside of it, it is worth applying for the Venezia Unica for public transport. This is also discounted up to the age of 25 and costs around 25 euros and has a term of 4 years. As a student, you can get the monthly subscription for 25 euros and use both the bus on the mainland and the vaporetto between the islands. A single vaporetto (public water bus) ride costs 7 euros, so I would recommend that anyone who often has to take the bus or vaporetto get the Unica.

University

The first days in Venice were some of the most exciting and exhausting. Luckily, you meet the other exchange students for the first time on Welcome Day at the university and can make contacts so that you don't have to deal with the great excitement at the beginning alone. On Welcome Day, all departments and courses for the coming semester are presented and you can start thinking about how to create your study plan and timetable for the semester.

In the first two to three weeks you have the opportunity to attend as many courses as possible in order to finally get a good overview and pick out your favourites. I would therefore advise everyone to take full advantage of this so that you will not be dissatisfied with your choice of courses later. The only initial difficulty was finding your way around the various university buildings and being in the right place at the right time. This will become routine during the semester and you can rely on the course times and room information.

Unfortunately, there are some professors who are rather averse to Erasmus students and therefore unfriendly. Often this is simply due to their poor knowledge of English. This is precisely why it is very advantageous to learn the Italian language in advance, the more the better.

In the Architecture Faculty there are also courses that are taught in English, but all others are exclusively in Italian. Often you can get help from fellow students, or the professors will give you parallel instructions on what to do.

You first have to register for the cafeteria in order to receive the card. The food is very affordable, but I haven't been there once because it's a little further away from the buildings and it's better to go to a bar nearby.

The college also offers a range of sports courses. You will receive information about this at the beginning of the semester. In order to register for a sports course in Italy you always have to submit a health certificate. You can get this from any Italian family doctor.

Courses and services

A big difference to the HfK is the course size. On average there are around 50 students in a course. This applies not only to lectures, but also to practical projects. In general, the courses are more strictly defined and it is difficult or impossible to develop your own project and work freely. The way the courses work is often arranged in group work, whereby, especially as an Erasmus student, you have to be careful not to be left out and to demand to be given tasks.

This is particularly necessary if you want to make professional progress during your semester abroad. It often happens that you are ignored by the local students because it is often difficult for them to bring you up to speed and introduce you to their working methods. Certainly also due to the language barrier.

Everyday life and free time in Venice

Venice offers a variety of nice places and bars where you can spend your evenings with other students. Clubs are sparse, but in the summer there are more festivals with live music, fried seafood and Aperol Spritz.

Otherwise, it is of course almost always overcrowded with tourists and since you can only get around on foot or by vaporetto (boat), you always have to allow a little more time for getting around. The crowds increase especially at carnival and in spring/summer. However, the route from the bus station to the university is usually not a big problem as it is outside the main traffic arteries.

If you need a break from the crowded lagoon city, it's always a good idea to go to one of the nearby islands. My hot tip is Sant' Erasmo, an island full of greenery and fields.

There are many options for shopping in Venice, but it is more worthwhile to go to Mestre or Marghera, which have a few more affordable shopping centres and a nice pedestrian zone.

Conclusion

Overall, I was happy with my time in Venice. You learn to stay a little more relaxed in the stress of everyday life, because sometimes there is no other way and maybe that's just part of Italian culture. You should be aware that you may not make much progress in your studies through the semester abroad, but you will gain independence and gain insight into other creative ways of working. You have to be open to that.

My goal was to further develop my Italian skills and my listening comprehension in particular has noticeably improved. In general, even beginners can understand simple conversations very quickly, especially because most courses are held in Italian.