

SoSe23 Stavanger experience report

I moved to Norway for the second semester of my master's programme in Migration and Intercultural Relations last January. After the first semester in Oldenburg, I spent the winter break in Lisbon and London with my family before moving to Stavanger for the second component of my programme. Travelling in Norway was relatively easy. Nearly everyone in Norway is fluent in English which made things easier in terms of communication. Overall, I really enjoyed my studies at the University of Stavanger (UiS). Although Stavanger is a relatively small city, there was always plenty of things to do. The nature in Norway was breathtaking with its fjords, mountains, and fauna. Locals were very welcoming and helpful in times of need which made it easier to feel at home, I would highly recommend Norway (and UiS) to anyone considering doing an exchange semester abroad.

Prior to leaving Germany for Norway, I struggled to find private accommodation in the city of my host university. Most students from my programme had applied for a room in a dormitory. Previous EMMIR students had told me that living in a dormitory in Stavanger negatively impacted their overall experience as the dormitory rooms were quite small, the common rooms were often unclean and that the furniture provided in the dorms was minimal. Given their feedback, I decided to look for private accommodation rather than applying for a dormitory room. Finding an apartment in Norway was a challenge, to say the least. I received no replies for apartments or shared flats on the Finn website (the most popular website to rent housing in Norway). Out of our 27-student cohort, only two students were able to secure private accommodation. I was lucky enough to join them in a house that was rented by Norwegian and Ukrainian landlords. The three of us lived above our landlords which eventually developed into a friendship with our landlords. Living with "locals" was extremely beneficial, not only in terms of understanding Norwegian culture but also in creating friendships in our new home. Other students from our cohort who lived in dormitories mentioned that this gave them the opportunity to meet other foreign students living in Stavanger. I really enjoyed my experience of living in a flatshare with other students from my cohort and locals. I would highly recommend to any international student going to Norway to consider living in a shared apartment with locals.

The courses given at UiS were a combination of lectures from the university's professors and guest lectures from other Norwegian universities and the University of Nova Gorica in Slovenia. Much more courses were given by guest lecturers than the professors at the University of Stavanger. Although the presentations by the guest lecturers were interesting, I would have enjoyed having more courses given by the professors at UiS. I believe that this would have allowed us to engage in deeper conversations and have some continuity throughout the semester. During our stay at UiS, we had to take four courses: one mandatory course and three optional courses to choose from a selection of six courses. All the courses were offered in English.

In terms of the "**social life**" in Stavanger, the international student association was extremely helpful and active in organizing events. There was a weekly gathering at the student café called "Coffee Around the World" where international students could present their city, region, home country, culture or language to other students at the university. Everyone was welcomed to join or present. The event was a great opportunity to meet other students and often gathered many international students at UiS. Free coffee and sweets were offered during the presentation. The presentation was followed by a quiz and a draw to win free movie tickets. The student association also offered free waffles and coffee on Mondays which most students enjoyed. On Thursdays,

students could join Anyone coming to UiS and looking to meet new people should join try events! The university gym is great for anyone into sports with three floors, plenty of fitness courses (e.g., yoga, spinning, running, HIIT...etc.), a sauna, bouldering, and a CrossFit space. The gym, including all classes, was priced at approximately 39 euros/month. I would recommend this to anyone attending UiS especially given that there is little sunlight in Norway during the wintertime which can be difficult at times. Locals usually used Vitamin D supplements to help cope with the lack of natural sunlight. Activities outside of the university are usually quite expensive as is everything else in Norway (e.g., food, transport, nightlife...etc.). The hikes in Dalsnuten located in Sandnes – a neighbouring city – and Preikestolen (a.k.a. Pulpit Rock) are a must for anyone studying in Stavanger. I would also highly recommend planning a trip to Oslo, Bergen and the national parks of Folgefonna and Nærøyfjord. Renting a car is sometimes cheaper than flying or taking the train to these destinations.

