

University of Jyväskylä (Finland) spring 2015

I spent my second semester of the Master's programme in Psychology at University of Jyväskylä in Finland. I chose this university in Central Finland for my exchange mainly because of my interest in sports psychology and Finnish language.

The planning and preparation part was made very easy for the new exchange students. The university provided us with lots of useful information by e-mails and on school's website, and exchange students also have their own orientation week at the beginning of each semester. All this information was very helpful for finding the accommodation, selecting courses and learning more about the things to do in Jyväskylä. In addition, each new exchange student was assigned to a mentor group. During the first few weeks, the mentors helped us with the organizational matters and organized some events for us.

The housing for the exchange students was located 2-3 km from the university, and like in Lund, students usually buy or rent a bike. Since winter in Jyväskylä was long and contained lots of ice and snow, I opted for walking and occasionally taking the bus. Normally, exchange students are offered a furnished single room in a flat, where kitchen and bathroom are shared with other international students. I was lucky to live in a brand new building in Kortepohja student village. The roommates are usually assigned randomly, and my flat mates came from Switzerland and Germany.

I was a student of the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences and I got to take courses from my own faculty, but also some language courses and a marketing course from the business faculty. Lots of courses are held in English, and making a final course selection was not an easy task. There were many interesting language and culture courses offered, some of which I managed to take in addition to my other classes, while others simply didn't fit my schedule. Unlike the system in Lund, where you take one course at a time, in JYU you usually have many courses at a time. In addition, course starting and ending times vary greatly. There can be courses, that have meetings throughout the entire semester, while some more intensive courses only last for two weeks with daily meetings. In JYU the courses can be completed in many different ways. Most of the courses, that I took, offered traditional lectures, group projects and written examination at the end of the course. But there were also courses, where you were given certain literature to work independently on in order to take a book exam, and many courses could be completed by writing reflective learning logs. Also, JYU offers different winter and summer schools with possibility to participate in intensive one week courses with other Finnish and international students. I participated in two summer school courses held in May, and both courses were very interesting, with lots of discussions, group projects and international guest lecturers.

During the semester, ESN Jyväskylä offered many activities and trips. I attended a sauna evening, some international parties and language cafes, where one can practice different languages, and visited St. Petersburg with ESN. I also participated in Erasmus in Schools project, which gave me a fun opportunity to visit a local elementary school and introduce Finnish children to my country and culture. During free time, it was also very easy to visit different Finnish towns. Megabus busses are a good and cheap way to travel around Finland and the local train company also has some campaigns from time to time, when you can purchase cheap train tickets.

Lastly, Jyväskylä is an excellent place to practice sports. The university's sports sticker gives you unlimited access to different gyms, fitness classes and ball games for the entire semester for just 35 Euros. For a small fee, it is possible to participate in some sports courses as well. For example,

I got to try gymnastics and ballet. In addition, I took a sports course, where I got to try 15 very different sports from a long list of sports for free. Jyväskylä is also great place for outdoor activities. There are many lakes and forests surrounding the city, and during winter there are many ski trails and outdoor skating rinks available. There is also a ski- and activity center Laajavuori situated very near to the student village, where it is possible to try downhill skiing and snowboarding among other activities.

Although, there were some moments, when I started to doubt my sanity for choosing dark and cold Finland over locations like Spain and Italy for my exchange, in the end, I was very happy with my decision. During the semester I had the opportunity to not only learn more about the area of sports psychology, but also about intercultural communication, media and business. I definitely learned a thing or two about myself and what I would and wouldn't like to do in my future. I was also very happy for all the opportunities given to me to improve my Finnish. And I even managed to find a summer job in Helsinki, where I got to use my new language skills.