

Erasmus at Umeå University in Sweden, Spring 2018

By Stefanie Winkler

Why choose a city with 83 000 inhabitants in the north of Sweden to do your Erasmus Semester?

At first glance this choice does not seem very appealing: long and dark winter, short summer and located in the Norrland of Sweden.

But this is exactly what makes this particular city worth the stay.

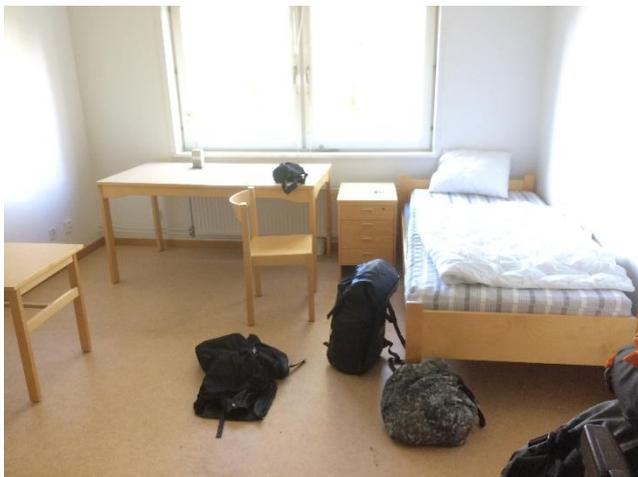
Preparations

The process started roughly a year before the actual stay with the application at the Institute of Sociology. After my nomination from the Free University and the following acceptance from the Umeå University, I was able to apply for housing and choose my courses. The staff at the Swedish university guide you through this process very well.

Courses

In contrast to the German system, the Swedish universities divide their semester into four periods. This means you only have one course at a time for four weeks, the only exception is the Swedish language course. This way you solely need to focus on one topic, in addition to that there is no examination phase at the end of the semester. The courses that I attended all used different teaching methods which are much more diverse than frontal teaching and discussions and are fun. On the other hand, in comparison with Germany the level of the courses was lower than I expected it to be, even in the postgraduate classes.

Housing



The international office at Umeå University offers rooms for international students and I would recommend applying there for housing. Finding housing otherwise is nearly impossible and all of the students I met, including the Swedes live in student housing. The good thing about being an international student is that you

explicitly can choose your room. Not just from various locations, but also the floor and exact room. There are several areas where students live in Umeå, the biggest ones are Ålidhem and Nydalahöjden. Although most internationals live in Ålidhem, I chose to live in Nydalahöjden which is a bit more expensive. But it is closer to the lake and I expected it to be quieter there, because there are more Swedes living there and this turned out to be true. The rooms have an own bathroom and a shared kitchen, which in my case was equipped with everything I needed, but this differs from corridor to corridor.

Since Umeå is a small city compared to Berlin nothing is really far away. From my apartment it took me 15 minutes to walk to the main campus. Consider getting yourself a bike otherwise you will have to walk a lot. There are several groups on Facebook for that ("Umeå International eBay", "Umeå International Bike Market", "Umeå Students Secondhand Bikes Market"). Biking around in winter might seem to be complicated but I felt safer on my bike and driving on ice than walking on it 😊

Everyday life and leisure time

Be sure to join the Buddy-Program it is a great way to meet people and to join activities, especially in the beginning.

The nice thing about the size of the city is that you will always see people you've met before at the campus, because almost everybody is at the main campus. So, you can always find someone to have Fika with. You can also meet people at IKSU which is a big sport centre. It might be more expensive than you are used to pay for a fitness centre, but it is worth it. You can use the gym, do classes, swim, climb, play beach volleyball, squash and much more.

In comparison to Germany, Sweden is more expensive. When it comes down to groceries it might not be that much, but alcohol for example is way more expensive. Especially when you go out you will feel the difference. There are several student pubs close to the university which offer cheaper drinks, but some you can only enter if you are a member of one of the student unions. Consider joining one of them, not just because of the pubs but they also enable you to get several discounts at shops and so on.

I recommend being out in nature as much as you can. It might be cold and dark but with the right clothes you can stay out long enough to see the northern lights or experience the midnight sun. And if you have a couple of days: rent a car with friends



and visit one of the national parks either in Sweden or Norway. They are beautiful no matter what season and staying in a cabin without electricity in the wilderness is an awesome experience. In order to fully enjoy these trips, be sure to have enough savings to do them and bring a backpack so you can hike to wonderful places.

The Swedes themselves are very friendly and helpful especially at the university. They are doing a great job with the international students and are always trying to help you. Everything is well organised and planned. But I was a bit sad not to get in touch with

Swedish students because they tend to stick to themselves, but since you will find friends from around the world this is okay.

All in all, I can just encourage anybody to choose the city of Umeå. If you don't have a problem with snow and living in a smaller place it is definitely the right city. Even if you are not a nature person you will be after this Erasmus.