

Lena Jülich

lena.juelich@t-online.de

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster

Erasmus en: Universitat de Barcelona

## **My Erasmus experience in Barcelona**

In Germany, Barcelona is known for its mild climate, its architecture and (obviously) the football club. But it has more to offer and in the past few months I learned a lot about its history, culture, and its people. I had already been to Barcelona once in 2009 for a few days of family vacation and remembered it as a very appealing, flourishing city. I spoke Spanish already but wanted to have a deeper experience with the local people (rather than with Erasmus students) so I prepared myself by taking Catalan lessons from a girl from Barcelona who was on Erasmus in my city, Münster. Finding a flat was difficult in the beginning but I was very lucky and with the help of a friend I found a student's flat share with 3 Spanish-speaking people (Catalan, Bask and Argentinean) in lovely Eixample.

First I did not know how to get in contact with locals but people made it very easy for me, as they were outgoing, interested and open-minded. The classes I chose were manly optional subjects so there were always different people. But I was warmly welcomed and had in every class people to talk to, with whom I would sit or do a group project. Comparing this to Germany I think it would definitely be harder to set one's foot in a class there.

I tried to establish an everyday life and registered in a gym near my house, applied for a volunteer's service in an NGO in el Raval, got to know a lot of Erasmus students (although I thought it was sad we always talked English), had a Catalan-German language exchange and spent a lot of time with my very great roommates. I felt very welcome here and not like a normal "tourist" (although in the street I got treated like one – mainly because I'm blonde) because I could experience Barcelona during summer, fall and winter, with its celebrations like 11.09. and la Mercè but also very interesting special occasions such as the 9N referendum.

Being an Erasmus-student has been different for me than being a "normal" student. In the beginning I couldn't follow the classes in Catalan easily. One professor switched to Spanish for me, but the others didn't and I felt more comfortable with that. Because I was hearing and trying to speak the language every day, it improved rapidly. I also didn't spend as much time in the library or studying as in Germany (only one exam this semester?), maybe because I only took 4 classes (12 hours a week).

I had never lived in a city as big as Barcelona but I got used to it. Though I don't know if I could live here forever. I miss riding my bike (I used Bicing but that's not as hazard-free as in my town) and hated to be sometimes almost 1-2 hours in the metro per day(!). As a vegetarian, living and eating here was easier than I had imagined although I missed a very cheap "Mensa" (student's cafeteria).

In total I enjoyed living in a city where others do their vacation, having the sea right beside, the streets lively, almost always good weather, and being able to learn a new language, get to know a different culture. I would recommend every student to do the same, Erasmus in general, or even in Catalunya. (visca!)