

ERASMUS+ EXPERIENCE REPORT

Sending University: **Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg**

Host University: **UIS-Stavanger University**

Term: **Spring (January-May 2017)**

When the time to get started with the Erasmus+ arrangements arrived, it felt like travelling back in time. When I was 20 years old I had my very first experience with the Erasmus program, and now, 7 years later I was embarking myself in a new adventure. From my previous Erasmus experience I always regret that I did not meet enough locals, so one of my objectives was to get to know Norwegian students during this new exchange. I heard from former MA students that were taking part in my study program that Stavanger, and Norway in general, was a beautiful country full of nature. Since it was not my first time in Norway I was looking forward to get another perspective, not from a touristic point of view, but as a person who resides there. Before we (my cohort and I) departure to Stavanger we had to fill in different forms in order to receive the Erasmus+, I have to say that that process is always the most tedious one, but both the sending and receiving institution helped us along the way. Once we had all the documents ready we needed to book for our flights and also to get ready with adequate clothing and shoes. Stavanger is known for its rain, so proper shoes and rain clothes were a must. When I went home for the Winter break (before heading to Norway) I made sure that I had the appropriate clothes in order to survive during my 4 months program. I have to say that without my waterproof coat and good hiking shoes I will not have gone through the wet weather. For future students, would also recommend bringing rain pants and boots. Even before being in Norway, I had already spent around 500 euros in travel tickets and adequate winter clothes. Furthermore, and following the advice of friends that lived there in the past, I brought food products that were much more expensive in Norway than in my country of origin, which in the end, had a meaningful impact in my weekly grocery expenses.

Additionally, and prior arrival to the host institution, we had an introduction session which contained useful information on where to find accommodation and other practical issues about the host University. Thanks to one of the web sites provided at this session I was able to find place where to stay. The monthly rent was around 440 euros. The location was really convenient since it was half way from University and the city center; we used to take the public transport to go to class and we used to walk to the center.

The arrival in Stavanger was an easy one since there were buses connecting to the different areas from the airport. Our introduction week was a special one: we heard more useful information on the courses and other relevant issues. The receiving university hosted different information sessions together with the rest of international students so it was easy to know all the activities occurring at the campus and in Stavanger. We had a truly enjoyable Norwegian cooking class, where we got to

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learn more about their culinary story and enjoy the new flavors and tastes. The schedules for the classes were all available prior to our arrival so made everything smoother and easier to adapt to. Since we were a small cohort the classes were rather small, but the rest of facilities at the campus were outstanding. One of the best aspects of the host university was the sports center where they offered a variety of sports and for really good fares (if compared to the average costs in Norway). Plus all the canteens included microwaves where students could warm up their meals (it is important to bear in mind the high costs in Norway).

Our lectures were mostly all well planned, and they took place as they were scheduled. Our days were packed with lectures and workshops due to the nature of our MA. It was such an enriching experience to have lecturers from Scandinavia as well as from Slovenia (due to our MA partnership). I enjoyed the lectures, and got a wide content out of it. We also had the chance to visit several reception centers for refugees, which was relevant for our MA program. I found Norwegian punctuality and way of being really nice. Many of our lecturers joined us for different gatherings and they were always very open about different issues. In general, I enjoyed their approached and teaching methods and that the installations of the university were all orientated to make the long hours of the students at site more enjoyable.

In addition, there were many the organizations within the University where someone could just join and meet locals. Nevertheless I did not meet as many Norwegians as I wanted, and despite their welcoming nature, overall we found challenging building up friendships with Norwegians.

Regarding our leisure, we used to hike every weekend and travel around Norway. There are many hiking routes in the Stavanger region (something for free and really worth it) and when it came to national travelling was quite expensive, but discounts were offered. We used to cook at home (it was not affordable to either go for a drink or for food on a weekly basis) and when going out, we always took advantage of the different offers for students.

Towards May, there seem to be more activities occurring in town and the weather let people gather downtown.

All in all, my Erasmus+ experience was extremely positive. I had the chance to live in Norway, a country which offers unbelievable nature, and that despite the high living costs can be really enjoyable. I managed to travel around, benefit from the great lecturers that the University offered and try new things that I had never tried before. Living abroad always offers people to get out of their comfort zone and to get a better understanding on how people live in different countries and also embracing new cultures. By leaving behind our day to day routines and coexisting with new people that differ

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from us, broadens people's understanding of life and break walls and stereotypes that may cause conflicts within individuals. For this reason, I will strongly encourage to any students out there to join the Erasmus+ program, and to choose Norway, since it is a country that can offer endless possibilities.