

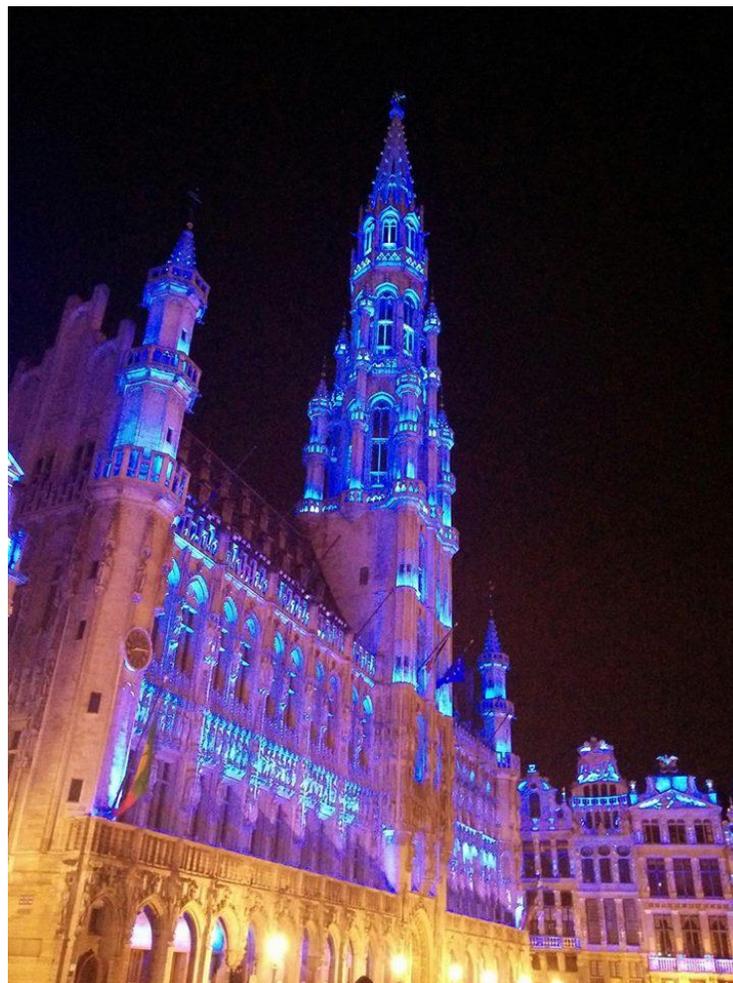
Alisha, BSc Biological Sciences (Ind)

For my year in industry I decided to go to Belgium to work at UCB biopharma in Braine L'Alleud (near Brussels). Here I worked in the investigative toxicology department on a project involving drug induced cardiac injury. My activities varied on a day to day basis from undertaking experiments in the lab, to analyzing data and compiling literature reviews in the office. This meant that I got to experience how research projects worked in medium sized pharmaceutical companies such as UCB, and being in a relatively small department meant that I was making a real contribution to the project, which will lead to me having my name on a poster and published article next year.

Moving to Belgium was the first time I had experienced living abroad and living without my identical twin sister. I'm not going to say it was easy to adjust because it wasn't, but was it worthwhile? In my opinion, yes. Pushing myself so far out of my comfort zone enabled me to grow as a person, to develop skills not only academically but socially, and to experience a new culture (I didn't realize how different the British culture was until I came here). There were times when I felt like giving up, I wasn't enjoying myself and I considered quitting (a few times), but I didn't because the experience I knew I would gain was invaluable. There are going to be times in life when you are living somewhere you are not comfortable or not doing your 'dream job', but it's a chance to reflect on which direction you do want to go in and to find out what really excites you.



Don't get me wrong, the overall experience has been massively positive. I've been exposed to and learnt (well, tried to) many different techniques in the lab which I feel will benefit me in my final year project at Leeds. I have made some amazingly supportive friends and met a whole network of international people (holidays all over the world, right?). I even got the chance to go on a week long course to Luxembourg which enhanced my ability to network and gave me an insight into many different career paths in toxicology. I am hugely thankful for the Erasmus funding I received to help me through the placement, as we didn't get the best wage, and this enabled me to fully make the most of exploring Belgium and the surrounding cities (Ghent, Brugge, Amsterdam, Berlin) as well as getting involved in activities over here such as yoga, salsa and the gym.



My advice for anyone debating on taking a placement abroad would be to go for it! It is an amazing and possibly once in a lifetime opportunity. I would however say, choose a placement/place which really excites you, something or somewhere you feel you could really grow to love, as this will make your experience seem a little less daunting and a little more worthwhile!