

We chose to participate in an international exchange program because we wanted to gain new experiences beyond the classroom and broaden our perspective on healthcare and nursing in a different country. As nursing students, we were particularly interested in learning how healthcare systems operate in other parts of the world and comparing them with what we have learned in Thailand. Another major motivation was the opportunity to challenge ourselves by stepping out of our comfort zone. In addition, this was our first time traveling to Europe, which made the experience even more exciting. We saw this exchange program as a unique opportunity not only for academic and professional growth but also for personal development and cultural exploration.

Preparation for the exchange program started several months before departure. We completed the required application documents, coordinated with our university and the host institution, and prepared travel arrangements, including accommodation, insurance, and transportation. We also attended pre-departure orientations and meetings organized by our university to better understand the program and expectations.

One of the biggest cultural surprises was how punctual and efficient public transportation was. Buses, trams, and trains generally arrived exactly on schedule, making it easy to travel between cities and plan daily activities. We also noticed that people highly value privacy, personal space, and independence. While people may initially seem reserved compared to Thai culture, they are often kind and helpful when approached. Another interesting observation was the strong respect for rules and public order, which contributes to a very organized environment.

We joined the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at the University of South Bohemia (USB) in České Budějovice, Czech Republic. Our first impression was extremely positive. The campus was well-maintained, modern, and equipped with facilities that supported both learning and student life. Faculty members and staff were approachable and willing to assist international students whenever needed.

During our exchange period, we participated in a variety of academic and clinical activities related to nursing and healthcare. We attended lectures, workshops, and discussions that introduced us to different approaches to healthcare education and patient care. In addition to clinical learning, we exchanged ideas and experiences with healthcare professionals, lecturers, and fellow students from different backgrounds. These interactions allowed us to compare nursing practices across countries and gain new insights that will be beneficial in our future careers.

Outside of our academic activities, we took every opportunity to explore the Czech Republic and nearby European countries. We visited historical cities, castles, museums, churches, and cultural landmarks that reflected the region's rich history and heritage. We enjoyed discovering the unique character of different cities, from the charming streets of České Budějovice to the historic beauty of Prague and other destinations.

Although our direct involvement with ESN was limited, we still had many opportunities to connect with both international and local students through university activities, classes, excursions, and social events. Many of the friendships we formed extended beyond the classroom and continued throughout the program, creating meaningful connections that we hope to maintain in the future.

Based on our experience, we would recommend future exchange students:

- Start preparing documents and travel arrangements as early as possible.
- Research your destination before departure, including transportation systems, local customs, and weather conditions
- Use transportation applications such as IDOS to plan routes efficiently within the Czech Republic.
- Keep both digital and printed copies of important documents, including passports, visas, insurance information, and emergency contacts.
- Learn a few basic Czech phrases. Even simple greetings and expressions can make daily interactions easier and show respect for local culture.
- Be open-minded and willing to try new experiences. Some of the most rewarding moments come from stepping outside your comfort zone.

Looking back, participating in this exchange program was one of the best decisions we have ever made. The experience allowed us to grow academically, professionally, and personally in ways that would not have been possible through classroom learning alone. We gained valuable knowledge about international healthcare systems, improved our communication and problem-solving skills, and learned how to adapt to new environments. Living abroad taught us independence, resilience, and the importance of cultural understanding in today's interconnected world. Most importantly, we created unforgettable memories and formed meaningful friendships with people from different countries and backgrounds. We returned home not only with new knowledge and skills but also with a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity and international collaboration. The lessons we learned during this exchange will continue to influence our personal and professional lives for many years to come.

