

## Rita's report

Everyone thinks that Erasmus is gold on blue, but in fact things are not quite like this ... there is a lot of work that needs to be done. Erasmus did not begin on the day we boarded on that plane to Romania. Erasmus started on the day of the applications. It's one of the clearest days in my memory. I was so nervous, I just wanted to postpone my turn to go into that dark auditorium (it only had a light aimed at me) crowded with people. And as if it were not enough to have the pressure of the presence of the teachers there were still our colleagues who held the power of decision.

The days passed by and the expecting day of the results of the applications came. I was more or as nervous as I was on the application day, but I opened *geopalavras* and I saw that I had not been chosen. At that moment I was really sad. I had worked hard and even then, it had not been enough. However, when I was reading the publication a tiny drop of hope came when I saw that there could be a fourth selected if there were financial possibilities.

On December 27, I received a call and I immediately realized that it was teacher Pedro. A thousand things went through my head in those first seconds of our call, but without many delays the teacher gave me the news - I had been selected - and he placed teacher Paula in conference with us. After that I could not stop smiling and jumping around the house.

After several weeks of waiting and hard work, the big day arrived! A sea of new experiences and battles were waiting for us. For me, the first battle/experience was my first flight. Although it was scary at first, the fear passed quickly. Our flight was at sunrise on Saturday but we just stepped on Romanian soil in the early hours of Sunday. This happened because in addition to the opportunity to get to know Romania, we were also able to visit Madrid.

Arriving at Bucharest airport, the nerves began to rise to the surface. It was time to go, to leave those we knew and to go with our host family. The Bucharest trip to Oltenita was a constant attempt to interact while we were trying to keep us calm because those people, who later turned out to be fantastic, were strangers to us at that moment. Érica, Mariana

and I went together through those dirty dark roads which frightened us a bit, but nothing compared to what was waiting for us.

After a well-deserved rest night, the first day was waiting for us and the expectations were high. Before we went to school, Ana's brother (Ana was my host) took us to see the Danube River. When we got to school the anxiety and enthusiasm to meet everyone was increasing. We did some activities and spent the day together to know each other better.

Around 4:00 pm, activities were over, and it was time to go home. We walked for a few minutes and we arrived in a place with several vans, which to our amazement were our transportation. But, as they say, *"First you strange it. Then, it penetrates you."* It was not so strange that these vans were a public transport, since the people that do this route were very few.

On Tuesday it was the day to know the great capital. We visited some museums which allowed us to know a little bit better the city's history. During the afternoon we had some free time and we ventured through the city, we ended up going so far that to get back on time we had to take the underground. This day was certainly one of the best days of the week because it allowed us to interact with each other in a much more natural way.

This day was very remarkable, since we (Mariana and I) had to leave Ana's house due to a range of reasons. It was the hardest thing I've ever done! Having to redo my baggage and give up of what is supposed to be the essence of Erasmus... it hurt me immensely and I had to hold back the tears. I appreciate and I am very thankful from the bottom of my heart to what this family did for me and Mariana. I know that they gave everything they had and what they did not have to make us feel good. Thank you!

Wednesday was the day dedicated to sport. We formed six teams according to the countries and we played many sports, from badminton to football and dance. We also had the pleasure of learning a traditional Romanian dance. It was a challenge, but it was overcome.

On Thursday we performed our play in partnership with the Cypriot girls. Undoubtedly one of the funniest activities we had done. Each rehearsal we had was worth it for the simple fact that we lived together and acted as one team. At the end of the day we had dinner with all the Erasmus team in a spectacular place! We danced, played and took pictures with each other. Our best night!!

On the last day we made a 5-hour trip to the mountains, where practically everyone fell asleep. It was a day of long walks. We visited an orphanage where we were presented with a play performed by the orphans. Later we visited an imposing castle with a beautiful landscape and an interior that matched it.

The return trip was hilarious! It was 5 hours of people laughing and dancing, enjoying the last moments of what had been the most unique experience of their lives. But no one thought about it during this trip or at least tried. We lived every second to the maximum and we do not let any drop of fun escape! And when we realised, we were already at the station ready to get off the bus.

This moment of farewell proved to be much more difficult than what I had imagined. We carried a huge sadness in the chest, but it had to be... among many hugs, kisses and a few tears we said goodbye to everyone, and we went to pack our things. We left Oltenita around 2am and returned to Portugal close to 12.30.

Despite existing many barriers to our reunion, I know that, one way or another, it will happen. We made friends for life in just one week. A week that changed me and showed me more than any other. It opened new horizons and showed me that there is an entire unknown world that needs to be explored. This trip was a mix of emotions that made me evolve and gave me a better understanding of all the diversity presented in our lives. It also helped me to gain more independence and confidence in myself and in my English, and this experience has greatly improved it. If I could go back and relive this week, for sure I would. All this is due to all the work done by teachers Pedro, Célia and Paula and to all my "thank-you" because without you nothing of this would have been possible! It is a dream coming true and it will always be kept with me!