

PH Zug Final report – Emer Aughney

Support

My interactions with the International Office at PH Zug were relatively positive. The initial information provided at the beginning of the exchange such as administrative instructions and general expectations, was very helpful. Lynne was so welcoming and helpful from the beginning she often texted me or called to check in. However, after 2 weeks into my stay there was an issue with communication about classes. This really threw me off as I had an expectation coming that I was going to be in classes with many other students both international and Swiss which wasn't the case. Lynne was very supportive throughout this and came with a resolution that made the situation much better. While this was unexpected, it encouraged me to become more autonomous in navigating both the academic and cultural aspects of living abroad.

Teaching practice

I thoroughly enjoyed my teaching practice at ISZL, my teacher Leah and the students made me feel welcome from the first day. I found the PYP curriculum hard to grasp at first and struggled to find my feet with teaching in a different country, but my teacher gave me constant feedback on my plans and ensured that any resources I needed were available. I learned a great deal by watching how the teacher handled classroom dynamics, communication, and daily organisation. I struggled at times as I felt that I was left to plan lessons without getting to observe the class much as we were only there 1 day a week. My teacher tried her best to support me through this, but I do feel it knocked my confidence a bit when it came to teaching.

I have left the experience feeling very lucky to have spent time in education in an international school and it has defiantly opened my eyes to possible jobs around the world. I've learned so many things from the amazing teachers at ISZL and hearing about their lives in teaching was very inspirational.

Buddy

My initial meeting with my buddy was lovely and very positive and she was very kind throughout my whole stay. She always made the effort to say hello in the corridor or canteen which I appreciated. Because my buddy had their own commitments, I found myself taking more responsibility for organising my time, solving issues, and learning how things worked on my own. While this was different from what I first expected, it turned out to be a valuable aspect of my exchange experience. It encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone, ask questions when needed, and build my own connections with other students and community members.

The independence I developed from relying less on a buddy helped me grow more confident in handling everyday challenges from transportation to cultural differences. I also enjoyed discovering things on my own and creating my own routines, which made the experience feel more personal and self-driven. In

the end, even though the support was limited, having a buddy assigned gave me reassurance at the start, and the independence that followed became an important part of my learning and growth abroad.

Accommodation / living costs.

As I was travelling to Switzerland with my friend, we wanted to live together and that was hard at first to find somewhere to live that we both liked. We were recommended to stay in Lucerne by a fellow student who had also stayed there. My friend's dad posted an ad and very quickly someone reached out to us offering 2 rooms in Lucerne in a shared flat. The cost of rent was very similar to Dublin which was not a shock to us but is defiantly something to consider when you are not living in the PH Zug accommodation. PH Zug were very quickly to respond when I reached out inquiring about accommodation and offered us both a room but ultimately, we decided to live in Lucerne instead. The accommodation in Lucerne was very spacious and central in the old town which made settling into a new city much easier as there were lots to do to keep busy. I was very lucky to be sharing with my friend which also made living with the third person easier as we felt we always had each other during difficult situations.

Cost of living

Marino had made me aware when I went for my Erasmus interview that Switzerland was going to be very expensive to live in for the few months of my stay. I quickly realised this after a few weeks into my stay. Small everyday items in your food shopping, public transport and socialising were much more expensive than what I was used to but I learned to budget a lot better than what I did before. My friend and I both got part time babysitting jobs that were very flexible after college. I met some amazing children and family through my babysitting out here and I feel like this experience has broadened my opinion of life abroad as well. Having the extra money from babysitting allowed my friend and I to travel around Europe and have so many amazing experiences that I will never forget!!!! The cost breakdown was about (40-50 CHF for food shopping, monthly GA card was 295 CHF, accommodation was 900 CHF a month)

Programme at PH Zug (lectures and courses)

When choosing my courses before I arrived, I was recommended various courses by past Erasmus students from Marino which made it helpful and made it much easier. I really enjoyed all the classes in PH Zug. But I want to especially mention the special education class with Rico. Rico made such an effort to translate for us and have printed resources in English for me and the other Irish girls. We got to visit a special education school in Zug with Rico and was very interesting. I also loved my singing class with Karin, she really pushed me out of my comfort zone which was uncomfortable at the time, but I am so grateful for it now. I can now confidently sing even if it's not the best to

the kids in my class. Simone was so much fun when my friend Ellen and I went to her for piano every Thursday. She was so energetic and made learning the piano again so much fun!!! I really enjoyed my mentoring class with Andrea, she was able to give us 1 to 1 support when planning for our lessons and had a lot of background knowledge from working at IZL which was very helpful. She even invited us to her house one evening for a Swiss dinner which was so kind of her and a core memory of my stay. I really enjoyed these classes because it gave us a chance to work closely with the lecturers, but we struggled at first as the classes felt small which wasn't what we thought. Our German friends who were also on an exchange were in much bigger classes and we felt like we were missing out on the opportunity to meet people.

Teaching practice programme

The teaching practice programme was one of the most enjoyable parts of my time at PH Zug. My mentor teacher Leah was so lovely and helpful and gave me such a great insight into her life of travelling and teaching all around the world. The school was like nothing I had experienced before, and I loved the approach they took through the PYP programme. It felt much less academic and more about the student's well-being and teaching them to be good people. I feel like I will approach teaching in Ireland very differently now with all the new skills I learned. Leah was very open to me teaching whatever lessons I liked, and I got to explore the PYP curriculum more by teaching subjects like inquiry and maths in different ways than before. I will defiantly be coming home with a whole new approach to teaching from my time in IZL.

Challenges I faced.

Thankfully I faced little challenges during my stay. Except at the very beginning just feeling slightly homesick, but I was very lucky to have my friend Ellen who I was living with, and we planned lots of things to look forward too. Like I previously mentioned it was not communicated to us that the number of Erasmus students in Zug was smaller this year which meant our classes at times would be only 3-5 students which was frustrating but once it was sorted, we were very grateful.

At times I worried about money and if I would have enough for my stay but getting a job defiantly helped with that and PH Zug had offered us a travel grant which contributed to my GA cards.

Recommendations for future students

If I was to give any advice to future students who are coming on an exchange, I would say to throw yourself into the experience and have no regrets. Being independent can feel challenging at first, but it becomes one of the most rewarding parts of the journey. The experience is fully what you make of it so go on all the trips and take every opportunity to meet new people and learn new things. The ESN Luzern and Zurich groups organise events which students can go to meet people. But also getting to know the other students in

the class, all the Swiss students were so lovely, and I have great memories from my classes with them. I would also tell future students to keep the cost in mind and be open to either working before you come on Erasmus parttime during the summer or getting a part time flexible job out here to help with additional costs. Also, if you have the opportunity to live in Lucerne, it's an amazing city with so much to do and also makes exploring Zug special when you get to.

Personal Evaluation and Conclusion

Reflecting on my experience, I can confidently say that my exchange in Switzerland was the best decision I have ever made. While not everything was what I initially expected, the experience ultimately pushed me to grow in ways I didn't know I needed too. I became more independent, more resourceful, and more comfortable stepping into unfamiliar situations. These personal developments are just as important as the academic and professional insights I gained.

My time abroad allowed me to meet the most amazing people, challenge myself personally, and gain a deeper appreciation for a new culture. Despite any challenges I encountered, I am grateful for the opportunity and proud of what I accomplished throughout the exchange. Overall, the experience has contributed significantly to my personal and professional growth. I would tell anyone to keep an open mind and to Go for It !!!!.

