

## Student Experience Report – Study Abroad

### Journey from the University of Oldenburg to the University of Stavanger, Norway

From January to June 2018, I spent a semester at the University of Stavanger in Norway. I had the opportunity to explore a new country, meet students from all over the world, and learn in a tranquil and nature-surrounded environment. Although my semester did present some academic challenges, I also gained new knowledge and challenged myself to try new activities. In terms of preparation and planning, the program coordinator at the host university was very well organized and sent us information many months in advance about our first weeks in Stavanger. I also received information about accommodation well in advance, along with my course schedule and other important information. Overall, I felt well prepared prior to my arrival and any questions I had before my exchange were answered quickly. The administrative and logistical support I received was very efficient, and our coordinator prepared us well for our semester in Norway.

My travels to Stavanger went quite smoothly. When I arrived at the airport, I picked up my keys for my residence at the airport hotel and headed straight to campus. During my exchange, I stayed at a student residence on campus, which was referred to as the Red Boxes (since the building is red). This residence was almost entirely for international students, and I had the opportunity to meet students from all continents, which was an amazing experience. Although the accommodation itself was quite basic and the facilities were old (the rooms were very small), I very much enjoyed the experience of living in such an international setting. I had very interesting and diverse conversations in the kitchen, and we would often organize activities together at the residence (including movie nights, potluck dinners, parties, etc.). The students at the residence were enrolled in many different programs, which meant that I interacted with people with different perspectives and knowledge. Many of them, like me, were also participating in an Erasmus Mundus Master's program. We would sometimes have serious conversations about the politics of our countries, or debates over the definition of culture or the environmental impacts of oil exploitation (Stavanger's economy runs on oil), but we also bonded over our music interests and favourite movies, motivated each other to go to sports classes, try new activities or go hiking together. My semester was filled with a wide variety of new activities, in many ways thanks to the people I met at my student residence.

I would definitely recommend staying in a university residence to meet other students and explore Stavanger together. The University of Stavanger has many residences, which are not all on campus, and it could also be nice to stay in an off-campus residence to explore more of the city. Since my residence was located on campus, I sometimes felt like I spent most of my time there and I wished I could have explored the city center more. On the other hand, public transportation works very well in Stavanger and the bus system is easy to use to get around, since it is a small city (around

150,000 inhabitants). I used to take the bus to go to the city center or to visit my friends, and tickets are not so expensive for students. In general, life in Norway, however, is very expensive. Accommodation and food are not cheap, especially compared to Germany, which is important to keep in mind before choosing Norway as an exchange destination.

Studying at the University of Stavanger was enjoyable overall. The university facilities are new and hi-tech, and most classrooms are equipped with the latest technology. The university also has a library open 24/7, which was very practical and useful to have access to. Another great facility was the gym, which offered many sports classes and had a discount for Erasmus students. There were also several cafeterias on campus, though the prices were not cheap and I would recommend packing your own lunch. The campus is situated near farmlands and a small hill with several trails, meaning that it is easy to take advantage of and enjoy the surrounding nature. Although the weather is cold in the winter, it is mostly rainy, since Stavanger is located near the sea. This meant that I appreciated the rare sunny days even more! With friends, we tried our best to enjoy the beautiful nature and participate in many hikes as well as outdoor sports, such as skiing.

Concerning my academic experience, I had a variety of professors at the university, both from Norway and guest lecturers from abroad. Most of my classes were very interesting and all of them were challenging, in terms of the content but also the assignments. Since the professors gave us a lot of flexibility to choose our own research topics, it was challenging at first to narrow down subjects for our papers (which were between 3,000-4,000 words). Overall, I felt as though my academic performance was a bit weaker during my exchange semester, since I struggled with my assignments, though I was still able to maintain my average. I very much appreciated the support from our professors and the in-class discussions with my peers, which inspired and motivated me. In terms of support, our program coordinator also made it clear that we could always rely on her and she was constantly present to answer any questions. I also reached out for support from peer tutors, who were international students studying at the University of Stavanger and who offered academic help at the library. Since I am completing an Erasmus Mundus Master's program, I am not worried about my credit transfers, as each semester counts for my degree and the grades I receive during my exchange will be shared with our program coordinator at the University of Oldenburg.

Ultimately, I know that I will keep lifelong memories from my experience studying at the University of Stavanger, Norway. I would recommend future students to take full advantage of the beautiful nature Norway has to offer, and not to hesitate to get involved on campus and meet other international students. The university is small and it does not take very long to get to know students! Definitely, I also recommend travelling to Bergen and Oslo, hiking to Preikestolen, and if you can, participate in the May 17<sup>th</sup> Norway Constitution Day Parade. Have fun! ☺

**Photos**



My class – EMMIR cohort 6



3 swords monument in Stavanger, Norway



Hike to Preikestolen to see the fjords near Stavanger, Norway