

## **Erasmus scholar Experience**

**Name:** Suraya

**Country of Destination:** Norway, Stavanger

**Receiving Institution:** University of Stavanger

**Course:** European Masters in Migration and Intercultural Relations (EMMIR)

**Duration of Stay:** 5 months

**Academic Year:** 2025

As a master's student in Migration and Intercultural Relations, my academic journey is designed to be as dynamic and intercultural as the subject itself. My Erasmus exchange experience was a significant part of this journey, beginning at the University of Oldenburg in Germany and continuing at the University of Stavanger in Norway. The transition between these universities is not just a change in academic environment, but also a profound personal and cultural adventure whilst enhancing my understanding in my field of study.

### **Preparation**

The international office at the University of Oldenburg played an instrumental role in facilitating the clerical and administrative processes. By liaising with the commendable team at University of Stavanger (EMMIR) the partner university to assist with course registration. Their guidance was invaluable and additional information was given about the resident permit application and how long it may take so that students endeavour to apply earlier since it sometimes takes longer than expected.

### **Housing, Travel and Arrival**

As the break from the first semesters was over and we prepared to move to Norway, accommodation was of a huge concern as finding timely and affordable housing for students is usually a challenge in most universities. In my experience, there was no hassle to find accommodation. The arrangement for accommodation was well organised and one with ease. The SiS housing in the University of Stavanger provided options with varying prices and were ready to make changes for students with due notice. The student houses were decent and clean in nice neighbourhoods

to take walks. Mine was a 15 min walk to campus and also close to the monumental “3 swords”. I could also reach the city centre 15mins by bus and other student housing was in the city centre for those who preferred the hustle and bustle of the city life.

The travel option varied among each student as students were free to choose their means of travel. Aside from the timely arrival of the Erasmus scholarship for non-scholarship holders, the Erasmus grant also offered top ups for “green travel” which motivated me to travel from Germany to Norway by bus and the ferry. It was a long journey but the experience was worth it and it is rewarding to be a part of the “green travel’ campaign” .

Upon arrival at the bus terminal, there were some taxis available which were convenient for students to share a ride. I arrived at almost midnight and the SIS Housing in the university confirmed our arrival and made arrangements to pick up keys. I would also entreat any student travelling to Norway to be abreast with the app to access the bus, train and ferry distinct in every city. There is no “semester ticket’ free for students and also the ticket cannot be used in other regions unlike in Germany. Therefore, the bus app Kolumbus is used in Stavanger. However, tickets purchased can only be used for the bicycle rides which are free for the first 15 minutes ride. There is also access to the ferry with the same ticket. The student price for a 30 day ticket is 380NOK which can be paid with visa or Vipps.

### **Academic and Campus life**

The semester officially began as we were introduced to EMMIR faculty and campus tours to familiarize us with the University system and how to navigate it. The University of Stavanger is such a beautiful campus with a multifunctional Student building cum gym, bar and coffee lounge where students can hang out after class to work on their computers or socialize. The library is everything to write home about , it is indeed world class. The staff are very approachable and ready to assist.

I have never been as excited about the modules that were being taught in my second semester during my exchange in Stavanger. There were opportunities

organised by the EMMIR faculty in Stavanger to meet active players in the field of migration and the chance to intern in organisations. Some of the modules were taught within a two week intensive phase and others were sparse through the semester with engaging seminars and programmes that broadened our knowledge in the field of migration and also to understand the social systems that addressed migration issues within Norway. The modules were taught by a team of researchers from Slovenia and some lecturers from Norway. Each module required term papers that had to be written and submitted within a deadline.

The university also put an effort to organise social events like “Coffee Around the World’ where students can present about their country. Another favourite of the students is “The waffle Mondays” that gives students free Waffles and the chance to further socialize. Moreso, events were organised for hikes, beach surfs and chance to visit and tour the city. This really improved the academic life balance for exchange students.

### **Finance and Daily life**

Being in Germany and travelling to a country like Norway will surely be such a huge difference for a student financially with its high standard of living. Generally, I would say Norway is more expensive than Germany. I could buy a week's groceries for 35 to 40 euro in Germany but in Norway a week's groceries could reach 70 to 100 euro. Also, everything from transport, clothing and eating out is on the pricey side than in Germany. Except the Kolumbus ticket which is affordable for a student price but can only take you around one region.

Again, the city of Stavanger is quite a cosmopolitan city with a lot of internationals. Perhaps due to the oil industry and its international companies. Hence, one is likely to run into different ethnic communities who are also fluent in English and Norwegian so it is easy to socialise and make friends. The city also has a couple of beautiful restaurants and pubs that are on the friendly side for students. It is important to know that having a Norwegian number goes a long way to help with some payment systems as Vipps is a very popular mobile payment platform that works when you have a Norwegian number. Sometimes it could be such an inconvenience when you cannot make payment with a Visa.

A cultural shock I experience is how at bus stops people allow a considerable amount of distance between each other while waiting for the bus. Do not be confused when you see people spaced out in a line at the bus stop, I advise you to not spoil the fun and follow suit. The weather here is mostly unreliable, as my colleagues will jokingly say “ it is possible to experience all four seasons of the weather in Norway”. It is pretty much a cold country so one must be prepared. Even when it gets sunny in summer it could get windy and pretty much cold. Not only is the weather cold but Norwegians like to keep to themselves and value their personal space. They could be overly interactive mostly at parties or over several glasses of beer.

Not to cheer you down, if you do not have some hiking boots perhaps you should. Because Norway is home to many hiking routes and breathtaking views. It is such a hilly and green environment with beautiful fjords, water bodies and Islands you cannot get enough of. I had the chance to hike with friends and visit beautiful islands and popular hikes like “Manafossen” , “Preikestolen” among others in Stavanger.

## **Conclusion**

My Erasmus exchange experience has been nothing short but a learning curve full of adventures, learning and even though sometimes overwhelming, especially when in a new environment without familiar faces. Although one may be excited about new experiences, it is important to be open to learn new cultures whilst they may come as cultural shocks. It is also an opportunity to add to your build of knowledge, to network and unearth new adventures. This experience for me has been one of the best in my life and therefore I would encourage any student who considers going on an Erasmus exchange programme because I would definitely do it all over again.