

Experience Report – Exchange Semester at the University of Stavanger

Host institution: University of Stavanger, Norway **Home university:** Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg (EMMIR) **Duration:** 1 January 2026 – 1 June 2026

Application Process

I applied for the exchange place through my home university's International Office during the regular application round for outgoing exchange students in my master's programme. The application required a current transcript of records, a short motivation letter, and a language certificate confirming my English proficiency. After being nominated by Oldenburg, the University of Stavanger sent its own application link, which had to be completed by its separate deadline.

Before the Stay Abroad

There were two sets of formalities to handle: one with the International Office in Oldenburg and one with the University of Stavanger.

For Oldenburg, I had to submit the Learning Agreement, the confirmation of acceptance from Stavanger, proof of valid health insurance covering my stay abroad, and the Erasmus+ grant agreement. These were generally straightforward but tied to fixed deadlines, so it was worth starting early.

For the University of Stavanger, the main steps were completing the online application for exchange students, applying for student housing through their housing service, submitting proof of enrolment from Oldenburg, and registering for courses once the course lists were published.

Accommodation

I started looking for accommodation as soon as I received my acceptance letter, around four months before arrival. The University of Stavanger offers student housing through its own housing service, and I'd recommend applying as early as possible, since places are limited and in high demand among exchange students. For anyone who doesn't get university housing or prefers the private market, Finn.no (Norway's main classifieds site) is the standard place to look, and the Facebook groups for Stavanger student housing are also useful.

I'd recommend staying close to the campus or along the bus routes connecting campus to the city centre, since this keeps both your commute and your social life convenient without needing a car. Luckily, my dorm was close to the main campus.

Studies at the Host University

Transport to the university was easy and reliable by bus, and the campus is also well connected to the city centre and to most student housing areas by bike paths.

My courses were directly related to my field of study and focused heavily on contemporary developments and current debates within the discipline, which gave me perspectives I hadn't encountered in my home programme. Courses were taught entirely in English, which gave me a real opportunity to improve my language skills, not only in formal contexts such as presentations and written assignments but also in everyday conversations with classmates and lecturers.

Lectures and seminars at Stavanger were organised in a noticeably more discussion-based and less hierarchical way than I was used to: lecturers were approachable, and students were expected to actively contribute rather than passively absorb material. Exams were organised mainly around continuous assessment, with written assignments and presentations counting toward the final grade rather than a single high-stakes exam at the end of the semester, which I found less stressful and more motivating than the exam culture at home.

Leisure Time

The biggest highlight of my leisure time was the natural beauty surrounding Stavanger, including the fjords, the rugged coastline, and the easy access to hiking trails right from the city's edge. Weekend hikes and excursions further into the fjords became something I looked forward to throughout the semester, and they're what I'll remember most fondly.

Beyond Stavanger itself, day or weekend trips to Lysefjorden and Pulpit Rock (Preikestolen) are well worth it, and Bergen makes a great longer weekend trip if time and budget allow.

That said, my impression of Norwegian society more broadly was mixed. Outside organised university settings, I found it considerably harder than expected to connect with local Norwegians; social circles felt more closed and slower to welcome newcomers than I had anticipated. Most of my closer friendships ended up being with other international or exchange students rather than locals. Combined with this, the cost of everyday life in Norway was consistently high, which shaped how often I could take part in activities beyond my immediate budget.

After the Stay Abroad

After returning, I had to submit the transcript of records from Stavanger, a confirmation of stay covering the full exchange period, and the Erasmus+ final report and online survey to Oldenburg's International Office.

The recognition process at Oldenburg involved submitting the transcript, the original experience report, and the confirmation of stay.

Overall Reflection

Looking back, the exchange semester was a worthwhile and formative part of my master's studies. I return with stronger English skills, a broader, more current view of the topics in my field, and lasting memories shaped by Norway's landscape. Just as importantly, the experience gave me a more realistic sense of what it actually means to integrate into a new society, including the parts that don't match the expectations one builds up beforehand. I'd recommend the University of Stavanger to other students, particularly for its academic environment and access to nature, while encouraging them to go in with realistic expectations about the effort required for social integration and the cost of living.