

## Studying Abroad in Prague

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The summer after my Sophomore year, I had the incredible opportunity to study abroad at the NC State European Center in Prague. For almost two months, I immersed myself in a new culture, learned from brilliant professors, and gained experiences that challenged me in ways I never could have anticipated. From exploring galaxies with astrophysicists to wrangling chickens alongside professors at one of Europe's oldest universities, I found myself constantly pushed to see the world differently. Even the smallest moments, like learning how to find the best pastries between classes, taught me how to embrace independence and joy in new environments.

### **Arriving at this Experience**

I first learned about the Prague program through my academic advisor and the Study Abroad Office at NC State. They encouraged me to apply, and after conversations with my family, I realized this was the perfect opportunity to expand my horizons both academically and personally. I am grateful for the support I received, which helped me prepare for the logistics and the challenges of living abroad.

### **Learning About Myself and Others**

One of the biggest lessons I learned about myself during this experience was how adaptable I can be. At first, I was intimidated by navigating a foreign city, trying to speak basic Czech phrases, and balancing coursework with travel. Yet, I quickly realized that I could rely on my problem-solving skills and my willingness to learn from mistakes. I discovered that I thrive when I step out of my comfort zone.

I also learned a great deal about others – both my classmates and the people of Prague. My peers came from different academic backgrounds and perspectives, which made travelling and day-to-day life more interesting and dynamic. The people of Europe taught me about patience and pride in heritage. Their history is woven into every cobblestone street and every conversation about resilience, independence, and cultural identity.

I met some of my best friends in Prague and made memories that I will remember my whole life.

### **Challenging My Assumptions**

Before arriving, I assumed that European classrooms would be similar to those in the U.S. Instead, I found myself in more relaxed settings that emphasized discussions, field trips, and cultural immersion. For example, one course involved trips into the countryside, where we learned about sustainable farming practices. In another, we went to multiple observatories to look at galaxies. This experiential style of learning challenged my assumption that education is confined to classrooms and textbooks.

Another major way that this challenged my assumptions was their view of careers. I believe that Americans focus on a work-life balance, while Europeans focus on a life-work balance. Life, family, and well-being come before your career. I really like this perspective, and I now view my career path from that perspective.

## **Expectations vs. Reality**

I was really nervous initially about going overseas, but this experience exceeded my expectations in every way. While I knew I would learn academically, I didn't expect to build such strong friendships with classmates or to feel so at home in a foreign country. If I could change anything, I would have stayed longer, as two months felt far too short. The most memorable elements of the experience were the little discoveries: walking around the city at sunrise, stumbling upon hidden cafés, and just getting lost. The most challenging elements were language barriers, dealing with late trains, and occasional homesickness, but I absolutely can say that this was the most high-impact experience that I have had at NC State.

## **Communication and Team-Building Skills**

My communication skills improved significantly. Group projects required patience, listening, and finding ways to bridge differences in expectations and work styles. I also had to communicate effectively with locals, even when we didn't share the same language.

## **Impact on Career and Academics**

Studying abroad has already shaped my career aspirations, like I mentioned before. Seeing how Europeans integrate their aspirations with daily life inspired me to pursue more international opportunities in my field. I am now more interested in global collaboration and seek internships

and full-time jobs abroad. I interned at a global company with a branch in Florence, Italy, for example.

### **Lessons About Culture and Country**

This experience taught me much about my own culture as well. Living in Prague made me reflect on the fast pace of American life. In the Czech Republic, I saw a greater emphasis on slowing down, enjoying meals, and appreciating history. I realized how often in the U.S. efficiency is valued over experience, and this contrast helped me reconsider my own habits.

### **Confidence, Independence, and Looking Forward**

Above all, this study abroad program gave me confidence and independence. Whether it was navigating public transportation, living out of hostels, traveling to neighboring countries, or simply ordering food in Czech, I gained the assurance that I can thrive in unfamiliar situations. I returned to the United States with a stronger sense of who I am and a greater belief in my ability to adapt and succeed anywhere.