My Semester in Estonia

If you are considering to study abroad, you should definitely do it! This has been my third exchange semester and I do not regret any of it. Living and studying in another country will open your eyes for the world. You will meet so many people with different backgrounds, and you will develop further yourself.

I spent the autumn semester 2016 in a small Estonian town called Pärnu. There I studied the master’s program Spa and Wellness Service Design and Management. Pärnu College is a faculty of Tartu University, much like Campus Helsingborg and Lund University, with the difference that Tartu is about two hours away from Pärnu. Tallinn is quite close though, so I visited this beautiful capital several times. I also went to Riga, which is about 2,5h from Pärnu and is definitely worth it.

I had never been to Estonia before, but I have been told by several friends that it is a beautiful country with a lot of nature, which I like, so I simply applied. The staff responsible for international/exchange students at Pärnu College is welcoming and very helpful. They always have an open ear for any concern. Already before my visit they quickly answered my mails which were of course full of questions. The two most important ones were perhaps:

- Where am I going to live? The university has an agreement with a hotel in town, which operates as a student accommodation during the low season. There are single or shared rooms with private bathrooms and a shared kitchen. All international and Erasmus students lived there together.

- Do I need to buy books? No. The library at Pärnu College is brilliant. They have any book you might need. I was amazed by the tourism section. Courses are based on research articles and journals, which can be found online via the university library.

Coming from the EU I did not have to organise any kind of visa, but I know the university staff will be able and willing to help with that.

Other than usual in Helsingborg, in Estonia you have several courses at the same time. All of them were 5 ECTS, which created a heavy work load at times, but that is just normal. We had teachers from Estonia (some even grew up in Pärnu), who have expertise knowledge about the spa and wellness industry. Moreover, some teachers travelled to Pärnu from England, Scotland, Hungary, and France for a week each.

We then had intensive courses, which I personally enjoyed very much, for these teachers bring a different and diverse view to the industry. We also had several excursions to spas and spa hotels in Pärnu and Tallinn, where we met the managers and had guided tours. I enjoyed this practical part because you could actually see how things are working in real life and talk to the managers, rather than just studying pure theory. The combination of Estonian and European teachers, and of theory and practice, is interesting and successful.
Of course, Erasmus is not only about pure studies, but also about the people you meet. I got to know people from all over the world, which is ever decreasing any kind of prejudices and interesting to me. As I mentioned, we all lived in the same place, so we spent a lot of time together exchanging cultural traditions and cooking special dishes for and with each other.

From previous exchange experience, I know that you can make friends for life – so I did this time. Sometimes we went to town to try out Pärnu’s cafés and restaurants, but out favourite spot was the beach. I love the sea, so I enjoyed the time in Pärnu with its beautiful beach. I didn’t swim in the sea, but there are many spas, which are affordable or have student discounts. The spa was perhaps our second-favourite activity. And of course you need to visit the spa when you are studying spa and wellness management. Whenever we went to the spa, we were instantly analysing services and design, as we had learned in class.

// Tamara, autumn semester 2016