

The Host Institution

What influenced your decision to select the host institution that you went to?

Finnish system of education is considered one of the best in Europe. Moreover, Lahti University of Applied Sciences (LAMK) always maintains a big number of exchange students, and I was interested in meeting people from many different cultures. Finally, I've visited Finland a lot, but never lived there for a big period of time, so I wanted to understand how it feels to stay in this country longer and to improve my knowledge of Finnish language.

Please describe the location of the host institution.

LAMK is situated in the center of Lahti, a nice small town in the southern part of Finland (an hour by car from Helsinki). The place is very beautiful, especially in spring and summer, when the lake is melted and you can enjoy the sun in a lovely old fashioned coffee place in the harbor. Among other sights are huge ski jumps and Sibelius talo, a big concert hall.

Please describe the courses that you took while on exchange. What were their pros and cons?

The way of teaching in Finland is very different from Russian approach. Courses are more interactive, with prevalence of assignments and home works over lectures. For example I took such courses as Human Resources and Strategic Management in Business Operations. Every fifteen minutes teacher asked us to discuss something in groups and to present our opinions to the class. This was great in a way that we learnt to make presentations in front of big groups of people, we had a chance to experience work in international teams, as discussion groups were formed randomly. Especially unusual was an experience of work with representatives of Asian cultures. There are a lot of Vietnamese and Chinese students in the university. On the other hand this interactive teaching doesn't supply enough theoretical information. Thus students, who didn't have Basics of Management course in their home universities, were a bit lost.

As I've already mentioned there were a lot of assignments, group and individual. Some courses are totally based on assignments. I had a course called International Contract Law. The teacher just gave us a huge task during the first meeting and we had to submit it before the certain date. That was it. I didn't really see the point in this kind of course, as we didn't even get any feedback, just marks. So it's even impossible to see your mistakes.

In addition to this there are so called book exams, which means, you have to read a book and pass an exam, thus, you pass a course and get credits. This is reasonable for Erasmus student, who need additional credits for their home universities. As in Russia ECTS system is not applied and we have to pass all exams at home as well, there is no reason to take this kind of course.

Moreover there are a lot of courses based on the material given by visiting lecturers, representatives of different companies, organizations and foreign universities. I had two courses of this kind: Business I Asia and International Marketing and Logistics. The advantage of those courses was in a possibility to learn some practical tips from managers of big companies. On the other hand I can't say that all lectures were very interesting, moreover I don't think that just the material given by visiting lecturers was sufficient. I would prefer some additional lectures held by university professors.

There is one subject, called Countries and Cultures, which I enjoyed the most. It was not as interactive as others, but the teacher is great. He gave a lot of new and useful information in an exciting way with many examples from his own experience.

Furthermore I really liked was a possibility to take courses in other faculties, if they fit in your schedule. For example I was studying in business, but I took a course in tourism faculty, called Introduction to Wine. I've learnt a lot about wine regions, sorts of grapes and what was the most exciting, we were tasting wines. As I heard from other students, there are more exciting courses, such as Introduction to Beer ☺ and Introduction to Finnish Cuisine, where students are cooking!!

All in all I should say that the range of courses available in English is rather poor. You can choose from all courses available in English, starting at the appropriate time. If you come for the spring semester, you can't take courses, which are continuing from the previous semester. There is also a possibility to study Survival Finnish. I didn't attend it, as I had already been studying Finnish before I came to Lahti. But students say that this course is not very helpful, regarding that most of people in Finland speak English.

How did course content, class size, marking, etc compare with St. Petersburg State University?

The most important issues I've already mentioned above. In addition to this I can say that classes are normally bigger than in St. Petersburg State University and for every subject they form a new class, so the amount of people depends on how many students assigned for the particular subject. This means that in every class you meet a lot of new people and a big amount of group work helps to get to know them closer.

Marking system is totally different. Teachers don't give marks; they give credits (ECTS). Every class equals certain amount of credits. You can get maximum or don't get credits at all, depending on your performance. Usually teachers give credits basing on work in class, home works and assignments and final exam.

In general the atmosphere in the university is less official than in St. Petersburg State University. You call teachers by first names, without titles. On the first lecture of the class they always ask students about their expectations from the course and in the end student's feedback is highly appreciated.

Very useful thing is a student portal Reppu, where you can see all schedules, register for courses, see time changes, and home works to be done, submit your assignments and see class material with professors put there. There is also an internal web mail and a portal, where you can register for exams and see your credits.

Did you find the academic and international office staff helpful?

Well in the beginning they helped with the choice of subjects and forming a schedule, but really failed with providing help related to accommodation. I should say that they are always willing to help but not always efficient.

Please describe the resources available to exchange students (i.e. computers, the library).

There is free Wi-Fi in the whole territory of the university, two big computer rooms in the ground floor, with a free internet access and free printing facilities. A library is not very big, but there are quite many books in English, many of them are new.

Did you experience any language or cultural difficulties at the host institution?

No serious difficulties. Sometimes teachers gave not very clear instructions, while submitting tasks into student portal, as English is not their mother tongue. Another problem was that the semester I was in Lahti, there were a lot of French and Spanish students, so they often talked their languages between themselves. That was a bit annoying for others.

Do you think that going on exchange contributed to your academic and personal development? If so, how?

It definitely contributed more to personal development than to academic. Regarding academic progress, I learnt a lot about another system of education and about handling business in different countries, with representatives of various cultures. All in all as most of Finnish students told me Business School in Lahti is not very strong. Thus I concentrated more on personal development.

The whole experience was exciting. The way of life in general was an experience. All exchange students lived in the same dormitory, so we spent a lot of time together and by the end of semester were like one big family. We were often cooking together, so we taught each other about cooking traditions of our countries. I learnt a lot about African and Asian cultures and a lot new about Europe, as my friends were speaking about their home countries. In fact it is very easy to interact with the representative of any culture if you are open-minded and ready to learn something new.

After this semester my desire to see the world and to get more familiar with other cultures grew only stronger. I would love to do another semester abroad, as I feel there is much more to discover.

Accommodation

Please describe the accommodation options available to exchange students.

There are two options. You can rent an apartment in the center or live in a student dormitory. Center apartments cost about 250-400 euro per month, it depends on the size of the apartment, if you are sharing it or not. In student dormitory there are flats for two or three people with private bedrooms and shared bathroom and kitchen (in flats for three people kitchens are much bigger!!!) There is a wired internet access in every room. Rooms cost about 200-250 euro.

Most of exchange students live in the same dormitory in four kilometers from the center of Lahti. I would strongly recommend this type of accommodation. There is a unique atmosphere of the place. As I mentioned above we lived like a big family. If you are bored you can always go and chat with somebody, students organize a lot of parties there. The building is located near the lake, so in spring we were making barbecues on the shore. All in all this is a way to experience a real Erasmus life.

Be careful with the organization, providing this dormitory accommodation. They ask a deposit in the amount of 300 euro which is returned during a month after you leave. If they don't like the condition in which you leave the flat, they can extract some sum from the deposit. So it is better to take pictures of the flat when you just got keys and before leaving invite an inspector, to prove that the condition of flat is sufficient. Thus you get some proofs, in case they decide to extract something from your deposit.

How expensive were the accommodation options?

As I said Center apartments cost about 250-400 euro per month, dormitory rooms 200-250 euro

What type of accommodation would you recommend?

Dormitory (see previous question)

Food

Did you have self-catering facilities or were meals provided with your accommodation?

There is no type of accommodation, where meals are provided. All apartments have kitchen, but there are almost no utensils for cooking. You can take a house box in LAMKO (student organization), it costs 40 euro, and they return 20 when you return the box. It is possible to choose what you take; people who get it earlier get the best utensil. It is even possible to get microwave and coffee machine. Moreover, anything you want you can find in second hand shops in the center, by reasonable price.

There is also cheap (2,60 euro) lunch available in the university cafeteria from 11.00 to 13.00. The food is ok, but more or less the same every day.

Was food expensive?

A bit more expensive than in Russia. We found you that fish is cheaper than meat. There is poor choice of meat in most of the shops.

Where is the best place to shop?

There is big Prizma supermarket not far from Dormitory. There is a very big choice of food and Alko shop. Remember that only ciders and beers are sold in normal shops (before 9 p.m.), all other alcohol is sold in special shops called Alko. They always ask ID and alcohol is very expensive in general.

Very close to the dormitory are Smarket and Kmarket, not big supermarkets and R Kioskki, where you can fill up your phone balance. Most of students buy a sim card of an operator DNA, as it is much cheaper to use local connection and DNA is the only prepaid operator.

How much does it cost to eat out at a local restaurant/cafe?

Can vary from 6 to 15 euros, depends on the place. The best one in Lahti is Mamma Maria, Italian restaurant. Food is very good there and prices are reasonable.

Transport

Please describe the local transport options.

Most of people use bikes. It looks quite insane in winter or to bike to a club (Dormitory is 4km from the center!!), but students do that to save money. It is possible to buy a bike in a student organization LAMKO or some second hand shop. The prices vary from 50 euro, depends on how lucky you are.

There are also buses, a card per month is 50 euro. One ride is about 3 euro in a day time. The taxi from the center to Dormitory is 16 euro.

There are buses and trains between cities. With a student card (costs 6 euro to get it), you get 50% discount. For example train to Helsinki is 7 euro with the discount.

Was it expensive to use local transport? Please give an example of the costs.

In comparison with Russia transport is expensive. (See previous question)

Personal Safety

Did you find the city in which you stayed safe?

Yes it is safe, it is Finland!! 😊

Do you have any safety advice for other exchange students?

Don't forget to lock your bike; practically it is the only thing to wary about.

Highlights

Briefly describe the highlights of your exchange experience.

New educational experience

A lot of new friends

Life abroad

Total responsibility for yourself

Different cultures

Learnt to cook a bit

Problems

Briefly describe any problems you experienced and any suggestions you may have to help others avoid them.

The only problem I had was accommodation. Student office had some misunderstanding with the organization responsible for students Dormitories (Oppilastalo). So take care of your accommodation in advance. Make sure they provide you a FURNISHED room in a Mukkula Dormitory. If not, try to contact Oppilastalo directly, as, by some strange reason, sometimes they don't give full information about accommodation options to the student office.

Other Comments

Do you have any further comments?

All in all, this program in Lahti University of Applied sciences is a great experience. If you are searching for new friends and willing to learn more about other cultures, you will enjoy it. There I understood that not a pace, but people make an atmosphere. Even Finland, which is often considered one of the most boring countries in the world, where they won't let you into a club if you forgot your ID and the frosts are horrible, you can still have a great time.