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Studying Abroad Experience Report

- 1) **Are we allowed to publish your report anonymously on our webpage (without your name and e-Mail)?**
 Yes [] No
- 2) **Are we allowed to forward your report and contact information to a Viadrina student on request?**
 Yes [] No
- 3) **Please confirm hereby that you did not mention names of a third party (lecturer, landlord etc.)**
 Yes [] No – in this case your report won't be published
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We would appreciate it if you could include the following topics (the report should be at least two pages long, there is no maximum):

- **Preparation:** Recommendations about preparing to leave, for example (if applicable) Visa, insurance, travel? How was the application process at the university abroad? Were there any introduction events? Were they obligatory and when did they take place? Was there a Buddy program or tutors?

If you are an EU citizen, you do not need to have a visa to stay in Finland, however you need to register at Migri. The University of Vaasa has been very helpful and informative when it comes to giving us all the information and answering our questions. You will need to buy private insurance (about 30-35€ monthly, I bought AON – it was recommended to me). With that insurance I had no problem when visiting a doctor and doing blood and urine tests when I got kidney infection. The healthcare in Finland is very good 😊 I have decided to travel by car (mostly due to Coronavirus). I was traveling from Poland to Finland via Germany, Denmark, Sweden and then took ferry from Stockholm to Turku. I was very satisfied that I have decided to take my car with me as it was very convenient and allowed me to do a lot of road trips in Finland which I enjoyed very much 😊 The introduction events were not obligatory and mostly took place over zoom (once again: due to coronavirus). I got a Tutor who was really helpful – he picked up the key to my apartment for me (as I arrived on weekend), gave us a lot of advice regarding grocery shopping, Finnish culture, university etc. There have been many zoom meetings to bond with other students organized however I have not attended them all, as I have been traveling and enjoying the nature a lot.

- **Accommodation:** How did you find your accommodation? Any tips about mistakes that should be avoided? Were there any special student accommodations? The cost of rent? Which area of living would you recommend?

During my preparation to leave to Vaasa, I have been researching a lot about the student housing (it's called VOAS). I was quite scared that all the dorms are quite far away from the University, however it looks scary only on the map. First thing you should decide is whether you would like to party more or concentrate on studying. I was given an apartment offer at Linna – this is a student house where most exchange students are staying. It's relatively close to the campus, the rooms are furnished and there is a lot of partying going on. However, the rooms do not have own bathroom. I have decided to change my apartment for Olympia II, as I do not party much and wanted to concentrate on my studies and my Master's thesis. Olympia II is located in the city center and it's 10-15 minutes walk to Hietasaari beach and 5 minutes from the railway station. Very close to Lidl and other supermarket – Minimani. Olympia II has the advantage that all the rooms include an own bathroom, which I found very convenient. However, the room has not been furnished at all (not even a ceiling lamp). I have bought everything at IKEA (there is no IKEA in Vaasa, you need to drive to Tampere) and sold it without any difficulties when I was moving out. I would recommend Olympia II for people who do enjoy peace and quiet surroundings. If you would



like to party, you can always visit Linna – it is not that far away 😊 The rent was about 270 € + 20€ electricity and 20€ garage parking spot. The internet is for free, you just need to buy your own router. All of my friends have had bikes, so it makes commuting everywhere very easy.

- **Studying at the university abroad:** How was the day to day life on campus? Was the attendance mandatory? Which courses did you take? Were you allowed to take courses from different faculties? Please attach links to the course list if possible. How did the exams take place? Were there any language courses? What is your overall opinion of the university in general? How well did the university take care of international/exchange students?

I have not been attending classes on campus much, as most of the time it has been closed due to coronavirus, however I enjoyed the Finnish approach on the online teaching. Some lectures are mandatory, others are not, the professor always informs about which classes are mandatory during the first lecture. The professors use a lot of different examination methods and they implement a lot of group work. Working in groups with Finnish students is a pleasure. I have mostly taken classes that have been recommended to me as most of them have been leading me to write my Master's thesis at the University of Vaasa. The professors are very helpful and although they require a lot and there is a number of assignments to do each week, they are not very strict. If you stick to the deadlines and attend the lectures, you will probably end up with a 4 or 5 grade. The Finnish grading system is from 0 (fail) to 5 (best note). The exams were online, however it was never the only examination method, usually the exam was about 20% of the final note. I took Finnish course, however I was not very satisfied with it – it was mostly for us to learn at home and we had one meeting over the week to discuss what we learned. I had so many assignments in other classes that I had no time to learn so much and most of the stuff was not really that important for survival as all Finnish people speak perfect English.

- **Day to day life and free time:** How high are the costs of living in total? How much money should be accessible monthly? How much does the public transportation cost? What can an exchange student do in their free time? What did you do?

The costs of living are very high and this is something you need to consider. The first few months have been a financial struggle for me, I have decided to work remotely to support myself and not to spend all of my savings. The prices are much higher than in Germany. The cheapest supermarket is Lidl. Alcohol is very expensive and you can buy it only in selected Alko shops. I have not used public transportation because I had my own car but the benzine price is about 1,60-1,70€/l. The university has been trying to organize few trips however only the Lapland trip took place. If you want to participate you need to pay for them at the beginning of the semester so it's good to have some money saved for that. The trips are pretty expensive and include only accommodation and transportation. If you want to participate in any activities (i.e. reindeer farm, husky farm, snowmobiles, aurora hunting) you need to pay for it extra. It makes about 600€ for 5 days trip + food expenses. It might be cheaper if you rent a car with few friends and drive to Lapland by yourself. However, you need to take into consideration the hazardous weather.

- **Conclusion:** worst and best experience

The best experience was the Lapland trip, I fell in love with this snow wonderland immediately. The worst experience was probably the fact that my exchange took place during the global pandemic and all other trips have been canceled. I have travelled as much as I could (having my own car was a huge advantage!), however I am quite saddened by all the things I have missed (Lofoten trip, Sankt Petersburg etc.).