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Home university:

University of Applied Sciences,
Karlsruhe - Germany

Receiving university:

Laurea - University of Applied Sciences,
Lohja - Finland

Field of study:

International Management, Bachelor

Semester:

5

Period:

August '14 – December '14

Preparation:

First of all I should mention that I applied too late because I thought I could not go to Finland (as I am half Finnish). I thought it would not be counted as a semester abroad. Of course I was very lucky when I found out I could apply. Nevertheless even if I was too late I got a quick answer from the Finnish coordinator that they want me to come, but that only at the campus in Lohja, a place was left. I was the first from our university to go to the new partner university Laurea. So I had a lot of work with my Learning Agreement which was okay because my German coordinator helped me a lot.

The whole cultural and language thing was no problem at all for me because in first hand it was the reason why I wanted to go to Finland. As I mentioned before I am half Finnish which means I have been there many times before and which also means I speak Finnish. I wanted to get to know my Finnish side and of course I wanted to improve the language as it is a very hard one. The good thing in Finland is that almost everybody speaks very good English. So even if you are not capable of speaking Finnish it is no problem to talk to people there, even if Finns are very shy.

I did not have to prepare a lot as I already knew what I will need and what not. A very big help was also the partner University and especially our coordinator in Lohja. I did not have to search for an accommodation as we got apartments from the university. I was very lucky because as far as I know we were the only campus which had apartments for their exchange students. All the others had to search on their own which can be really hard and time consuming. Not just that we got a room to live in, but we got furniture in every room (including bed, chairs, wardrobe, tables, mattress) and our tutors went shopping for us so everyone got bed sheets, towels, plates, glasses, pans and so on.

We had 4 tutors so about one tutor for two to three people. They helped us a lot especially with the preparation, the arriving and the first few days in Lohja. With the help of everyone it was really easy for me to prepare for my semester abroad. I always knew whom to ask in case I had some questions.

The tutors were students as well which was sometimes quite helpful in case we had questions about some exams, presentations or teachers.

Studies abroad:

The University of Laurea in the area of Helsinki has a few campuses. I was at a campus in a town named Lohja, about 45 minutes away from Helsinki. It was a rather small campus with in total only 11 exchange students. There were only a few lectures held in English in which we could participate. For me it was totally fine because I found similar courses in my home university which could be replaced by the Finnish courses. My subjects were Development expert, Know-How on internationalism – culture and language, International Business and Markets and Marketing. I also took part in basic Finnish to improve my Finnish language which I already spoke before I went to Finland.

One special thing about the campus of Lohja was the Business Lab, an institution for students to work in and to take part in real business projects instead of participating in a normal lecture. I also took part in one of their projects but voluntarily and without putting it in my learning agreement. We helped a gymnasium to improve their business and marketing plan which was really interesting. I learned a lot especially about the European market and got to know other views on business than just the German one.

The teachers were really nice and they cared a lot about us. They tried to be as flexible as possible to make our studies abroad comfortable. They rescheduled lectures and exams dates for us if we had no time to attend and so on. Also the English of them was very good and easy to understand as usually in Finland.

From the beginning of the first day we were integrated in normal classes with the Finnish students and we participated in all the get to know activities which helped us to make friends with some Finnish students. Our lectures were mixed with exchange and domestic students and some teachers also tried to mix us up in group works and presentations to get to know each other better. This all was possible because we were on a small campus and in my opinion we got really lucky therefore. A lot of exchange students from bigger campuses complained because they had no real chance to get to know Finnish students as it is usual in campuses with many exchange students to have extra lectures for them.

All in all the studies helped me to understand international business better.

Living abroad:

As I already mentioned a few times the semester in Finland was not a very big challenge for me. What made it a lot easier especially because we were in a town 60 kilometres away from Helsinki, is that I had a car. The only other way to get to Helsinki was by bus, which took of course a little more time. Very nice was that we could afford a student card for about 10 € with which bus and train drives cost half of the normal price.

We exchange students lived together in a building with many apartments. We shared our flats which was really good to get to know each other pretty fast. The building where we lived was about 3 km away from the centre of the town (University, gym, bus station). So of course with the car we were much faster than by walking. But there was also a bus station next to our house. Therefore you had to buy a bus card every month for about 60€.

As I have written before the accommodation matter was no problem as an exchange student in Lohja. The tutors made the life very comfortable and easy by buying our stuff before we arrived and so on.

Compared to Germany Finland is an expensive country especially when it comes to food, drinks and transfer expenses.

Of course living in a foreign country means adapting to the country's culture and behaviour including how you spend your free time and eating habits. As I knew already a lot about the country and the people I was able to show my friends a lot of it which made their experience even better. For me it helped to get to know myself better. Now I have a better idea what I want to achieve in my life, my strength and weaknesses.

Programme:

The University of Laurea offered many different activities in which you could participate voluntarily. Many of those activities were organized by the students themselves or at least the offer and transfer was organized by them. I participated in a weekend trip to Stockholm by ship. We could also go to Lapland and lot of cultural things like that. In those I did not participate because I know the county already.

Due to Lohja's Business Laboratory we could participate in group workshops and so on. But of course most of them were in Finnish and so it was not possible to attend as an exchange student.

Helpful advices:

If you want to go abroad it is very important to inform yourself about the country. Get to know the culture, the weather, the people and their habits. Exchange students should be open to new things and willing to learn new things. Of course there is often the language barrier therefore you have to get out of your comfort zone and just start talking.

We had the problem with some of our exchange students from France who were afraid to talk in English. Because of that we had many misunderstandings in the beginning which gave us a wrong picture of each other.

Try not to get ignore the other nationalities just because it is easier to stick with the ones you know. I think it would have been a better experience for everyone in our group if everyone would have been open and willing to talk in the very beginning.

Regarding the Learning Agreement it is very helpful to have a clear idea of all the subjects you have in your studies, to take the best learning experience out of it.

Personal opinion:

I really liked my semester abroad. It was one of the best experiences of my life and I would do it again if I could.

Going abroad in Europe with Erasmus was the best choice I could make.

My receiving institution was very caring and nice to us exchange students and they always helped us when we asked for something.

One thing that would be nice but which could hardly be improved, is making every group of exchange students more international. Being by that more or less forced to get to know different cultures and different people makes the experience you have so much more interesting. It is a way to learn more in the same period of time. Not just about other countries but also about yourself.

I really liked that we had the chance to get to know Finnish students as it was an almost unique chance according to the exchange students in other faculties.

I know that it was easier for me than for others because I already knew the culture and the language but nevertheless I can tell that the whole exchange was very well organized and planned.