

# Erfahrungsbericht

## Erasmus+ Auslandsstudienaufenthalt 2018/19

### **Before you go!**

Once you decide to go abroad, excitement and motivation are key words to make the stay in your “new home” as pleasant and fruitful as possible. Not gathering enough information and waiting to be surprised can be nice, but some “surprises” can end up being tiring, very time consuming, and not as nice as you expect. I would like to list some suggestions that I believe to be quite helpful for your time abroad.

- Please, think that you will be away for at least 4 months. Look into which kind of documents you will have to take with you, which contracts you will have to cancel before leaving, phones, credit cards, etc. Obvious right, well... make a list just to be sure, believe me, you will be surprised how forgetful we can be.
- **Health Insurance:** In my case, having **insurance** in my home country was easier than trying to get a new one abroad. Certify that your insurance covers your stay abroad. I was insured by the AOK and there were plenty of hospitals in Istanbul that I could go to in case I needed to. AOK gave me a list of the hospitals they had a partnership with. Before you leave, you also have to get a **letter from you insurance company**. This letter has a number and once you are in Turkey you have to go with it to the Genel Sağlık Sigortası (Health Insurance for Foreign Nationals). They will validate your insurance for Turkey.
- Acquiring a **credit card** before leaving Germany was really useful. In Istanbul you can pay with credit card everywhere. Supermarkets, pharmacies, little stores, restaurants, subway, anywhere. It is better than having to withdraw money over there, as you would have to pay a fee every time you get money from the ATM. The ATM's also charge different fees, pay attention what they will be charging you and try different ATM's until you find one that does not rob you too much.
- Take a lot of **pass photos** with you. I do not know why, but they need photos for everything, not only scanning and handing them back to you, no, they keep them for whatever reason. I took 8 photos with me and they were not enough. They need photos for the transportation card, university card, identity card, and whatever other cards you will need.

- There are some **Facebook pages, Erasmus Istanbul, Sharing Flats in Istanbul**, where you can look for **accommodation**. There you can find hundreds of rooms, apartments, houses in all forms and constellations. **Warning:** the pictures may not always look like the room you will be renting. So, ask about that. There are usually no long term contracts. You can go, pay, stay for a month, and if at some point you find a better place, it is not difficult to change homing. It is ok if you talk to you landlord some weeks in advance so that they can find someone else to take your room. It is usually not a problem, because there are always people looking for accommodation, I guess, that is why the landlords do not care so much about people leaving short notice. Be careful about the **neighborhood** you will be in. I lived in Gumussuyu, great area, very central, not so far from school, super secure. Another good areas are Sisli, Osmanbey, Cihangir, karakoy, there are many, I cannot list them all here. They are all in the European side, which in my case was better because it was close to university. The Asian side is also interesting and Kadikoy is a great place to live. Alternative, lively, fun. But a bit further from university and you will have to take the boat to cross sides. It is not a big problem, but you have to have in mind that you will depend on the boat. After midnight there are no boats between the Asian and the European side, only (Dolmus) vans. They are not expensive, but they do not accept your transportation card. You will have to pay with cash and depending where you live it can take a while until you get home.
- If you need **special medication or products**, it is not easy to find them in Turkey. I am used to just go to the pharmacy, ask for whatever I want, and even if they have to order it I would have it by the end of the day. In Turkey it does not work like that. Only some pharmacies will order your product and it can take weeks until you have it. Moreover, they are more expensive than buying them here. If you take any especial medication, take them with you, do not relay on getting them there.

### **Your University: Kadir Has University**

The university is amazing: modern, great location, not too big, really good classes. People are nice and very helpful. There is a heavy and perceptible language barrier though. I would expect that in an international university most of the university staff would speak English. That is not the case. I had many difficulties with the secretaries and also with people in other departments because they would not understand me. Nevertheless, there is always the international office. Really nice people who do the best they can to help you.

There are many options to eat inside and outside (nearby) the university. The university is in a beautiful area, easy access and open 24 hours for students. You can eat, sleep, take a shower, do everything in there. They have a great library, a gym, and many clubs that offer a variety of activities that you can engage on. Again, there is the language barrier. They will usually do everything in Turkish. It is an issue for international students who very often have problems finding out about what is going on and miss on various activities and events. The activities offered by the university are almost always free of charge for students. The gym is small but has everything that one needs. The library is great, you have access to the newest items, it is very cozy, great for research and you can always ask them to purchase whatever item you need, DVD's, books, newspapers, magazines, etc. It is easy and fast. They are super competent.

The Kadir Has University has a website in Turkish and English. It is easy to access but it is not easy to decide which classes you are allowed to take. That is because some classes can be taken only by undergraduate students and others only by master students. It is always a struggle if you decide to take something that is not in your department or part of your program. It is possible but it is a lot of work. So, if you see a course that you really want to take and it is not part of your program, not only write the professor teaching it asking for her/his permission to take the class, you also have to write your supervisor so that she/he can make the arrangements for you, change your status in the system so that you can register for the class, etc. etc.

## **Feel at Home! Istanbul**

I feel like it is not really necessary to say how beautiful and wonderful Istanbul is, but I will, because Istanbul is a city that really takes your breath away. Entertainment, beauty, history, cultures, these among others, describe a city that is full of people, 24 hour action, clubs, restaurants, bars, cinema, stores, museums, whatever you want, you will find there. Some neighborhoods are very conservative and others quite liberal. Like in every city, some places are also more dangerous than others, but in general, Istanbul is a pretty **safe** city. Pay attention to **pickpockets and taxi drivers** though. Taxi drivers will deceive you as much as they can. Always use google maps, waze, whatever you have, knowing where you are and where you want to get to.

Otherwise, they can drive you around for 30 minutes and the only thing you had to do was crossing the street to get where you wanted to go.

The **people** are nice, friendly and helpful. Of course, they present traits that can differ from where we are from, for example, their relation to personal space is different than

what we are used to. They touch you while talking to you, hug and kiss you even when meeting you for the first time, pull and push you in the subway as if they were your friends, little stuff like that. Of course, not everyone is the same. I am not making generalizations here, only pointing out real situations that I have experienced, so do not be alarmed if that happens to you. Another point concerning the way people relate to each other is how people behave in stores. If you need something just go and ask. Make your way to your aim. If you just wait for someone to come to you, you will need three days until someone notices that you are there. Even when you are asking a question it is normal that other clients interrupt you and ask their own questions. Some people perceive it as rude, I do, but for most people it is just normal, and they are not purposefully being disrespectful to you or anything. As a contrast to that, sales people stay many times at the store doors. They try to engage in conversation while you are walking on the street and they try to show how great their products are. If you want to have a look at something, then stop and listen. If you don't, pretend you do not understand what they are saying and just keep walking. It seems rude, but it is part of the business, they will not be offended by that.

## **Documents! Not as bad as it sounds!**

At the beginning of every semester, the university applies the **residence permit** for all foreign students. In sum, it works like that: We go online, fill out a form and then turn it in at university together with all the required documents. The university, namely, the international office, will do the rest for you. In case you miss the deadline, you will have to apply for it yourself direct at the Turkish Consulate. It is not impossible but it is much more work. So, do not miss the deadline.

Once it is done, a further step would be getting your **transportation card**. With it you will pay only half of the price as a student. You will need a letter from student affairs. Just tell them that you need it for the **transportation card**. It is not complicated, you just have to go to one of the transportation points (many can be found at the metro stations) and you just say that you would like a student card. It is fast and you get out of there already with your card.

If you like museums, buy a **museum card too**. As a student you can get one really cheap, it is valid for a year, and it is really worth it. You can use it mainly in Istanbul but sometimes also in other cities.

## **Interesting stuff**

- **Phone:** They will shut down your phone after 3 months unless you pay a fee. The fee is expensive. If you buy a phone there, there is no need to pay for the registration, no extra fee. If your phone comes from outside you will have to do

it at some point. Or ... you can take more than one device with you. You could use the first device in the first 3 months and once it is blocked you can use the same sim card on you second device. After some weeks/months the first device should be ok again as you will not be using it. So, you can use your devices interchangeably.

- **Sim card:** you can buy a sim card easily. It is better to buy one after you have your residence permit because you get better prices on the packages if you have it. If you do not have the patience to wait until you receive your residence permit (I did not wait) you can buy a sim card and then charge it every month for 35-45 TL with 2-4 Gb. It is enough for you to go around.

## **Do I recommend Turkey, Istanbul and Kadir Has?**

**ABSOLUTELY!!!** The conversations I had with international students, together with my own experiences living abroad, as well as the conversations with Turkish students who visited and lived in Germany, confirmed how **Turks and Turkey have being negatively portrayed in the last decades**. People around the world have being bombarded with one sided images of Turks and Turkey especially through two main channels: through the representation of Turks through specific groups (Turkish population living in foreign countries), and through images displayed by the media. One of the problems when **people look at culture as a collective feature** is that they often fail to distinguish between isolated behaviors and collective ones. For example, Turks living in Germany are often taken as a representative for Turkey, although they are clearly not a representation of current Turkey and of current Turkish cultures co-existing in Turkey nowadays.

I have learned and grown so much and my own experiences opened my eyes to so many aspects that were hidden through a cloud of preconceptions and second-hand opinions. Go, have an open mind, experience, ask, question, learn and grow. **You will not regret it!**