

My semester abroad

I got to spend my semester abroad in Turku/Åbo, Finland.

Before going there, I wouldn't have known where that is. So a bit about Turku first: Turku is the warmest city of Finland located in the southwest with access to the archipelagos. Like most cities in Finland, it depends on the season what you can or can't do. Summer officially ends on the last day of August so a lot of things in/around Turku close then. Due to the rather warm temperatures, winter only really starts sometime in January or so - meaning when I had left. It is also however considered the Christmas City of Finland.

Turku is a student city thanks to having for universities. The Turku University of Applied Science (TUAS) is a nice University in the area of Kupittaa surrounded by several hospitals which one can definitely visit even though we didn't get any placements - unfortunately. Since Turku is a bilingual city, one of those universities is Swedish just like most street signs etc.

Student life in Finland is different to in Germany – or at least different to what one is used to thanks to the dual system in Munich. One of the most difficult things upon return is to remember the different hierarchy in the university here. In Finland, the teachers are more like colleagues. You call them by their first name and if you want to write a mail, it's texting style – they don't use proper formal greetings or the like in mail or conversation.

The courses themselves really depend on what you make of them. It's a lot of group work – so use your chance at working with Finnish students, they might have a different approach sometimes and like to talk more Finnish than English but they always try talking English (some are just shy or insecure about their language skills).

The apartment situation really depends on what you want and what you can get. Retrodorm is perfect if you want to have a bare minimum of privacy and don't mind sharing showers and the kitchen with altogether 17 people (if the floor is completely occupied), plus, it comes fully furnished with all supplies in the rooms/dormitory. Student village west allows for a bit more privacy with having their own bathroom but a shared kitchen but comes without most supplies for in the kitchen/room – you will need the Starter Pack. The last option is Varrissuo where you live in apartments of three to five – I didn't visit that place so I can't tell you much about it except for that it really depends on who you live with whether it is good or not.



Free time in Turku can be difficult to fill. Other than chill with the people in your dormitory or do (campus sport offers a lot of nice courses and has a gym) or watch (ice hockey and football) sport one can't do much.



So you will spend a lot of time travelling as well to get out of the sometimes gloomy area – from November on you barely have any light so you use it any way you can. There are a lot of day trips around Turku and the buses aren't really expensive (unlike everything else). The Turku bus card allows you quite a big range of travelling already – only problem is that a lot of things close down when summer ends and only open if you are lucky in the autumn school vacation.



Also, the universities offer bigger trips via their Erasmus Student Network (ESN). Just remember that you don't want to take any stuff for university along on the trips so focus on that before booking the trips. ESN offers two different trips to Russia, a trip to Lapland (consider which ESN you want to go with) and a party boat to Stockholm.



Other than that, you can always book the trips yourself with friends – Russia, Sweden, Lapland, Norway, the Baltic states, etc.

Use the chance you get to travel because:

A) you have enough time for prolonged weekend trips and

B) at least I wouldn't have travelled to a few places if it hadn't been that close anyways and the weekends hadn't been so draining sometimes.



Party time is mostly during the week – Wednesday and Thursday. Don't pack any outfits – Finnish people party in an overall tied at the waist with whatever shirt they like. You can obviously bring your own things but with the overall you can collect badges of the trips and parties you go to and don't have to worry about anybody spilling their drink on you.



My advice to anybody going is:

- Take the time to prepare. I know it sounds basic but due to our finals being right at the beginning of our semester abroad, I didn't prepare myself half enough to really enjoy the start – it was a lot of organisational stuff which worked out and probably couldn't have been dealt with before but that on top of the finals stress from here was a bit much without the proper preparation.
- Attend the orientation week – even if you only go there for that week and fly back for the oral exams here, it really helps to get to know the university and people.
- Use your chance at working with students from other countries. I'm still no fan of group work but you get to know people with that.
- Take the extra courses for international students (Finnish and cultural exchange) and the chance of the friendship programme (it will we'll be explained during the orientation week)
- Save up enough money – Finland is expensive.
- Relax, everything is going to work out – thanks to Laura our coordinator in Turku that sentence became something of a mantra and she was completely right.