

*“It seemed too good to be true in advance, but it really turned out to be a great experience!”*

Edo went to Croatia for 7.5 months where he worked on a sustainability project. This EVS project called “European Friends for Green Trends” is sponsored by the Erasmus + program.

In the beginning, the European Voluntary Service (EVS) offer sounded too good to be true in my ears. In exchange for doing a variety of volunteer work, you receive financial compensation. I had previously done a volunteer project in China - which, by the way, was great - but you had to dig into it. This was not the case with EVS: the offer was as good as promised.



### **Top location**

EVS is not only financially beneficial for young people, but also the experience itself is beautiful. It offered me a great personal enrichment. I would like to do a project in which sustainable living and nature conservation were central, and so I ended up in the tourist town Opatija on the Croatian coast. No wrong place! The sea was within walking distance, the mountains and forests were fabulous and the weather never got boring: from impressive lightning storms to the well-known Mediterranean sun.



### **Conscious living and learning**

The host organization Zmergo tried to raise awareness about the damage of plastic waste in nature among the local population. Food waste and realistic sustainable lifestyles were also brought to the attention. In addition, the NGO has managed to ensure that a large nature reserve has a protected status. I have immersed myself in the subject matter and have also often withdrawn nature, which was certainly an overwhelming experience on your own. It is cliché, but in Croatia I have become a somewhat different person, someone who lives more consciously. I try to maintain a sustainable lifestyle and not get carried away by all technological developments. That alone is profit for me.

Another nice aspect of EVS is non-formal learning: here you get the opportunity to set up a personal project within working hours, where you choose which skills you want to gain. I have learned a number of computer design programs via Youtube tutorials, so that I can now design 3D cities. I would like to go to the green / sustainable urban development sector, so that was another great learning point!

*“I am now trying to maintain a sustainable lifestyle and not get carried away by all technological developments. That alone is profit for me.”*

Now the sustainability theme always comes back here: many EVS projects can easily be reached by Flixbus. This is a bus transport company with an incredibly extensive network throughout most of Europe. It is often cheaper than flying and saves a lot of CO2 emissions. It takes a bit longer, but you stop in all kinds of nice places in between! If you do catch the plane, then a flight can be compensated via GreenSeats.

### **What does not kill you make you stronger**

It must be said that not everything went smoothly, tensions between volunteers and employees could still increase. There was poor communication and some people were not together. But perhaps that not everything went smoothly, it made a more penetrating experience. You were forced to solve problems on the work floor and to bridge cultural differences.



### **Also a lot of fun outside of the project**

Besides volunteering, I have been able to travel a lot through Croatia, as might well be known as a beautiful country. The student city Rijeka was half an hour away, there was entertainment and a student rowing team. There I met a lot of nice young people, unfortunately my family did not live in my village. The On-Arrival and Mid-term training sessions - a fixed component of every EVS - were an absolute highlight.

All volunteers around the country come together for a week, there are fun workshops, parties and lots of local food. And last but not least, Croatia was second at the World Cup in Russia, a happy theme that was of course the talk of the day during the summer.

by Edo Van Baars