

## Experience report study abroad semester

# How was it?

*You may have heard this question more often now that you are at the end of your semester abroad. The International Center would also like to know how you evaluate your semester abroad and what you need to know. The experience reports will be published and serve to help orient others going abroad. The International Office would also like to use the contents for advertising purposes if necessary. We would therefore like you to keep this in mind when filling out the report.*

## 1. General information

*Please do not mention any personal information (name, e-mail address, etc.) in the experience report.*

I agree to the publication of the report and the attached photos (there are no third parties rights to these fotos):

Yes  No

Study program at EUF

*Teacher Education*

Subject combination (if BABW)

*English; Special education*

Host country

*Finland*

Host university

*University of Eastern Finland (Joensuu)*

Semester abroad (e.g. fall semester 2021/22)

*Spring Semester 2022*

## 2. Your Experience Abroad

*At this point you can share the experience you made abroad. Sometimes it is not so easy to report on such experiences in such a compressed way. We have therefore prepared some questions to help you do this. At the end of the questionnaire, you will also find a free field for you to fill in, in which you are welcome to enter aspects that are not covered by any of these questions.*

### How did you prepare for the semester abroad?

*I attended a Finnish language course at EUF. Most of my friends in Joensuu, however, did not make the effort of learning the language and it was no problem at all. Nevertheless, you make Finnish people always happy when you know some words in Finnish. Moreover, I followed all the instructions given by the international Center (Creating the learning agreement, sticking to deadlines, applying for a room in a student accommodation (offered by ELLI), attending orientation meetings from the UEF, etc.)*

### How did you establish social networks in your host country? Do you have any tips on how this can be achieved?

*I highly recommend to move into one of the student accommodations offered by the company "ELLI". I lived in Karjamäentie, which was the best decision because there were so many other exchange students to meet up with. Latolankatu has many exchange students too. Unless you are really introverted, there is almost no way to not meet many people because ESN and motivated exchange students organize so many activities. Also, I think where I met the most people was at private birthday parties or sit ins in student flats of other exchange students. I went to university every day (even though most of my courses were online) to have lunch with other exchange students and then study in the library. Everyone of my friends did the same, so that lunch on campus was where everyone gathered. I would suggest to particularly attend the get togethers that happen during the first days and weeks, since this is the time in which everyone is the most open and interested in making new friends. But I even made new friends in the last weeks and days of my stay and after the first half of my stay, I felt like having a small group of close friends that I often hang out with. So, there is no pressure if the first days don't go as expected. Generally, which was really nice is that at most of the gatherings (BBQs, Predrinks, etc.) everyone was welcome.*

### Did you learn the local language, respectively how important did you think it was for your stay?

*I learned it but it would not have been necessary. I would say that it was a nice thing to have on top but it was not important.*

**How was the study program at the partner university structured?  
(e.g. premises, workload, language of instruction, examination forms, accessibility)  
What intercultural encounters/competencies shaped your stay?**

*We were supposed to only choose courses that are offered in english (unless of course we know finnish). The language of instruction can be seen in the individual course descriptions. The pedagogy/special education courses were not difficult to pass. The english courses required a slightly higher workload but could still be passed without a big effort of studying. Something that I didn't know beforehand is that the courses start and end at individual times. For example, I had three courses that started at the day I was officially enrolled and then I had another three that started up to two months after my arrival or could be done at any point during my stay due to an individual study format. Since I split my 5th Semester into two semesters, I had no pressure and therefore not as many courses as some others. I had a lot of freetime, which was important to me whereas some others had a tighter schedule. In two courses I had to write an exam (a short essay, no references needed) at university. In another course I had to write homeessays and in other courses I had to hand in a learning diary, which was a very kind requirement.*

**What intercultural encounters/competencies shaped your stay?**

*I found it super enriching to spend five months with people from so many different nationalities. Many of us exchange students did not make that many finnish friends but rather friends with people from literally everywhere. We made numerous international cooking evenings and ESN organized international dinners. I liked that people always tried to say something in their friends' mother tongues, so that a typical conversation when meeting in the morning would begin with "Calimera" and end with "vamos".*

**Which perspectives on the host country/country of origin have changed and why?**

*Before I came into Finland, I thought that many of the things I have been told about the Finns would only be stereotypes. However, especially in winter, many Finns indeed do not seek for communication and only get more open when in sauna, nature or when drinking alcohol. Sauna is everywhere (even at spots where there should not be a sauna, like in the forestry building on campus, behind a room filled with stuffed animals). The Finns themselves claim to be depressed during the winter time (which is no surprise considering temperatures below -27 and the darkness) but I didn't feel like they are in a bad mood. But with the first days of spring, one could clearly see that more life came*

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*into the people and the city. Moreover, I feel like many Finns value and appreciate nature in a way that I really liked. Hikes, BBQs and outdoor sports are a must for them, regardless of the temperature.*

### **What was your daily life like where you were? (e.g. living, shopping, leisure, inclusion)**

*I normally went to university in the morning, worked for a few hours in the library or went to a lecture, had lunch and then joined leisure activities such as sledging events, baking sessions or café visits with friends. Most of the evenings, people cooked for each other, went to a bar, went for a walk to hunt the aurora lights or went out to a club. Of course, everything is optional, not everyone went out to party and there were always alternative things to do with friends. Also, the nightlife is not exactly big in Joesnuu but with Erasmus people everything can be turned into a big party so that "Bepop" (Club) or Karaoke bars always promised big fun. On several weekeneds or even during the week, there were always some people doing a trip to other finnish cities or the baltic countries. Also, ESN organized some trips (e.g. Lofoten, Lappland,...), which many people joined.*

### **What are the unique or special issues in the host country and what were the opportunities for engaging with these issues?**

*The cold in Janurary and February was challenging, but with a good winter jacket, gloves, thermo underwear, a hat and snowpants (!!), nothing is wrong with -20. Many people rented bikes for only 50€ for the whole stay. In winter, it sometimes was hard to bike despite the slippery ways. For those, for which a daily 20 min bike ride at cold temperatures and darkness lays out of the comfort zone, a bus ticket for around 60€ per month is an option. In the beginning, half the people did so but with rising temperatures, the most part had a bike.*

### **Is there anything else you would like to share? (e.g. anecdotes, criticism, etc.)**

*The university is amazing! The libaray makes you want to study because it is so well arranged with many comfortable seats to study. There are two main cafeterias, which offer students lunch for 1,60€. Everyone loved the lunches: In addition to the main dish with optional salads, you were allowed to take as much bread with hummus or butter as you wished. I loved the atmosphere on campus and sometimes it was impossible to work because you would bump into a familiar face every couple of minutes. Joensuu as a city is not the prettiest city but I got to love it because of the incredible experience it has given to me. And the nature around it is super beautiful. There are lakes or the river near every student accomodation and there you can do BBQ's*

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*or go for walks on the ice in winter. I don't think that many other places have as much of an erasmus spirit like Joensuu does, for Joensuu is not big but has incredibly many exchange students (when I was there in spring, there were at least 80 Erasmus students). Also, Joensuu has everything one needs and thanks to its moderate size, students and especially erasmus students are everywhere. The students union (which I recommend to join for around 35€) does not only rent skis and more for its members but also helps you with many other things. For example, you can get a "sykätta" sports membership for 17-35€ to join the gym and as many sports and dance courses as you wish. One of my highlights during the winter were hikes/ walks on the frozen lakes to small islands. And the "polar bears" sauna, where you can go for a swim in an ice hole after your sauna rounds. Alternatively, you can go into the free sauna sessions in the student accommodations twice a week! Ultimately, doing my exchange semester in Joensuu was the best decision and turned into the best 5 months of my life.*

### 3. Photos

Finally, you can upload photos here, which visualize/represent your stay abroad well. If necessary, add a description. The following questions can help you choose the appropriate photos:

- Does the photo possibly reinforce prejudices or stereotypes about the country?
- Do you have the consensual consent of the persons depicted in the photos?
- "A picture is worth a thousand words!" What does your picture say about the country and your semester abroad?



*Typical BBQ  
(normally with  
more people)*

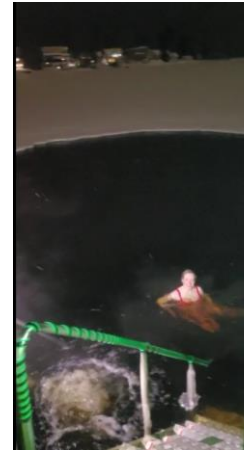


*At -28°C*



*Frozen  
Pyhäselkä  
Joensuu*

*Lake  
in*



*Ice  
swimming*



*Koli  
Nationalpark*



*Little hut  
next to Lake in  
Joensuu*



*Cozy café  
in  
Joensuu*



*Student  
accommodation  
"Karjamäentie"  
in  
Joensuu*

**Many thanks for your support!**