

Erasmus Report Winter term 18/19

I spent the last five months in the northern part of Sweden, in a small city called Umeå.

Back home I used to study 'Life Science' in the master's degree programme and I was looking for a practical term abroad. The idea was to spend some time with a research group in the field of biotechnology/biochemistry and do my own small project. Since I have always been fond of Scandinavia I applied for different cities in Sweden and Finland and was accepted in Umeå. Via personal contacts of the ERASMUS coordinator in the department of chemistry in Hannover, a group that could provide me a proper project was found quickly. The university in Umeå guaranteed for accommodation if you participate in courses with more than 30 ECTS. It was the most difficult thing to organise such a course in which my project fitted into. I moved in with 8 others into a student dorm. We shared a kitchen but luckily each room had a bathroom for itself. Sometimes it was hard to keep an already worn-down kitchen clean and some experiences are dispensable. Nonetheless, my bedroom with the small bed and the hard mattress felt like home during my stay and the dorm was perfectly fine for the terminated time.

I was warmly welcomed by my supervisor and the head of my research group and spent around 35 hours each week at work. The time was divided between working in the laboratories and doing some theoretical work. They offered me a desk in my supervisor's office. Some of my colleagues were Swedish and I was able to improve my language skills with them during the coffee breaks which are very important at work in Sweden. But my English improved as well as it was the main language. I am more secure about talking and writing especially in an informal way, always encouraged by another ERASMUS student sitting in my office and who was a native speaker. After some time of training I could work completely on my own which included planning the experiments, caring for my equipment etc. My supervisor was always there for advice, support and discussions about the troubleshooting. In the end I had to hold a presentation about the results of my project and the huge amounts of data I was able to collect.



I used to spend my free time with other ERASMUS students. The offered buddy programme introduced us to some Swedish students. Around 30 Internationals were handed over to 5 to 10 locals who took care of us. Because of my chosen course it was hard to get to know local students and this programme was the perfect opportunity to meet some Swedes at least. I met not only our Swedish buddies there, but also interesting international students of all fields of studies. Whilst you often stick with people of your own field at home, it was easy to gather with mixed students. My group was an engaged one. We had a nice breakfast every Sunday, hosted by one of the group members, had games nights and went out together. And I met most of my friends of that time there. Every now and then we had tournaments to compete with the other groups, for example in Volleyball and Bränboll, the Swedish version of Baseball.

We spent lots of time in national parks hiking, exploring the wilderness of the north and even crossed the arctic circle. The winter darkness affected me less than I expected, although on the darkest day of the year the sun was barely up for 3 hours. But I must admit that especially the November with a lot of rain and just little light influenced your motivation for daily work a bit in a negative way. Since the snow arrived in the beginning of December, it became better again.



Figure 1: At the arctic circle.

I had a lovely time there and can strongly recommend this place for a term abroad. But, I think, if you meet the right people you can spend an unforgettable time anywhere.

