

## MY YEAR IN THE MED: A MALTESE ERASMUS YEAR by *Ben Sorrill (BA Arch EU 4)*



With a bit of trepidation I left behind the rain and arctic temperatures of the British summertime to spend a year at the University of Malta arriving in the middle of the night to temperatures still fifteen degrees above those I left behind. After much waiting for my lift to the Halls I eventually took a taxi to my home for the next nine months and the dawning realisation that to many Maltese the Spanish idea of *mañana* is an intolerably hasty way to live...

Bright and early the next day was the three hour induction session where a lot of information was given to us (usually finishing with: "In Malta this is illegal!") and many forms were completed – the true legacy of British colonialism. In a campus designed in the '60's eyesore' style the Archaeology Department was sited in a pretty little farmhouse away from the bustle with its own little courtyard containing citrus trees and, much like the teaching, was at its base old-fashioned with modern elements constructed on its top. It is a very friendly School though and I soon felt welcomed by both staff and students. The teaching style was eclectic, ranging from the very 'Culture/History' approach of the Head to the cutting-edge Dr Nick Vella, picture below (whose terrifying introductory lecture on 'The Theory of Archaeology' with its open threats of expulsion from the module left us quaking in fear but who turned out

to be extremely friendly, approachable and a superb lecturer). The structure of the course is very flexible allowing you to choose from a huge range of modules. For myself I stuck with archaeology taking modules in Maltese Prehistory, Roman and medieval archaeology along with others such as Prehistory of Sicily and Sardinia, Phoenician, early Israel and Palestine and Syrian archaeology. All the lessons were taught in English so language was no barrier—fortunately for me! The only fly-in-the-ointment was the University Residence: it was a wonderful place to live in (although quite expensive) and had a great pool, and was entirely filled with a great



collection of international students (the Maltese live at home); however, the management of the place were rapacious and really didn't like students... At various points of the year there were some very polite rebellions over their habit of changing the T&Cs without notice and some very arbitrary attempts at punishing perceived 'misdemeanours'. You were considered lucky if you escaped with your deposit intact! Otherwise Malta is significantly cheaper than the UK when it comes to cost of living.

Why Malta? Sun, sea and amazing archaeology... The Maltese are very proud of their spectacular prehistory and temples considered until recently the oldest freestanding stone structures (don't mention Gobekli Tepe) through to the Knights-Templar fortifications. There are not many places where you can see so many different periods so close together. I even got to dig part of the way down a Phoenician Shaft Tomb but unfortunately didn't get as far as the burial chamber (other shafts on the site were nine meters deep!). For those students who perhaps like their nightlife there are the pleasures of the Paceville clubs and if you are on the island for Mardi Gras the *Nadur Carnivalle* on Gozo is not to be missed! Oh, yes, and be sure if you do go to Malta to try the *Pastizzi*... very cheap and but very delicious!!



# STUDYING IN ITALY: A YEAR IN PISA!

*Emma Hoornaert and Laura Massey are both BA Ancient History and Archaeology students, now in their third year but spending that on an exchange year abroad in Pisa. Here they give us a bit of an insight into their time so far in Italy (LM) :*

It's hard to believe that Emma and I are actually in Pisa after a year and a half of preparation and attending Erasmus meetings. We've been here for two and a half months so far and I confess I have been slow to write this report because I'm simply having too much fun!

The first big concern everyone had on arrival here was finding somewhere to live, as Pisa is a university that doesn't provide any accommodation for foreign students. Having said that I think finding your own accommodation adds to the experience, it feels great when you finally agree to rent a room in a language you don't speak very well! Especially when your apartment has the best views you can buy (as all my housemates would agree) in Pisa (see photo)!



Before we came we spoke minimal Italian, but the two week intensive course we did when we arrived really helped and the great thing about Pisa is that you can do a free language course (for credits) in the first semester. I also have a tandem partner who I teach English in return for Italian lessons, so I'm getting there slowly!

University was a bit confusing to start as we had to organise all our own lectures. There were many incidents when we discovered we couldn't take certain lectures because of a timetable clash or a professor on sabbatical, you just have to turn up to the lectures and hope for the best! Of course, the lectures all being in Italian are very difficult to understand but provided you let the lecturers know you are Erasmus, they are always willing to help you out. Student life here is good, although there is only one main club in Pisa 'Akua Keta', ESN (Erasmus Student Network) are always organising visits and parties, especially early on to help everyone get to know each other. Emma and I mix more with Erasmus students than anyone else we know some Italians and part of Erasmus is about getting to know more about many different cultures as well as that of your host country. We miss a few things—we are both in the University of Leicester's womens' rowing team. Not much chance to keep up that here, despite the river Arno running through the city.

Pisa is a great city, it's big enough that there are things to do but at the same time everything is within walking/cycling distance including bars and supermarkets; there is also a regular meeting place for students (Piazza Garibaldi!). Although Pisa is known for being a tourist hotspot, not everywhere in the city is affected, but it's best to avoid walking through Piazza dei Miracoli with an umbrella when you are late for lectures - tourists with golf umbrellas are a major hazard! We are not far from the sea for beach trips, and only a one hour train journey from Florence! The trains here are generally much cheaper than Britain so we've got lots of trips planned, and have already visited towns such as Florence, Bologna and Lucca. We are both really looking forward to seeing what the rest of the year abroad will bring!