

## STUDYING ABROAD

*Always been curious about what it is like to spend time studying abroad? We have asked two students to enlighten us about all the fun and the difficulties that are involved.*



Name: Nicole van der Elst

Age: 25

From: Lisse, the Netherlands

Studied in: Galway, Ireland

Studied abroad from September 2010 to May 2011

### **Why did you want to study in that particular country or city?**

I've been to Ireland several times before I chose to study there. It always feels like coming home. People are so welcoming and friendly so I was glad that I was able to live there for nine months.

### **Are there any surprising or major differences between studying abroad and here in Leiden?**

I felt like a first year student again in my first month. You don't know anyone, have to find the classrooms and become familiar with a different educational system. In general the education level is less challenging than in Leiden, so I had a lot of spare time. The one thing I particularly liked about university life was that there were many societies. They are very informal and organise a bunch of different activities. It is a great way to meet new people and do things that you've never done before.

### **Which courses did you do whilst abroad and why?**

Galway specializes in literature, so almost all my subjects were literature related. Literature was my favourite subject in Leiden so it didn't mind at all. On the side, I took Irish language lessons. I was always intrigued that Ireland is bilingual and all the signs are in English and Irish. The classes were four hours a week so quite intense. At the end of the year we went a weekend to an Irish speaking region of the country and I could practice my knowledge on natives.

### **What are you studying at the moment?**

Research master Study of Art and Literature, track Literature in Leiden.

---

**What did you have to do in order to study abroad? What was the process?**

I was an Erasmus exchange student, so the procedures are pretty settled. There is an Erasmus coordinator in the Humanities department who helped me with my application and all other questions. I handed in my application and motivation letter in the first half of the second semester [of the academic year before leaving, *red.*]. In the end the coordinator decides whether you can go to your first choice university. I heard that I was admitted at the end of April. Then I started to plan all the practical things like housing etc. The international office in Galway was a great help as well. In my experience international students get a lot of help although there are always things you have to sort out yourself.

**Did you enjoy studying abroad? Are there any things you wish you had done differently or had known beforehand?**

I absolute loved spending a year abroad. I've learnt a lot about myself and looked differently at my own country. I had an international group of friends and we all tried to make the most of our stay in Ireland. I've travelled a lot and took part in typical Irish traditions as St. Patricks day, watching rugby and drinking Guinness in the pub. I'm still in touch with most of the people I met in Galway and mostly we end up reminiscing about the great year we had.

**Any tips for people who are thinking about studying abroad?**

I can only say if you have to chance to go abroad do it! It was a great year for me and if I had to chance again I would do it again. It is a great experience to learn a lot about yourself and to indulge yourself in another culture.