

# My Erasmus in Finland – Jyväskylä

by Katharina Adler

I am a student at the university of applied sciences in Nordhausen. Here I am studying “inclusive studies” where I am focusing on the work with children who have disabilities or difficulties in development or including in their social environment. I went abroad during my third semester and I chose the city Jyväskylä, which I never heard about before and where I probably would not have gone without this Erasmus. Jyväskylä is situated about 300 kilometres north of Helsinki - between countless forests and lakes. When you think about Finland, especially about a semester during autumn and winter, you probably think about cold, darkness, and snow. But the experiences and memories you will collect there go much beyond these expectations.



## Preparations

For my semester abroad, it was important for me to find courses at the partner university that I can use as an equivalent for my studies back home. Apparently, this precondition limited my possibilities to a few universities. But besides that, I was open-minded regarding the country. I am interested in the Scandinavian countries and as soon as I decided for Jyväskylä, I started preparing the learning agreement. Actually, this was the most “difficult” part of the preparation process. Be prepared that there will be more changes in your learning agreement when your studies abroad begin. I don’t know anybody who did not change something in the learning agreement.

It is good to plan your journey as soon as possible because then you can get a cheap flight. Also, you should take out a health insurance. It is good to bring warm clothes (good jacket and shoes) to Finland as it is expensive there. I

bought winter clothes during the summer in Germany and saved a lot of money. Around one month before your studies start, the university provides a tutor for you. He or she will write you an email with all important information and of course you can also ask all questions you have. This tutor will guide you through the first week at the university and his or her task is it to give you all help you need. My tutor picked me up from the train station and took me to my apartment when I arrived. Some of the tutors are very enthusiastic and active with their tutees and had contact with them until the end of the semester. I was not so lucky and my tutor just did the basic things with us. Nevertheless, it is a big help at the beginning.

In my opinion, the university in Jyväskylä did a very good organisation in welcoming the Erasmus students and preparing them for the studies at their university. Before you will arrive, you receive a lot of information via emails and you always have the chance to ask questions.

## **Accommodation**

In Jyväskylä you have the opportunity to choose your accommodation between Koas and Kortepohja. I lived in one of the buildings of Koas together with two Spanish girls. Some students who came together from their home university could also ask to be placed in the same apartment. I heard about some cases and Koas always accepted this request. I lived in the suburb Kuokkala. Most of the students lived in Roninmaki or Kortepohja. I felt in Kuokkala a little bit separated. Especially in the beginning of the semester most people got to know each other because they were living very close to each other. Kuokkala is about 15 minutes by bike from the university and city centre away, to Roninmäki it took me 20 minutes and to Kortepohja more than 30 minutes. Nevertheless, the apartments in Kuokkala are nice and tidy and there are supermarkets close by.



## **University**

The university consists of three campuses. I had my lectures and seminars at two of them. Close to the city centre is the library situated. It provides many places and computers to study or to do group work and I spent a lot of time in there. There are student restaurants distributed over all campuses. You can get there your lunch for a very student friendly price (2,60€) and in a very good quality.

They offer every day different dishes. In addition, you get water and milk, salat, and very good bread with butter. Having lunch together at university was always a good chance to meet people and have a nice break between the studies.



## **Courses at university**

The courses I attended in the university have been quite different. On the one hand, there are courses which end with a book exam. These courses consist just of self-studying without any contact teaching. You have to study a book by your own and at the end you write an exam about it. On the other hand, I also attended very active courses with a lot of group work and discussions. The sizes of the courses are most of the time small (approx. 20 students). The best course I did was called "integrated arts and physical education", where we had a lot of different demonstrations. We actually practiced and learned about various methods and strategies for lessons in school and how to integrate arts and physical education in the core subjects. In my opinion, these practical approaches during the studies are essential for working together with children in the future. The minority of my courses consisted of lectures like we know it from Germany. Most of the time the courses include interaction between students and teacher.

## **Free time**

Jyväskylä is definitely an university city and it offers a lot for their students. The university offers a huge amount of sport courses which you can attend for 40€ per semester. Moreover, there is the ESN (Erasmus student network) that regularly organises events especially for the Erasmus students, for example parties, trips, or meetings in bars or cafés. The trips they offer are to Stockholm, Russia, and Lapland. I did the trip to Lapland and it has been a great week with nice memories and a beautiful landscape. But if I could choose again, I would organise this trip by myself. In my eyes, the trip was very "touristic" and we had to follow a certain timetable. Also, a self-organisation would have been cheaper. When you organise it by yourself, you have the possibility to do whatever you want whenever you want and enjoy the time in a better way. But this view is always depending on each person ;)

For the people who like to party a lot, there are several possibilities for you. In the city centre are some clubs and bars as well. If you are living in Roninmaki or Kortepohja, students also always do parties on their own in the flats or in the hallways. This was always a lot of fun and in my opinion better than the parties in the clubs.

As you probably already know, the alcohol in Finland is quite expensive. Sometimes they have special offers in the clubs but most of the time I just drank the cheapest beer and wine from the supermarkets. So don't worry, there are also "cheap" possibilities when you look for it.

If you have some money left, then Jyväskylä is also good for going shopping. There are nice shops for clothing and also in the second-hand shops you can be very lucky.

In and around Jyväskylä are many forests and lakes, so you will have hundreds of opportunities to go hiking and enjoying the nature.

## **Conclusion**

I really enjoyed my semester abroad in Jyväskylä and I would recommend to every student to do one semester in another country. I think it doesn't matter which country - you gain valuable experiences about other countries and cultures, you make friendships and get to know interesting people, you learn about another university and education system, you see new cities and a beautiful landscape, and so on and so forth. The organisation to go abroad is really not a big effort, if you take in consideration what you experience and learn through your stay abroad.

Don't hesitate and go for it!



## EINVERSTÄNDNISERKLÄRUNG

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