



ERASMUS EXCHANGE IN BELGIUM- UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE LOUVAIN



Accommodation

Almost every student in Louvain-La-Neuve stays on campus within the town. However the walls are not elastic and it is worth applying early so that you don't miss out, as having to organize accommodation off campus is tedious and not very convenient. The accommodation ranges in price from €55 a week upwards to about €75 and thus represents excellent value as opposed to Dublin. The €55 a week accommodation is basic but perfectly adequate for a student with most places being well heated and hot water is on tap. However, the finish and furnishings can be minimalist to the point that there may be no soft furnishings and you may have to do with a foam mat rise. There is no generic design as the accommodation as in UCD changes in design depending on the region. The amount of people in the accommodation may range from three to a 'Kot', up into double figures. The accommodation is always provided such that the Erasmus student stays with Belgians. This is an excellent opportunity to speak French if you wish and provides the possibility of language immersion.

Louvain La Neuve is well known for many novella innovations in various sectors and one of those is in relation to 'Kot a projets'. Essentially these are large kots in which the people staying there will be charged with a project. These may range from humanitarian projects to the provision of games or the helping of people with homework. These kots are always very large sometimes up to 12 people or more and are very lively places to spend time. They will host parties to raise money and may often visit other kots to raise awareness for their project or an event they are organizing. Many of these must provide so that an Erasmus student can stay with them and they are perfect for someone who likes activities and undertakings such as this.

Student Life

Fraternities called 'Cercles' are attached to most of the faculties in Louvain La Neuve. Should you wish to enter and be part of it you must do an initiation in September which will involve a lot of drinking and humiliation. The members of the fraternities can be seen out and about wearing these particular caps which are often adorned with badges to advertise their feats of drinking. These hats are guarded closely and a lanyard is a necessity as should the hat be knocked off and hit the ground a forfeit must be carried out.



24 vélo

One of the biggest student parties in Europe comes to LLN every autumn. The 24 vélo is organized on the pretext that is a 24 hour bike race which a large amount of novelty bikes being entered. The party starts at noon the first day and continues unabated until noon the day after. Lots of music large crowds and a huge amount of beer are to be expected



ERASMUS EXCHANGE IN BELGIUM- UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE LOUVAIN



Université Catholique de Louvain will challenge an Irish student's perception of what a university is. The university is actually comprised of a purpose built town about 20km south of Brussels. The student accommodation and university buildings are scattered throughout the town with the primary function of the place, being to host the university. The town has many unique features such as the fact that one may drive underneath as part of the surrounding road network and the parking provisions for the shopping centre and commercial units, which have in recent years become more numerous



Culture

Possibly one of the best things about Belgium is the ample provision for festivals. Many of the towns throughout Belgium throw these massive parties each year which are free to all and easily trump any festival in Ireland or most European countries. They include fete de Wallonie (Namur), La Nuit Blanche (Brussels), Le Dou Dou (Mons) and various others. The festival usually comprise of cheap beer and partying until 6 in the morning, on the streets or other improvised locations. Perhaps the most extreme example can be found in Brussels where a shopping centre was turned into a scene for a rave with dance music and extensive lighting and DJ sets.

Another example of Belgian culture which will appeal to students is that of beer. The finest brasseries in the world are found in Belgium and it is a great Belgian pastime to enjoy the produce. The beer is both attractive in quality and in price. Many students simply buy crates of the more generic versions for less than €10. This comes with the bonus that should the crate and the empty bottles be returned you will be reimbursed some of the price. The Trappist beers are the most celebrated and there are only 7 types which can range in strength up to 12%. A pint of beer is seen as an unnecessary volume and 33cl is regarded as the optimum quality for each serving.

Vivian Clabby and Aoife Murphy

Climate

Temperature in the summer ranges from early 20s and sometimes hit 30 plus.

The winter can be harsh and this year 2009/2010 it was minus 8 and the snow fall was heavy. Jackets and boots are a must for comfort at these temperatures

Sport and Activities

The college boasts a large sports centre. In order to avail of the facilities one must pay €40 at time of subscription. There is a large climbing wall as well as various fitness classes and an extensive gym. Throughout the year there are many sports leagues which may be entered.



Wi-Fi and Phones

The University provides Wi-Fi for the student population which is available in and around university buildings. Students may take out contracts which can be expensive.

Mobile phones are relatively inexpensive with a wide range of networks and unlocked phones can be bought cheaply.



Transport

The main method of transport in and out of LLN is by train. The track runs underneath the town and it is possible to travel to anywhere in Belgium by rail. Although Brussels is 20km from LLN it is an hour to the centre by rail allowing for the fact that you will have to change in Ottignies. Tickets are great value which makes most of the country accessible and even beyond as it is possible to travel to Amsterdam by rail as well as Paris and the Eurostar to London also stops in Brussels. At the weekend one may expect to pay €5 to Brussels.

In terms of travel to and from Ireland you have the choice of two airports and two airlines. Ryanair fly from Charleroi and Aerlingus fly from Brussels International. The Aerlingus option from Brussels International is the most convenient given the times of the flights as well as the baggage restrictions and thus on the first flight over as well as home it is probably worth the extra fare. Ryan air flies at inconvenience times in the morning but has obvious advantages should your travel not require more than hand luggage. The train stations sell combination train and bus transfer tickets.

Classes

In the Law faculty itself the classes range hugely in difficulty and content. Should you opt for first year classes the numbers will be large. There is more hours allotted to lectures which are a change from Dublin as is the marking schemes in the exams. The courses are graded out of 20 with the Belgian students having to achieve 12 in order to be dispensed from having to re-sit the exam. Communication with the faculty staff as well as attendance at the lectures is quiet important here. As it is necessary to take the bulk of your classes in French it is very important to improve your French. The ILV provide classes through the term to this end which can vary in quality. The best way is to communication constantly with your housemates and any French speaking friends you may meet. You comfort and understanding of the language will improve greatly and fluency is a very attainable goal by the time you leave.

The masters courses in LLN are very much worth availing of for several reasons. Many are in English which will take the pressure off greatly come exam time, they are closer in style to those provided in UCD and many are excellent in content. In the masters programmes here there is a great opportunity to study in small groups with excellent professors. Paul Nihol and Olivier De Schutter are two professors are two of many who one would recommend studying with. Olivier De Schutter is in fact a special rapporteur for the UN on the right to food and a human rights academic of considerable note. Students can only benefit from the close proximity to these highly respected professors which they may enjoy.



Language Courses
Should you choose to come in August CLL provide language courses in French for all levels. They provide students an excellent opportunity to acquire a basis in French and well as get to know other students that may be staying the year in LLN. If you disclose to service de lodgment that you are doing this they will extend your leave to take this into account.