

Czech Republic

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Short note of myself

Before starting this experience report, I want to tell the reader, that I had already worked in Czech Republic for five months in prior to this internship. It was in a smaller town for my then employer (CH). But this time I was in Ostrava, the third biggest city in Czech Republic with 285'000 inhabitants. It is like comparing Uzwil with Geneva, so my impressions were rather different.

Experience of being abroad

What was your most meaningful experience?

Even if it sounds like a cliché, it was just all the people. My accommodation was the student dorms, right next to the university I worked at (VŠB - Technická univerzita Ostrava). Thus, I was surrounded by lots of people from around the world. I made friends very early and we spent almost every weekend together, doing a hike, visiting a big cave, going camping or go for a bike trip.

Experience at work

What differences did you notice in the way work is conducted in the foreign country compared to Switzerland?

I experience the biggest difference in working habits at my very first workday. Suddenly in the afternoon, my coworker told me, that I can finish for today and go home. I must have lost the feeling for time, since I thought that it was rather early to go home. But it was! The clock showed just 14:45. Within a few days I realized that Czech people love their summer and wanted to enjoy every minute of it rather than being in the office. The combination of me being used to work at least until 16:00 plus the necessity of locking the doors with a key that only a few of my coworker owned, resulted in me being kicked out of work because they wanted to enjoy their off time early.



Figure 1: St. Vitus Cathedral - Praha



Figure 2: Dolní Vítkovice - historical industry park in Ostrava



Figure 3: Pilsner Urquell brewery - Plzeň



Figure 4: Knedliki - typical Czech food

Cultural differences

What was the most difficult thing to get used to?

For me, it was three different things. As a Swiss person, I am used to very punctual public transport. Although Ostrava has a fantastic network of bus and tram, as soon as you leave the town, you have to plan with delays. In my case, this was especially when visiting the neighbor countries Poland and Slovakia. The second difficulty was the language. Czech is a Slavic language and thus not related with anything that I could derivate some words from. Being in Ostrava, a big town with lots of international universities diminished this barrier a lot. But again, as soon as I left the town, communication was hindered and sometimes the only possibility was using an app or the Italian style (using hands and feet). The third thing sounds a bit strange, but Czech food is not very rich in vegetables. I loved the food, especially Goulash and Bramborák (potato pancake). But sometimes you miss the veggies. When I told my Czech friend, his response was: "We have a lot of vegetables, sauerkraut, onion and pickles." Apart from that, the food was delicious. I even recooked Goulash with Knedliki (dumplings) back home.

IAESTE

What were the advantages of doing an internship through our exchange organisation?

The best part was, that I had a local guy from IAESTE working just a hundred meters away from me. He showed me around, introduced me to my now friends and became one himself. He lent me a bicycle and kitchen utensils, gave me some tips, only an experienced local could and helped me with any problem.

Additionally, I attended two weekends, organised by an IAESTE committee. A hiking weekend in the Tatra mountains in Slovakia and a weekend in Lednice, a wine region, where we made a bike trip, made party, and had a vine degustation.



Figure 5: Typical colorful main square of a Czech city - Olomouc