

# ERASMUS-Erfahrungsbericht

Persönliche Angaben			
Name:		Vorname:	
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Gastland	Finnland		
Gasthochschule	University of Oulu		
Aufenthalt	von:	August 2016	bis: Dezember 2016

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## Finland – why Finland?

For me studying abroad was always part of my future plan and I was really happy to realize it now. After I told my friends and family, they were really excited and wanted to know where I'd go. This was the point when they started to question my mental health: why are you going to Finland? Its cold and dark and the Finns are supposed to be closed up and unfriendly. Why do you want to stress yourself with this kind of experience? My answer: Why not? Why shouldn't you want to experience something completely different, something unusual, maybe even something crazy?

Luckily one of my teachers at our university in Chemnitz gave me a completely different feeling about my upcoming adventure. He was at the same place for exchange 10 years ago and highly recommended it. Going to the south is too easy. Going to the north is really special.

As the semester in Finland starts much earlier than the one at our home university, time was running by really fast. I was busy with exams and planning and suddenly I found myself at the airport of Berlin, meeting my two friends, who took part in this Erasmus too. Because I've already been abroad after highschool, I was more or less used to saying goodbye and travel. But it was a really nice fact that I wasn't alone this time.

At the 18th of August 2016 in the evening sun we arrived in Oulu. During our travel we already met the first student, who would spend the semester with us. Together we figured out the way to the bus stop where our „kummi“, a person who is taking care of you the first weeks, waited for us. His name was Dan and he was the opposite of what the klischees in Germany say about Finns. He was very communicative, friendly and caring about us feeling at home. He brought us to our new home in the students housing and there we were. Living in Finland.

The first days we used to get to know the city and the surroundings and how to buy groceries. As Finnish is a language, which doesn't have anything in common with any language we are familiar with, it was a little bit challenging to figure out the product we wanted in the grocery store. So we stood in front of the shelves with our dictionary and took quite a while to buy the ingredients for a simple meal. But soon we got used to some words and the language course at the university was also helpful.

Oulu itself is a beautiful little city at the ocean. The city center is marked by a lot of little bridges and rivers, which make the heart of people, who love water, beat higher. The size is comparable to Chemnitz, which makes everything being accessible easily by foot or bike. Biking is really common in Oulu and I think even over all of Finland. The paths are nice and a lot of times far away from the main road, which makes it more safe and easy to drive. Finns

never stop riding their bikes, even if it is raining, snowing or slippery outside. And so we adapted this habit and used our bike as much as possible. As the landscape over there is rather flat it is really comfortable to ride a bike and you also save the money for the bus, which helps a lot. During the night the bus system is not really convenient, so having a bike has another advantage. Now one might question where to get a bike for a reasonable price? There are a lot of second hand stores and private persons selling cheap and old bikes, which will still bring you from A to B safely. Really helpful for buying and selling used products is Facebook nowadays. There are some groups, where the students offer their stuff. I highly recommend to participate in those. It makes the life over there much easier.

The first time at „Oulun yliopisto“ we already got lost. The main building is not big in floors but in the area it's covering. All the separate areas and faculties are connected by covered paths, so you don't have to go out in the cold in the winter. The study facilities are relatively modern and innovative. For example you have a learning area called „TellUs“, where you find computers, tables, white boards and separate rooms. This place is perfectly to study in company and work on group assignments. We spent a lot of time in between and after classes there. Apart from that I really liked the variety of canteens in the university. There are a lot of them, which all serve different food every day. The university has an App called „Tuudo“, where you can check all the menus and decide where to go. The food is also good and you get salad, bread and drinks for a really affordable price. The App shows you also your upcoming classes and exam results. So it helps you a lot to organize yourself and your day. The relationship to the teachers is a little different and more informal than in Germany. This makes it nicer and easier to communicate and in my case they always did their best to help.

Participating in an exchange program means studying on the one hand, but on the other hand it is about to get to know people and learning to deal with different cultures. This played a big role during my adventure. As I was living in a students housing I already met a lot of students in my building, and most of them were also on exchange. Soon we made some friends, prepared dinner and went out to explore the nightlife in Oulu together. This was quite nice because the students in Oulu are covering a quite big part of the population, so the city is very active, also during the night. There are a lot of different opportunities to dance or just have a nice drink somewhere. Starting at places playing common music and charts and ending at special rock and metal clubs. Everybody should find some place he or she likes. Besides that it was able to rent a clubroom in the students housing to celebrate. This was done quite often and there we met a lot of exchange students but also Finns. It was nice to get to know them and share some different ways of celebrating.

Talking about people, I think for me that was the most remarkable memory I made over there. I made some really special friends from all over the world, who made the adventure unforgettable. Especially a group, which contained about 12 people, became really important to me. Together we travelled to the Northcape, to Lapland and shared some unique experiences.

One of the trips was organized by the Erasmus Student Network of Oulu (ESN). The people working there put a lot of effort into organizing parties, events and trips, which make your stay even more special. I highly recommend to buy the membership for 10€ to have a lot of discounts, free entry to the parties and special offers of trips. Our trip to Lapland with ESN was filled with magic moments, like a Husky Safari, Ice Hole Swimming or a trip to a little fishing village in Norway.

As everybody might know, Finland is known for their high usage of saunas. That's definitely true and you shouldn't miss the experience of sauna and ice hole swimming in combination. This is a feeling, which can't be compared to anything else in life and it will be good for your health too. A must do if you choose to go to Finland.

One might question, how it was to handle the cold and darkness in winter. Firstly, the cold is not really bothering. It's a dry cold and therefore quite easy to handle. The most important is to dress up reasonably. According to the darkness, it wasn't really bothering me either. I'd rather say it was an interesting experience. I sometimes had to fight with getting sleepy, but doing sports in the afternoon always helped a lot. Emotionally I didn't have any problems. Until I came back to Germany and experienced a really sunny day I didn't realize that I missed the sun.

Overall I highly recommend to participate in Erasmus during your studies, because it's a unique experience, which you shouldn't miss. It helps you to grow characterwise and develop new skills and to broaden your mind. Finland is a perfect place to do that and Oulu a lovely city to live in. I wouldn't choose anything different and I don't regret anything. The nature in the north of Finland, where Oulu is located in, is really unique and you get to experience wildlife. In my case I saw reindeers, elks and even a polar fox. If you like outdoor adventures, I'd say that's a perfect place to go. I'm sure for me it wasn't the last visit. So I'd say: be brave, try out something unique and go to Finland! You will not regret it.