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Beyond Borders

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"A Journey That Wasn't on the Route"

by Mario Muñoz

My time in the ESC project in Zabok, Croatia has been my first experience in an international environment (beyond travel purely for leisure), and therefore it will always be a stage of my life that I will remember in a meaningful way.

On one hand, It is not easy to forget those moments of uncertainty before making the decision to come here, the fear— to some extent— of starting this new adventure, but at the same time the excitement and desire to challenge myself in an environment different from the one I was used to.

On the other hand, I can only express my gratitude to my colleagues, who were kind to me from the very beginning and helped me integrate. Everyone here has shown great hospitality at all times.

In addition, this experience has given me the opportunity to open my mind, acquire new skills, try new foods, and travel to different places.

I have always been especially interested in culture in all its forms, and I felt that this project would provide me with significant personal and professional development, allowing me to improve my language skills in English and to learn and strengthen my abilities in writing, editing, organization, and more.

In short, I consider this to have been a very enriching period in many ways, and I would recommend anyone who is considering doing something similar to go for it and give themselves the opportunity to step out of their comfort zone. It is a great opportunity not only to gain new knowledge and meet new people and cultures, but also to find yourself and get to know yourself better, as every new experience — and even every day and every obstacle that appears along your path — can become a new challenge and a new lesson to learn. Change begins when you believe in yourself.



Photos by: Mario Muñoz and Marija Gebert.

"A Film Festival, New Friends, and the Courage to Begin"

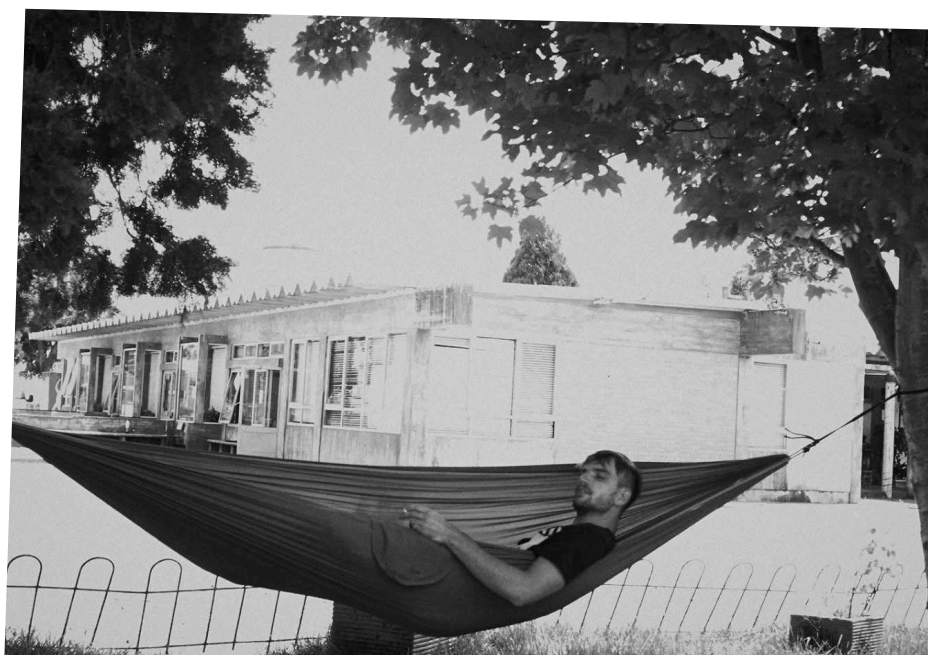
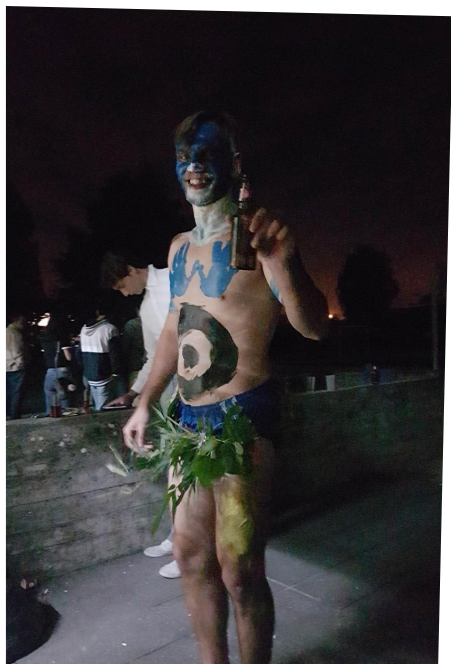
by Tin Krznar

An experience I will always remember is my first Erasmus youth project in 2018 in Portugal, mainly because of the sense of happiness I felt while staying in the small Portuguese town of Avanca. The project was related to a film festival, and during my stay, I had the opportunity to socialise, talk, and make friends with young people from Portugal, Bulgaria, Turkey, Italy, and France.

The project itself lasted 10 days, but my friends and I spent a total of 12 days on the trip. During that period of my life, between the ages of 23 and 28, I accepted every opportunity for volunteering, travelling, or student work without hesitation, which is why I decided to take part in this journey as well. In addition, I am interested in film and literature, and the theme of the project was precisely film.

My expectations of the project were not very high, but I was definitely very excited about travelling so far. The project meant a great deal to me in terms of confidence and energy, as stepping out of my comfort zone encouraged me to explore and learn new skills that I had previously considered unattainable.

Let yourself surrender to the experience, to the feeling, to the words of the famous Croatian writer A. B. Šimić — "Do not walk small beneath the stars." Open your heart and mind to new things and new people, to new languages and cultures you will surely encounter through such an experience. And to paraphrase another poem that has been on my mind for some time now: "Become a character, not an empty form".



Photos by: Tin Krznar.

"Where Snow, Castles, and Memories Meet"

by Bruno Alves

It was my first time traveling alone, and I couldn't have chosen a better place to start than Croatia — a beautiful country located in the center of Europe, rich in natural beauty, culture, and gastronomy. I decided to go there thanks to a wonderful friend of mine who lives there, and, eager to leave my comfort zone, I went on this amazing adventure that lasted a week.

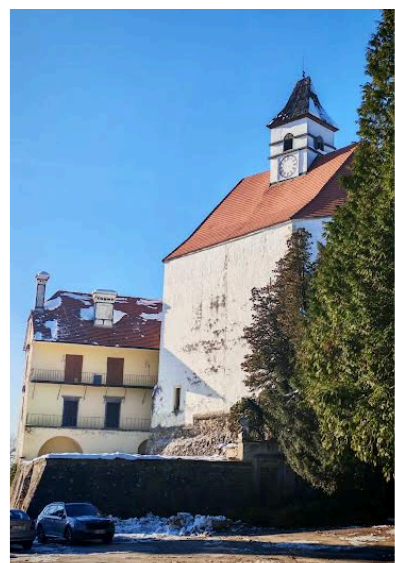
From the moment I landed in Zagreb, I knew this would be an amazing adventure, especially when my friend showed me the plan she had made of all the places she wanted me to visit. I'll talk more about that in a bit, but first I want to mention how incredible it was to see snow. It was such a magical moment for me, as I had never experienced that kind of weather before. All the things I wanted to do as a kid became a reality, such as throwing snowballs, making a snowman, and even cleaning snow off the street. All of it was wonderful and an experience I wish I could have more often.

We had a very solid plan that allowed us to explore not only Croatia but Slovenia as well. I got to visit places such as Ptuj, Borl Castle, Olimije, and Jelenov Greben in Slovenia, and Zagreb, Zabok, Veliki Tabor, Stubičke Toplice, Oroslavje, Trakošćan, Klanjec, and Kumrovec in Croatia. I made amazing memories in all of these places and learned a lot more about the history and culture of Croatia.

I visited many castles during my trip, all of which had stunning views and were very impressive. They also differed greatly from the stereotypical image of a castle, which made them even more impressive and refreshing to me. Jelenov Greben was another beautiful place I got to visit, where I experienced feeding reindeer that were free to walk around and interact with people. I had never experienced anything like it before, and it's a place I will definitely want to visit again. If I had to choose my top three places, they would definitely be, in order: the center of Zagreb during Christmas, Jelenov Greben, and Zabok.

I also had the chance to meet amazing people and experience Croatian gastronomy. I didn't expect to find something so similar, yet at the same time very different, from the Portuguese culture I am used to. The hospitality was incredible, and everyone I met was very kind and polite. Everything made me feel truly welcome. The food was amazing as well — I loved every single dish I tried and was always eager for more. Some of the most memorable dishes were ćevapi, sarma, and štrudla.

I came back feeling sad because I was enjoying my trip so much. I wanted to stay longer, keep visiting places, meeting new people, and trying more things from Croatia. I truly enjoyed my trip, and I will definitely come back to explore much more. It's an amazing place with beautiful views, rich culture, and history. It's truly one in a million and a wonderful destination to visit at any time of the year.



Photos by: Marija Gebert.

“Living Now to Avoid Regret Later”

by Josué Martinez

I lived in two countries and I couldn't say that one was better than the other, they were just different experiences with their food things and their own lessons.

I'm in Australia right now, I've been here for a year and I'm going to do one more, and the thing that made me take the decision is that I always wanted to travel, discover the world, see new places, meet new people, and I didn't want to regret not to do it when I'm old.

I expected it more relaxed, like an “adventure” type of thing every single day/week, and I could've lived that way, but once I got here I realized I preferred to live a different type of life, established in a city and focusing on new goals.

To any person with any goal, just do it, sometimes we overthink things too much, life is too short and the things you'll regret the most in life are the things you didn't do. Any experience in life will have positive and negative things, we have to learn how to detach and enjoy the positive and learn from the negative.



Photos by: Josué Martínez.

“More Than Travel: Experiences That Matter”

by Hanna Sander

A few years ago, I had the chance to travel across several European cities by Interrail, twice; once for 2 weeks and then again for 2 months.

I traveled by train, which allowed me to discover many new places in a short time and meet lots of nice people along the way.

My other unforgettable experience was my ESC project in Salamanca, Spain. I stayed there for 10 months, working in sports with people with disabilities. During this time, I met incredible people and also improved my Spanish a lot.

Both experiences exceeded my expectations and gave me unforgettable memories. The reason why I decided to embark on these adventures was because I was motivated by a desire to explore the world more, experience new cultures, and meet people from different backgrounds.

If I can give one piece of advice to anyone who is unsure about having an experience like mine, it would be: be open to new experiences and embrace the unexpected. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone—some of the best experiences come from the surprises along the way.



Photos by: Hanna Sander.

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