



HOCHSCHULE TRIER

Umwelt-Campus Birkenfeld

## Studying Abroad with Erasmus

### Institute of Technology Sligo, Ireland



Christian Schober

5. Fachsemester

Wirtschafts- und Umweltrecht

Prof. Dr. Hubert Schmidt

15.06.2017

## Table of Contents

<b>A. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>B. My Way to Sligo</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>C. Accommodation</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>D. Studying in Ireland</b>	<b>4</b>
I. General Information	4
II. First Semester	5
III. Second Semester	5
IV. Exams	6
<b>E. Leisure</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>F. Irish Habits</b>	<b>8</b>
I. Irish Manners and Courtesy	8
II. Sports	8
<b>G. Helpful information about Sligo and Ireland</b>	<b>9</b>
I. Public Transport	9
II. Cost of Living	9
III. Weather	10
<b>H. Conclusion</b>	<b>10</b>

## **A. Introduction**

This Report is about studying two semesters in Sligo, Ireland. In the following I will describe the steps that have to be taken before the journey can begin.

During my 2nd semester at the Environmental Campus I attended a presentation given by the International Office. It was recommended to plan our semester abroad about one year in advance, since there are multiple formalities which have to be done. A checklist is provided by the International Office. In springtime 2016 the International Office officially nominated me for the study semester so I could apply for IT Sligo. The application had to comprise a transcript of records and a certificate that attested my English skills. After I received the letter of acceptance by the IT, I started searching for an accommodation. I read study reports and contacted students who had already been to Sligo.

## **B. My Way to Sligo**

The induction week at the IT started on 12th September 2016. After I reserved my apartment, I booked the flight to Dublin which is about a 3 ½ hour bus ride away from Sligo. Via internet it was easy to find a timetable and I could also book the tickets from Dublin Airport to Sligo in advance. After landing in Dublin my first priority was to find the bus stop, which was not as difficult as I expected. It was approximately 9.15 pm when I arrived at the station in Sligo. I knew the address of my accommodation and with the support of Google Maps it took me about half an hour to reach it. It is also possible to travel by train, which is about half an hour quicker; however the train station is not located near the airport and therefore requires a 25 minute bus ride.

## C. Accommodation

You can decide between choosing an apartment which is close to the town centre or an accommodation next to the IT. I preferred to live close to the University, so I decided to take „Benbulbin Suites“. Apartments are mainly rented to people who work in Sligo for a period of time or families, which spend their vacation. I shared my accommodation with a fellow student. Each of us had a large room with a double bed, TV, desk, wardrobe and a bathroom en suite. You share one room which is both living room and kitchen. It is not necessary to buy additional furniture. The kitchen comprises an oven, stove, toaster and a refrigerator with freezer. Glasses, plates, pots and cutlery also exist. You cannot wash your clothes at the Benbulbin Suites but a possibility is given at the Clarion Village, another student accommodation which is only 2 minutes apart; but this is quite expensive. From the Benbulbin Suites the IT is accessible on foot in 5 minutes. Unfortunately you have to walk 20 minutes to reach the town centre, where all the shopping facilities are.

Most of the Erasmus students lived at the Milligan Court, which is approximately a 15 minute walk apart from the IT and close to the town centre. It is modern and provides a dishwasher, washing machine and dryer for every apartment, but unfortunately it is located next to a heavily trafficked road and is therefore very noisy. In addition when people tried to get their deposit back the owner tried to keep the money partially, for instance by claiming that the apartment was dirty and furniture were damaged. Moreover during winter time students complained that electricity costs increased sharply.

Other student accommodations I could visit were the Clarion Village, The Grove, Gateway and Ard Nua. All of them – except the latter – are located close to the IT but are not as modern as the Milligan Court. I least prefer Ard Nua, since it is neither close to the IT nor to the town centre and the apartments themselves are not better than the ones from other landlords. It was striking that most of the Irish students seem to spend their weekends at

home which sometimes gave the impression that the accommodations are almost empty at the weekend.

If I had to choose an accommodation again I would probably – despite the negative arguments – take Milligan Court because of the furnishings, proximity to the town centre and shopping facilities and due to the fact that the majority of fellow students lived there; however I cannot assess whether Milligan Court is always the place where most people live or if this year was an exception.

## **D. Studying in Ireland**

### **I. General Information**

Prior arriving in Ireland I chose to apply for the 'Bachelor of Business – International Marketing' programme, which is particularly designed for Erasmus students. It is a good opportunity to meet people from various countries and to get to know their culture, for instance France, Spain, Italy, and Dutch, which is of major importance when you think of the globalised world we live in and the necessity of understanding cultural diversity in many workplace, but also leisure situations. Most of the students in my class came from France, followed by Italians and Germans.

The Institute of Technology can be compared to the University of Applied Sciences in Germany. However, the main difference is the way the marks are made. In Germany it is common to have one exam at the end of the semester that entirely decides whether you pass the semester or not. At the IT you have to work more during the semester. At this point I have to mention that studying in Ireland is definitely not a pure party semester one might expect. Each subject is divided into a 'continuous assessment', which can – depending on the lecturer – make up 50% of your mark, and a final exam. A continuous assessment could mean giving an oral presentation (solely or in a group), writing a report or dealing with a group problem.

## **II. First Semester**

At the beginning of the first semester we had to pick three mandatory and three elective subjects. Compulsory was International Marketing, where you learn a lot about the importance of cultural aspects when doing business, Marketing Research and Business English. Marketing Research did not comprise an exam but we had to form a group of three students and each had to conduct a market research on a topic chosen by ourselves during the entire semester. Business English is a very good way to improve your language, since the class is quite small (approximately 12 students) and for this reason you get to talk a lot. The four lectures per week were split into two blocks, one working with the textbook and one on grammar. The lecture itself was diversified and I learnt lots of new vocabulary and expressions, particularly in relation to business, which made it my favourite subject. As elective I took European Affairs, which dealt with Lobbying in the EU and, since I study Business Law in Germany, European Law, which focused on the EU Institutions and Treaties. The third elective subject I chose was International Trade and Economics, which focused mainly on tariffs, the WTO and Brexit as it is a major concern particularly for Ireland.

## **III. Second Semester**

The first semester formed the basis for the second semester, which started in January, as several subjects slightly changed; however most of the lecturers remained. International Marketing became Applied International Marketing. The class was divided into groups and each had to carry out two projects in relation to a business. Marketing Research was replaced by Applied Marketing Research, which required us to conduct a market research for a local start-up company during the semester. Exams did not have to be written in these courses since reports had to be handed in as well as a presentation had to be given. Business English nearly remained the same except that we had to present a “group problem” instead of handing in a report. With regard to the elective subjects, European Affairs shifted to International Affairs,

with focal point United Nations. Also we had International Law instead of European Law, dealing for example with consumer protection, intellectual property rights and insurance. The third elective in the second semester was International Macroeconomics, covering Monetary Policy, Exchange Rates and the Economic and Monetary Union.

#### **IV. Exams**

The Irish students wrote their exams in January. Since I chose the International Marketing programme, mine already took place during the last week before Christmas so I was able to spend the end of the year with my family; however it was stressful to write the exams just a few days after the last lecture took place. The duration of every exam was two hours; in addition we received about 20 extra minutes to compensate the language barrier. In contrast to the approach of my home university, all examination results were published on one day a few weeks after the exams had taken place.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester we had a 2-week Easter Break followed by the exams, which were written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of May.

#### **E. Leisure**

I was surprised by the large number of leisure activities that were provided by the IT. It is common to join one or several clubs and societies and I highly advise you to do so, in order to get in touch with students from other courses, particularly with Irish people. Furthermore the IT Sligo Students Union organised numerous parties and events that took place during the semester, for instance the chance was offered to attend a Horse Race or a weekend trip to Donegal. If you are interested in travelling around Ireland I recommend you to do it at the beginning of the semester prior the continuous assessments.

Although Sligo with its 20 000 inhabitants seems to be pretty small from a German perspective, you have various possibilities to spend your leisure time. Rosses Point and Strandhill can be reached easily by bus and offer a

beautiful sea view, whereby the latter is more crowded and used by surfers. I also recommend you to climb the mountains Knocknarea as well as the Benbulbin. If you prefer walking through forests I advise you to go to Hazelwood Forest and the Doorly Park. All attractions mentioned above can be reached either by bus or on foot. In the evening I particularly appreciated going to one of the numerous pubs and spending time with my international friends while listening to live music, it really is a unique atmosphere you can be looking forward to. Pubs in Ireland are locations where people from all social classes come together, mainly of course in the evening. Food is sold either in the pub itself or often they have a separate dining room in case you want to eat something. I cannot confirm the image people might have in their head, thinking of rooms filled with smoke, since strict smoking restrictions are prevalent in Ireland. During my leisure time I particularly enjoyed playing pool with friends as some pubs own pool and snookers tables and also dartboards. In case you like to party I can reassure you straight away, since Sligo has a few nightclubs. Several times I went to see matches of the Sligo Rovers, a soccer team playing in the Irish Premier League. The level of course cannot be compared to the level of the English Premier League or the German Bundesliga; nevertheless it is still fun to be one of the approximately 2000 visitors.

If you like shopping the town centre has numerous stores you can go to. Within a few hundred metres one finds Tesco supermarket, book shops, cafés, a cinema and “typical” restaurants one would find in other countries, for example an Italian quarter is located in the centre as well. Years ago, German discounters Lidl and Aldi Sued expanded to Ireland and have become very popular, as they have adapted to Irish needs, offering good value for money. They are located about 5 minutes away on foot from the town centre.



## **F. Irish Habits**

### **I. Irish Manners and Courtesy**

According to stereotypes I heard prior arriving in Ireland the Irish were a happy, friendly and welcoming nation. This was confirmed by the impression I gained over the months. There are small things that make the difference in comparison to the culture I used to live in. When you meet people most of the times they smile and saying hello is usually followed by the question “How are you?” People are not always interested in your well-being; still I realised that it makes a huge difference if you act like that or if you either say nothing or only an unemotional “Hi”. Emphasising small things that are important it is also to mention that Irish people tend to apologise for any kind of reason, even though they are not responsible. For example if you do not pay attention in a supermarket and accidentally bump into someone, the other person would still apologise. I can also give an additional example in relation to the kindness of the Irish. One day we tried to get a bus ride to Knocknarea (mountain). As we were waiting suddenly a bus driver came to the bus station, asking us where we wanted to go. After quickly calling someone, he told us to get in his bus, which was not a bus owned by the public transport company we actually wanted to go with. He gave us a ride to the Knocknarea and as we wanted to pay him, he just smiled, said goodbye, wished us a pleasant trip and waived his hand. We could not believe it, but it was true. This anecdote is a perfect example for the kindness of Irish people I will never forget about.

### **II. Sports**

Regarding sports, Rugby is definitely superior in Ireland and more popular than soccer. As I was in Ireland, the “2017 Six Nations Championship”, one of the most famous rugby events, took place. I heard almost everyone talking about it, including the lecturers and also when I went to the gym I recognised that most of the people wear rugby jerseys from the national team or local clubs. Soccer can be seen as

second most important sport and is – as well as Rugby – usually shown on all of the numerous TVs that are present in most of the pubs. Traditional Irish sports are also important to the majority of the citizens, including Gaelic Football and Hurling; however I only have vague ideas about the rules.

## **G. Helpful information about Sligo and Ireland**

### **I. Public Transport**

Travelling around Ireland is possible either by bus or train. In contrast to the former, the latter is usually on time and more comfortable. In Sligo local buses are most of the time unpunctual and one cannot rely on the timetables, which is not always joyful considering the fact that Ireland is not a country famous for its sunny and dry weather and many bus stations are not covered with a roof. Ireland offers numerous extraordinary and stunning landscapes; however only the main attractions, like the Cliffs of Moher for instance, can be reached by private bus companies. As a student without own vehicle it is tough to discover spots that are beautiful but not very famous, since it is often impossible to get there. For this reason I can recommend everyone who is interested in studying in Ireland to bring his/her own car in order to be flexible.

### **II. Cost of Living**

Prior arriving in Ireland I heard that the average cost of living is approximately 20 % higher than in Germany, particularly regarding food. I can confirm that partially: In fact meat is more expensive compared to my home country; however the value for money is better in my opinion, since the quality of meat produced in Ireland is greater. The biggest differences between Ireland and Germany in relation to costs are the prices of alcohol and tobacco. With regard to the former, it has to be said that particularly spirits and wine are much more expensive

whereas a pint of beer (0,5 litre) costs 4-5 EUR in a pub. In relation to the latter, as non-smoker I have not experienced the differences; however I talked to a lot people who complained about the high prices.

### **III. Weather**

The weather in Ireland is always a big issue and unpredictable. When I arrived early in September it was quite warm, which means – taking an Irish point of view – 15°C. Surprisingly the weather between September and December was quite dry and sunny. Months later I was told that it was the best autumn they had for years. In winter they usually do not have any snow, but ice, as temperatures are regularly below 0°C; however it gets not as cold as in Germany. Unfortunately during spring the weather got worse as it rained very often until the end of April. The summers are mild; temperatures rarely exceed 20°C, consequently Ireland is not a paradise for beach holidays. It is almost superfluous to mention that is quite windy in Ireland over the year as it is obviously an island. If you look for a topic of conversation the weather is always an option. Once I took a taxi and when I mentioned “weather” the driver talked the entire ride about how he felt about the past days, weeks, months and years.

## **H. Conclusion**

All in all, I spent the most exciting time of my life in Sligo, respectively Ireland. Moving to a foreign country you know practically nothing about enables personal growth and strengthens the personality as you have to face new challenges on your own by stepping out of your comfort zone. I could not have made a better choice with the country. Being surrounded by native English speakers, particularly my speaking skills improved in a way which would probably not have been possible in Germany. In addition I had the opportunity to study together with people from different countries. One often reads about cultural distinctions; however experiencing it on your own is

special. You are confronted with stereotypes that are often true but at the end of the day you laugh together about it and become more aware of differences and similarities, which is valuable in a globalised world. Ireland as a country offers a lot one can discover and if you are helpless, you can be sure the Irish will help you. In conclusion I would always study abroad in Ireland and choose Sligo again. Being alone at first, I now know people around the world that I can call friends.