

Un anno in Polonia



My name is Dario, I'm a 17 year-old student from Italy, and I had the amazing opportunity of spending the school year 2020-2021 abroad.

I embarked on this journey almost by chance: one day a friend of mine asked me to go with her to this meeting organised by Intercultura, where they would talk to anyone interested about these experiences abroad that they organise for students. I had almost forgotten that a woman from this association, a couple of weeks before, had talked to us about this meeting during a lesson in school. I was curious and had nothing better to do, so I decided to go.

As soon as I heard the volunteers that previously went on exchange talk about their experience, I was hooked and I knew I wanted to spend my 4th year of high school in another country.

Fast-forward through all the selection process, at the end of June I found out I was going to Poland, and later on I got information on my family and where they lived, and that is near the center of Krakow. Needless to say I was very lucky to end up in such a beautiful city, and to this day, whenever I go outside, I remind myself of how grateful I am to be living here, and even after almost 7 months I am definitely not taking it for granted. This is one of the things that the exchange taught me.

And there are many more: now I have a deeper understanding of what culture is, I realised how little I actually know about the world around me, and meeting with other students from all over the world helped me find out more and more.

Moreover, here I value my days a lot more, cause I know they are going to finish, so I do my best, together with the other exchange students, to fill them with something new and interesting, trying to spend less time doing "ordinary" things. We spent a lot of days just exploring Krakow, visiting every place we found was unique, going outside the city, in nature, and this taught me that you don't need to be on vacation to be a tourist. Even if you don't live in a big city, it's easy to find something to visit in your surrounding area, and this can turn an ordinary sunday into an exciting day out with your friends, seeing new places and finding out more about the region where you live.

In addition, this year abroad is an experience that can really improve yourself, making you more responsible and independent. And on top of all of this, it's just great fun to meet so many new and different people, visiting a new country and discovering more and more about their culture.

One of the hardest challenges I faced was definitely language. Poland has one of the most difficult languages in the world, and in addition to that, since school lessons are online, I didn't have the possibility to go to school and meet my classmates and teachers in person. This took me away around 30 hours every week, where I would've had the opportunity to hear, and try to speak, this new language with real people,

and this massively delayed the process of learning. Luckily AFS Polska, the equivalent of Intercultura in Poland, organised an online course of polish for exchange students that really helped me, and now I got to a point where I'm able to understand and speak normally in polish with friends and family, but conversation on more specific topics is still out of reach.

But even with the challenges I had to face, like the impossibility to travel freely because of Covid, and despite knowing that in a normal situation it could've been much better, I am so happy with how my exchange is going nonetheless. A lot of people asked me why I decided to do it in such times, but I had no choice, it was either exchange during pandemic or no exchange at all, and since in Italy the situation isn't much better than here, it was really worth it in the end.

In conclusion, taking part in this experience was by far the best decision I have ever had, and is something that I strongly recommend. Obviously it's not something that anyone could do, but in my opinion most people should at least inform themselves on this topic, there are a lot of companies that organise such things, and by finding out exactly how it works you can understand if it's something that you wanna do. If so, I'm sure you won't regret it.

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