Arcada University of applied science in Helsinki from 22.08.12 to 01.01.13.

Originally I was enrolled in the Plastics Technology program, but when I arrived in Helsinki I decided to participate the (in my personal opinion) more interesting International Business program.

In Munich I studied Fahrzeugtechnik at the Fakultät 03 before.

Preperations

The application procedure was pretty easy. I just followed everything like it’s written on the homepage of the UAS Munich and the Arcada. If you go through the links, you'll find everything you need. Just take the application serious and plan some hours for doing it.

The only special thing I needed was a transcript of records, so I managed to get it from the Hochschule München, also quite easy.

My subjects

The Arcada is a pretty small university with just 3000 students, and 1000 of those are exchange or foreign students. It’s a Swedish speaking university, though there are also three programs in English:

- Plastics Technology
- International Business
- Nursing

I chose, as already mentioned, International Business as course and my personal subjects have been:

In period one
- Swedish for exchange students
- Investment and funding
- Entrepreneurship I

In period two
- Swedish for foreign students II
- Entrepreneurship II
- Digital Marketing
- E-Business
Every subject has 5 Credits; I graduated everything, so I got 35 Credits for my whole exchange semester. I didn’t really care about to get the subjects imputed back in Germany because I quit my studies there anyway, so unfortunately I don’t have any clues about how this works.

One term (=Semester) is half a year and is divided by two periods each about two months.

I avoided speaking German, even with Germans I spoke in English. I came to Finland to train my English (and then also Swedish soon), and with this method I trained English much more than with every language course I have ever taken.

**Study life**

The courses itself have just been amazing! Amazing enough that I quit my study in Germany completely and I’ll move to Finland soon again and start there a new study. Hopefully also International Business at the Arcada.

The system is definitely different from the German. Finland is spending much more money for education than Germany, and you can recognize this in a lot of details in the daily study life.

It starts with the whole atmosphere. It is much more relaxed and not so performance-focused. In my opinion you will easily pass the courses, if you invest some regular work every week, of course!

In Finland there is no form for the “Sie” used in university life, the teachers are called Andreas, Mikael, Susanna and so on and not Prof. Dr. Dipl. whatever. This makes the conversations to the teachers more like a nice talk to a friend instead to an authority. There are also just about 30 students instead of hundreds in a course, so the teachers and students usually know each other personal.

The grades are not made by just one single exam in the end (exception: Swedish and other language courses “just” have two, one written and one oral one) but by several assignments during the whole time of the course. That of course divides the work load on comfortable portions during the time. It is more a learning one part of the course and get a part of the grade nearby learning instead of learning for just getting the grade in the end to pass the course like in Germany.

The assignments are usually team work and also judged as one mark for the whole team. Of course, this has its good and bad sides, but over all I felt judged fair.

One thing has been not so ideal: the change of the periods. Between the first and second have been an intersection of one week. The new courses already started while the old have been still running. For the old ones we needed still to write the last assignments, so I had seven courses at once for one week. Some other schools even had one week break between, but they also started therefore one week earlier in August. I personally would have preferred to have also this one week free in between, but okay, nothing is perfect.
Travel

I flew to Helsinki from Munich. I booked my flight early and paid 272€ for both flights. The flight to Helsinki took me a whole day, because I chose just cheap flights configured from a flight-search engine, and had a stay in Paris overnight. The way back was done in 6 hours, just 2 hours in Amsterdam in between.

The Stay

We received already an E-mail from HOAS back in Germany. They have several dormitories for students in Helsinki. Those are big buildings with a lot of different flats, from single flats with own kitchen and bath to 6-share flats where you share kitchen and bathroom with five other students is everything available.

They sent me everything, I transferred the deposit on their account and received all information about the address, the rent and so on.

The dormitory itself was awesome. The room was not so nice but that didn’t matter. They have a sauna in the ninth floor with a balcony!

It was awesome, you can get out of the sauna and stand naked on the roof and have a look even until one of the seas of Helsinki! And in the winter there was some snow, so we swam in the snow in between the turns. I loved this sauna, was there so often as I could. It was open three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) from 6-8 pm.

Free time

There have been some Parties organized by Erasmus all the time, but I avoided those. Erasmus people have the attitude to stay just with themselves, something that I didn’t like. So I also hadn’t much contact to the other Erasmus people. I came there to get known this country and its people.

So I went out often on my own, made some real Finnish friends and spent my time with them. And yeah, Finnish girls, they are awesome, too, and definitely worth to spend some time with. And I also found some real good friends in the Finnish students at the university.

Helsinki offers an awesome nightlife, there are live concerts and nightclubs everywhere. During the days I liked to hang around in one of the several cafes or went to public saunas.

Sightseeing is something you can forget there. Helsinki is too small and too modern to offer many interesting old buildings or even an old town. If you want this, I would suggest you to do your Erasmus in Stockholm or another old city.

We also rent a car once and drove to a cottage for four days to see and feel the Finnish nature, and, of course, a real wooden-fired sauna.
I also did a travel for five days to Stockholm. Also a nice city and definitely worth a visit. Especially when you’re already up there in the north, the flight from Helsinki takes just one hour.

**About Helsinki**

It’s the capitol of Finland. But, because Finland is a small country with just 5 million inhabitants, also the capitol has just about half a million people living in. This is one factor that makes Helsinki so cozy. It's not so overcrowded than other cities but still, because it's the capital, it has all the advantages of a big city at the same time. You won't miss here anything, it has a big cultural scene, and a lot of opportunities to go out into the nightlife (even more than in Munich for example...). If you drink alcohol, then you have to pay a lot. I didn’t care because I’m not drinking and smoking anything at all, but the others complained pretty often about the expensive prices there.

But the real special things about Helsinki are its people. They are obviously Finns, and those are the nicest, honest and social people I have ever met. Yes, it's true, Finnish people are not speaking this much and seem to be kind of "cold" when you don't know them. And yes, Alcohol changes this habit a little bit. But this is just the very first impression! When you speak to them a little bit and when you show them that you are also a correct, honest and nice person, then they will open themselves after a certain time and you will have really nice friends with a very positive way of thinking and living.

Helsinki's people are also quite young. A fact that leads to a very dynamic and fresh city, always in the pulse of the time though Finland is actually pretty isolated. Also the Finn's preference for modern technology is everywhere recognizable from the electronically tickets over the opportunity to pay everywhere with EC-Card to the use of smartphones everywhere.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

Finland is a very special and unique country. And also extreme in a lot of points, I personally think either you love or hate it, there is not really so much in between.

There have also been some Erasmus-students, who complained about Finland all the time. They had it not for the first preference, they would have preferred to go for their exchange semester to a warmer country like Spain. But they didn’t get those places and just Finland was left to choose, and because of that they didn’t really care about the country. They just wanted to have the Erasmus Parties and get drunk all the time. If you don’t want to have this, then avoid Erasmus and get connected with the Finns.

For Example, ask in the Corhouse of the Arcada (you will find out already on your first day at the school what this is) if they could need your help organizing some events. Or just go out into the nightlife and talk to random people. They really appreciate if someone breaks the ice for them.
So, think about if you can handle -20° C, a looooot of snow, darkness, quiet fins where YOU often have to go first, second and third to make a contact or even a friend, equity in the whole society and very special food there.

If you can, go there, give this country a try. You might be impressed by the honesty and the really deep heart of the Finnish people, beautiful nature, a great and modern school system, a beautiful town with a lot cultural life. And this kind of mystic, magical, that this country owns, especially during the short and dark winter days out in the nature.

Personally I’m glad with my exchange semester and I also appreciated the good service and support from Erasmus. I would do it every time again.