



AN ERASMUS YEAR IN ISTANBUL

Final Mobility Report for
ERASMUS+

Double Degree Master's Student
in
Transcultural Studies
at the sending institution
University of Bremen
and
Intercultural Communication
at the receiving institution:
Kadir Has University

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1. Introduction

Every student dreams of studying abroad, but that does not change the fact that it is hard to decide in which city and at what university. The aims of this report is to help those considering doing their ERASMUS+ in Istanbul, whether at Kadir Has University or another one. In the first chapter, I aim to state general information about the beautiful city of Istanbul, regarding, sightseeing, cuisine, safety restrictions, formalities and finding jobs and accommodation. In the second chapter, I aim to introduce Kadir Has University, with everything related to location, history, campus lifestyle and foreign student activities. The third chapter is dedicated to special events and memories I made during my exchange year in Istanbul, which shall serve as an inspiration for other students. In the fourth and final chapter, I will conclude the report by weighing the pros and cons of choosing this city and university as well as presenting some of my favorite pictures taken during my stay in Turkey.

2. Istanbul: Connecting Continents

Istanbul, with both of its European and Anatolian (Asian) side, has lots of sightseeing to offer. Do not hesitate to tourist attractions; after all, they only became so popular because they are actually beautiful. Go up the Galata Tower, visit the Hagia Sophia Museum, Süleymaniyye mosque, have a picnic at Büyük Çamlıca. Leave no place like Eminönü, Karaköy, Ortaköy, Beşiktaş Kadıköy, Bebek etc. unexplored. Don't spend too much time in fancy cafes and check out the antique and colourful corners in Cezayir Sokak and the Balat/Fener area. Beautiful views are to be found everywhere in this city, my personal favourite, as it is right next to my flat, is the one you see if you go up the Pierre Lotti Teleferik (Seilbahn). If you ever need a break from the metropolis' overcrowded streets, you have four beautiful Prince's Islands (Adalar), my favourite of which is the smallest and closest one Kınalıada, perfect for chilling, picnicking and swimming. It is surprising how easy it is to understand Turkey's history just by walking through its streets, whether it is Ottoman mosques or Roman ruins. Religion is an important part of Turkish culture, as you will notice from the loud calls to prayer and the endless mosques in every corner. To my surprise, however, I found that most people in Istanbul do not practice religion.

The first question that comes to mind when thinking of Turkey is the question of safety. It is undeniable that it had its share of terror attacks a few years ago, but right now it is a peaceful and safe place in which you do not need to worry. Pickpocketing is an issue just like any touristic city in the world; however neither I nor anyone I know have experienced it. Do not ride a taxi if it does not have the fair calculator set for 4 Turkish lira already. A tip that can save you from being scammed anywhere is to speak your basic Turkish in confidence

and do not use the word “lütfen“(meaning please) as it is the first thing that will you sell you out as a foreigner. A rule I was constantly told by locals “Burası İstanbul, lütfen yok” = This is Istanbul, we don’t say please”.

Coming to the important part, cuisine! Besides the famous dishes as the likes of Adana Kebap, Köfte, Midye and Kumpir I suggest you try everything you possibly can. You never know what you fall in love with. My personal favourite: Çiğ Köfte because it is an interesting mix of raw bulgur and greens, topped with lemon juice, pomegranate syrup and if wanted spicy sauce, making it by far the best sweet-sour-spicy vegan wrap ever! Oh and it is super affordable too, it’s only 3-5 Turkish Lira. My favourite fancy restaurant must be Bigchefs, which has multiple branches and my most recommended homemade Turkish food place is Armada, located at the Şişhane metro exit at the end of the famous Istiklal Street. A beautiful dine and study restaurant and café that I personally have grown to be every attached to is Manca in t to Silaharağa Caddesi, because it is located right under my flat!

To be able to afford all that yummy stuff, you might find yourself looking for a student job. It is definitely harder to find one if you do not speak Turkish. However, it is not impossible if you keep digging. I myself worked at Kadir Has University as a teaching assistant for the Preparation School (similar to the Studienkolleg in Germany) where I was having English conversation clubs once a week. Passing by my flatmate’s office to give her the keys somehow ended up with her boss offering me an internship as well. Who would have thought I would be editing and proof-reading texts for foreign clients of a Turkish marketing agency? There is hope for everyone!

Furthermore, It is not as hard to find accommodation in Istanbul as one thinks. The university itself offers dorms, but they are mono-gender, have early curfews, do not allow you to host or have anyone as a guest at all - not to mention that they are overpriced. As the better alternative, you can join flat share groups on Facebook (and write a post like mine, because the people who find your criteria applicable will message you and save you the time and effort to read all the offers as it can be very overwhelming). Finding a place where you can live alone is either impossible or very expensive. Make sure nobody scams you, the price range for a room in a shared flat should be 800-1500 Turkish Lira including bills and the same for the deposit if there is one. Never accept the price in Euros because they conversion rate is constantly changing! Besides, it is not very common to have contracts



for anything in Turkey, so specifically ask the flatmate/landlord to write you one or you might find yourself in trouble later. Speaking of experience here.

Moreover, there is only one formality that is very time-consuming and it is applying and receiving the residence permit card. To apply for it, the university will inform you about all the documents and papers you need to gather per email and again on the orientation day. These were the tax number (obtained at a tax office upon arrival), health insurance, a certificate of enrolment of receiving institution, two passport pictures, a valid home address in the host country, some information about your studies, etc. All of this data will be uploaded to a website (e-ikamet), similar to the one of mobility-online where you can login, save and access



your application to edit and continue. When you are done with the application, you have to print it in color and give it to the International Office with the receipt of paying for the tax number along with some other documents they will request. This is your contribution done, everything else the university will take care of. They will give you a temporary paper to serve as your student visa, once the card is ready (usually in 2-3 weeks), the university will inform you per email and you can pick it up from campus. Take care of this card, as you cannot travel in and out of Turkey without it!

A second important card you need is the AKBİL Istanbul transportation card with a lower fair for students. For this, you have to go the Student Affairs office, ask for a student certificate with a Yoksis Number. Only with this number on the certificate and with a passport photo will they give you the lower fair at any AKBİL office, but preferably the one in Karaköy.

3. Kadir Has University: A Second Home

Kadir Has university has a breath-taking location along the Golden Horn route, not only giving the classrooms a wonderful window view of the sea and Galata Tower, equally mesmerizing by morning and night, but it also means it is very easy to travel from and to it. Just at the main entrance, there is a bus station (Unkapani / Kadir Has University) with over 10 different frequent buses. A ten-minute walk from campus also leads you to a metro station (Haliç). Not only is the building itself a very nice one, it also rich in history. It used to be a tobacco factory run by Kadir Has himself, turned into a tobacco museum later until it finally became a campus. Despite the wooden antique interior, it is now is a modern home-like campus, filled with comfortable sofas and tables and chairs, hot/cold water dispensers and

vending machines on every hall. It even has a Starbucks and a Kahve Dunyasi, two very affordable places to sit, snack and drink. Moreover, there are three cafeterias with warm food and good deals. The campus has a garden, a gym, a really nice and resourceful library, places to sit outside, a football field and a gender center. The staff, if they do speak English, are very friendly and always willing to help. The only thing it lacks is good access to computers, clubs non-Turkish speakers can join and most importantly, rubbish bins!

Luckily, there is a growing number of international students at KHAS, and there are about 50 Erasmus and exchange students every semester, and they are all well taken care of. The International Office staff as I have experienced is very warm-hearted and helpful towards all. There is also the ESN, a group that will become your family when you are in Istanbul. They are a group of open-minded, fun-loving students and volunteers that add Erasmus and exchange students and their assigned buddies to a Whatsapp group and plan amazing events, from domestic trips to party nights and everything in between. There is an ESN group in most universities in Istanbul, and these are all combined into one group when there is an event. Never miss any of them, they are the best chance to have fun, meet locals and expats, explore the country and make new friends. Even if some of them do not seem affordable, trust me, they are worth the investment. Moreover, A few weeks before your travel, KHAS will assign you a “buddy” who will contact you and ask if you need help, to be picked up from the airport etc. If you are lucky, your buddy will be very helpful, in my case she was the only one out of all buddies making excuses about having to work etc., and she never helped with anything. That is why here is a tip: it is important you befriend new



students on the Orientation Day so if your buddy isn't around to help you, you stick with the new friends and their buddies to get things done. Also, not denying that buddies are useful in situations where you have to go to an office where it is unlikely they speak English, you do not need to depend on their help, you can do it by yourself if they just guide you. Lucky enough, I was asked to be a buddy after all the current buddies graduated and I got to help three students from Germany.

The preparation period is the week before the classes begin. There is a mandatory English language exam for all foreign students, no matter how great your English is, if you are not a native speaker or come from an English-speaking country, you will have to take the three part exam: grammar and vocab (easy), listening (tricky) and lastly speaking (a piece of cake). I highly recommend you to go to the Orientation Day and attend all its activities. There will be a long introductory speech but that will help you with things like residence permit, health insurance, etc. They even play a little treasure hunt so that you get to discover the campus beforehand, and you get small gifts (nice KHAS merch) along the way.

KHAS offers a wide range of interesting courses, however, only a few of these are in English language. Unless you are a Turkish speaker, do not sign up for them with the hope that they will hold it in English to respect one or even multiple foreign students. This will never ever happen. 😊 Once your enrolment has been done (usually a smooth and easy process), you will be provided with a KHAS email and a Sparks account. Once you have your login data, you can sign in and see all the courses you may choose from under "Offered Courses", a list of course names, times, tutor names and language in which it is held. Choose your degree, faculty and department from the drop down lists to ensure they only show you courses you may for sure sign up for. For a wider variety, you may choose courses from other degrees or faculties only if there is enough space and there are not enough non-Turkish courses you can take within your own department. The registration period, it is only open for a few days and you will be informed about them per email. Register for all the courses you can (by sending them to the basket - literally as if shopping online and adding to shopping cart). Once you are done, you have to go to your basket and send the course list you signed up for for approval. This means that your supervisor will either accept or decline them. If he or she did not accept enough courses, you may register for different ones. You can make changes to your registration in the Add and Drop period, usually one week after the beginning of classes. Do not forget to track the changes on your *Learning Agreement - During the Mobility*. If you want to learn Turkish, the university also offers a weekly "Survival Turkish" course for beginners!

4. Memorable Highlights of My Turkish Year

Perhaps what made my stay in Turkey so nice is that I was lucky to have found such a helpful flatmate, who shared my passion for travel and art and did not only help smooth my integration but also introduced me to nice people and places. One month after arriving to Istanbul, I had already befriended 20 people from 10 different countries, starting from Korea in the east and all the way to Argentina in the west. Not only did we go on trips, share laughs and tears, but we also truly grew into one massive international family. Our most memorable trips were the ones to Cappadocia (Video from the trip under: <https://vimeo.com/323064133>) and Fethiye. Another memorable thing for me was being taught to cook Turkish cuisine by my flatmate's mom and being invited to her family's food-filled meetings.

5. Conclusion

Among the countless pros are learning to read, write and communicate in Turkish, definitely useful for daily life and maybe even future careers. This exchange experience has not only helped me on a personal level, by forcing me to be independent in a place where I knew no one, but has also strengthened both the theoretical and practical sides of my cultural and ethnographic studies, seeing as I could observe and study culture in simple daily context for a whole year. This will definitely be a great core for my plans of building bridges between the East and West, bringing them together and slowly ridding each of stereotypes and preconceptions. Among the many pros, the drop in the Turkish currency (unfortunately) has (fortunately) made life in Turkey very affordable for Euro users. My last piece of advice to those planning to go to Turkey for a semester only, definitely go in the summer semester, the winter is unbearably cold and gloomy. I cannot deny that I faced difficulties here, such as the fact that the majority of Turks does not speak English at all. One major disadvantage of KHAS is due to its expensive fees, it is a place for the high society; rich, spoiled kids that are often too conceited to befriend. Weighing the pros and cons, Istanbul and KHAS were both great decisions that I cannot say I will ever regret, as the pictures below will explain.

