

The background image is a vibrant, clear-day photograph of the Hotel de Ville in Tours, France. The building is a grand, ornate structure with a prominent clock tower on the left. In the foreground, a large fountain with multiple jets of water is active. A tall, black lamppost stands to the right of the fountain. The sky is a bright, clear blue.

THE ERASMUS EXPERIENCE OF LA TOURAINE

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Part of the European Union's 'Lifelong Learning Programme', the Erasmus exchange has been in place since 1987, allowing students to spend part of their degree studying or working abroad. Last year, we were fortunate to receive places and spend a year studying at Université François Rabelais in the Loire Valley, France, which added further variation to our five-year course at Trinity College.

Photographs by Rebecca Weedle and Orna Grant



The Erasmus programme was a fantastic opportunity to live and study in another country. There were many exciting challenges in the year for us. Erasmus encourages students to meet other international students. Over 115 different countries are represented in University François Rabelais. There is, therefore, a mosaic of cultures and languages. La Touraine is known for its pure, unaccented spoken French. The university organizes a language course before lectures commence in September. In addition to refreshing our French, this was a great way to meet other exchange students. We also gathered in the 'Café des Langues' on Monday evenings with other internationals and local residents. There was a very friendly and warm atmosphere; on arrival we were invited to sit with five or six others and conduct a conversation *en français*. A Tourangeau (local person from la Touraine) facilitated the discussion and gave us local guidance about Tours and the region. In return, we shared the English language and Irish culture. We quickly made friends with other students from Germany, Australia, Peru, Costa Rica, USA, UK, Spain and

of course France. We organized dinner parties amongst ourselves to compare our national dishes and sample the famous Vouvray wine of the Loire Valley.

A beautiful city in which to live and study, Tours has a lively atmosphere for students. Being the largest city in the Loire Valley, Tours has a population of nearly 150,000. There is one main university, Université François Rabelais, founded in 1969, which is named after the French writer François Rabelais. The university is distributed over five campuses across the city. These multiple faculties allow for plenty of opportunities to meet other students. The Loire Valley boasts some of the most beautiful châteaux in France, including Chenonceau, Chinon and the Jardins de Villandry, which we visited. Incredibly well situated, Tours is a fantastic location from which to visit other European cities, both within and outside France. We travelled to La Rochelle, Nantes, and Paris, as well as fitting in weekend visits to Germany and skiing in Austria.



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The Erasmus Experience of La Touraine the hospitals, which was exemplified by the casual dress code. As is part of French culture, every single member of the team is greeted each morning.

As the year progressed, placements in hospital and communicating *en français* with doctors, patients, and fellow students became much more natural. During each rotation students were individually attached to specific doctors, and there was a focus on particular specialties including geriatrics, orthopaedics, gynaecology and paediatrics. Medical students were given an active role in the hospital through a paired system by which final year students are assigned as mentors to third years. We found this gave us

good structure while on clinical rotation, and an opportunity to ask questions and discuss cases informally. This system encourages teaching and a teamwork approach very early in the medical career.

The university's systematic approach to teaching was very impressive and the exams followed the lecture material very closely. The Corpo, the student medical society, comparable to BioSoc in Trinity, organizes a rota by which students attend lectures and prepare notes for their peers. These notes were fundamental in guiding our studies, because they were concise and reliable. As Erasmus students, we were exempt from the rota, probably for the best! A number of the French medical students were very helpful when we arrived, making us feel welcome and taking the time to show us around the university.

The Erasmus experience was incredible and one that will stand to us. Studying Medicine in France was definitely challenging at times, but also worthwhile and rewarding. It gave us the opportunity to broaden our horizons socially and culturally, and to immerse ourselves in a foreign language. Along with other exceptional reminiscences, we will have many splendid memories of nights out together on Place Pluméreau, especially during the lovely autumn and spring weather.

Our rotations were really interesting: we each spent six weeks in medicine, five in surgery, two studying anaesthesia and two in radiology. The anaesthesia and radiology will be of great benefit to our future studies, as these subjects are not covered in the same manner in Trinity. The oncology and radiology modules emphasized cancer diagnosis and treatment, and were clinically focused, which has sparked our interest in these fields. From a medical student's point of view, the hospital system in France was run very differently compared to Ireland. We found the French doctors and healthcare staff to be quite relaxed and somewhat less formal towards patients, visitors, staff and students in

