

Erasmus report



My winter semester 2021/22 in Riga, Latvia at the RTU – Rigas Technical University as an industrial engineer.

Briefly about me and my person :)

I am a male, 24 years old and I am at the end of my Master's degree in industrial engineering. I spent my semester abroad in Riga, Latvia, in the winter semester of 2021/22.

I had already spent a semester abroad in Hungary during my Bachelor's degree through the Erasmus programme. At that time, it was an internship abroad, which is why I wanted to have another experience abroad to know what it's like to study abroad. I also had great experiences and made close friends.

Why Riga?

I wanted to experience something new and go to a place or an area I hadn't been to before. Unfortunately, the Corona situation added to the difficulty in choosing a partner university. Riga and Tallinn were the two options I was assured of. To be honest, I didn't really have Riga or the Baltic States on my radar for a semester abroad. In the end, I decided on Riga because it is the bigger and more international city where you can do more business and there are better train, bus and flight connections.

Riga as a city + weather

Riga is the capital of Latvia in the middle of the Baltic States with about 650,000 inhabitants and therefore also the largest city in the Baltic States.

Due to its proximity to Russia, Riga and Latvia have a strong Russian influence. This is noticeable in many areas of life. In many parts of the country, especially when travelling further away from Riga, it is difficult to speak English. Here, people speak mainly Russian or Latvian.

I travelled to Riga two weeks before the semester actually started to look for a flat and to explore the city. I was in Riga from the middle of August, which was a very good decision. I was able to spend two weeks in summer in Riga, as I had good weather, sunshine and around 20 degrees throughout. In winter, 20 degrees was not uncommon, but not permanent either. Some locals told me that in recent years it can sometimes be as low as -35 degrees. You should therefore be prepared for cold winter weather if you go to Riga in the winter semester.



Accommodation & shared flat

Most Erasmus students live in shared flats, which are specially designed for Erasmus students. These are furnished and fully equipped. The easiest way to find them is on Facebook in groups with the keywords: Riga shared flats, erasmus flats riga, riga flat and rooms, student marketplace riga and many more with similar names.

I myself travelled to Riga first and then contacted the landlords on site, as I wanted to see the flat in person. Most of the others rent the flats from home. It worked out well for most of them, but I also heard of a scam once. To avoid this, you can join the Telegram groups from Riga and just ask if the landlord is trustworthy.

Prices range from 150€ to 450€ per room per month. The former are small rooms outside the city. The most expensive rooms are in the city centre, in modern flats with double beds and private bathrooms.

I would not recommend rooms outside the central district or the old town, as public transport connections are poor in the evening. Some landlords quote rental prices without service charges. Always ask whether these are included. In winter, heating costs can be very expensive.

I paid €320, including utilities, for my estimated 15-square-metre room with a double bed in a shared flat for 5 people.

University

There are at least 7 universities in Riga. I went to RTU - Riga Technical University where most of the engineering & economic students are. I was mainly at the FACULTY OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING, TRANSPORT AND AERONAUTICS.

The lectures and courses varied greatly in terms of level. Some courses were very easy and you passed them if you handed in three homework assignments. If you handed in an incorrect assignment, you also had another attempt to improve it. The other extreme courses were very difficult and time-consuming. There are courses in which a written exam is written directly after the lecture, which is graded and counts towards the final grade. In addition, laboratory reports must be handed in and a written exam must be written at the end of the semester.



Homework or small scientific papers are common. You often have two weeks for these.

Personally, I would recommend taking a look at several courses in addition to the ones you have already chosen in the first few weeks on site, and then changing your learning agreement to make sense of them.

The organisation of the university is really top notch and the Erasmus contact persons are very competent and helpful.

However, the organisation of some professors is incredibly poor. Some course materials are in Latvian and not translated. This content is still relevant for the exam. When I asked (via email) whether the professor could translate them, I never received an answer. Also, some exam dates are announced by email 3 days before the actual exam date. If you then have other exams and did not expect this exam, it becomes impossible to pass, let alone get a good grade. I could list an infinite number of examples of this. What I have to say, however, is that all complaints were dealt with in a very friendly and open manner. In the case of the exam, several make-up dates were offered to all those who could not meet the deadline. However, only after complaints.

In summary, the organisation of some professors leaves a lot to be desired. However, they are still willing to compromise so that everyone has a fair chance.

Life

Meeting people in Riga is very easy. The ESN - Erasmus Student Network - regularly organises get-togethers and Erasmus parties where it is very easy to get into conversation with people and make first acquaintances. Most Erasmus students also live in shared flats with other students. This also makes it easy to get to know people. For my part, I had no problems with this in Riga.

For me, life and free time consisted of travelling, culture, parties and hanging out with friends.

During the week, you usually go to university and then do your homework.

I often started the afternoon by meeting people for a coffee, going out for a meal, doing sports together or going on an excursion.

Afterwards, I often went to a pub or just sat together at someone's house and talked.

Because Riga is a relatively large city in the Baltic States, it is very easy to travel to all the surrounding countries by bus. There are cheap long-distance buses to Tallinn, Vilnius & and various Polish cities. Some of these tickets cost as little as €12. This makes it easy and inexpensive to travel through northern Eastern Europe.

With an international airport that also serves low-cost airlines, it's easy to travel to Scandinavia and the rest of Europe.

Latvia itself is best explored by train. The whole of

Latvia can be easily travelled by train. Tickets usually cost no more than €3. On nice days you can travel to Jurmala within 30 minutes and spend a day at the beach.

In Riga there are several museums and many different leisure activities as well as good restaurants.



Conclusion

I had a lot of fun in Riga and can only recommend it to everyone and I would also say that the other people I know would have a similar opinion. I met so many nice people, made many contacts and also close friendships. I travelled to several countries, explored parts of Europe I didn't know and just had a very cool and exciting six months in Riga. I also attended interesting courses at the university that I probably wouldn't have attended in Germany. All in all, I had a great time and would do it again any time.

