

My Erasmus Experience



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Location: **Prague**



“**W**hen I enrolled on the BA (Hons) Film & Moving Image Production course at Leeds Metropolitan University in 2004, I did it with the specific intention of subsequently applying for an Erasmus place at the Film Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, FAMU. Prague was both stunning and enormously relevant to my research into European film history. And I knew that because there would be no tuition fees, this would be the most feasible way of receiving an education at what was once the most prestigious film school in Europe (if not still to this day).

Moving to a decidedly cheaper country like the Czech Republic made a world of difference to my livelihood. In Prague I was suddenly paying only £2 for cinema tickets, 50p for opera tickets and £3 for a main course in a decent restaurant. I could afford to buy organic vegetables by the cart load and ride the public transport system for virtually nothing (a 3-month metro pass cost me the equivalent of £15.) Good accommodation was also much cheaper to come by. Without having to fret about the price of nutritious food, rent or transportation, I knew I could genuinely concentrate on my studies.

I'd worked as an art director on 12 student films by the end of my second year in Leeds and I was keen to further develop my portfolio abroad. There was also the added bonus of moving to a city where international film production is at its peak. I saw FAMU as a strategic vantage point for gauging the film industry, networking and possibly gaining some work experience.

I had a full timetable, 08:30-22:00 on some days, and I was eager to make the most of it. My class schedule was a showcase of all kinds of subjects I knew I would have missed out on if I'd stayed in Leeds such as workshops in Acting Theory, Editing, Avant-garde Cinema, History of Documentary, and Visual Composition. It gave my practical work context and generated a lot of new ideas. I enjoyed my classes and the city of Prague so much that within a month I arranged for an extension to my studies.

Perhaps the most fortunate moment I had on Erasmus, irrespective of the course itself, was when I rented a room on Národní and the owner turned out to be working as a freelance painter on the second Narnia film, Prince Caspian. She and I became friends and I received invaluable first-hand advice on tackling job interviews and developing a portfolio. I also got to help her paint some of the props that will appear in the film - my first taste of working as part of a major motion picture art department.

The eight months I spent on Erasmus made an important difference to my personal development because it allowed me to experience life on the fringe of the film industry while also experiencing it from the security of degree qualification. Although I was on unfamiliar territory, I was under the wing of two established film schools. I had a comfort zone. Being able to live and study in another country for a year made my degree more complete, more stimulating, and gave me contacts to aspiring film-makers from all over the globe, an all-important resource. The program also gave me a more academic perspective on my subject and confirmed that I am participating in an art form that requires a detailed exploration of the world and a multi-cultural conscience. ”