

Student Exchange Evaluation

University: University of Bergen, Norway

Date: Semester one 2016

Subject: English Literature

Exchange city – Bergen

I feel there is great advantage in going to a place less touristy such as Bergen instead of places like Barcelona or London. The lack of preconceived notions gave me a freshness in outlook unable to be attained with popular destinations. I felt this was very beneficial as I was able to develop opinions and experience the city separate from the expectations.

Bergen itself is a very quiet city. In winter it gets dark around 4pm and is very cold but in summer there is 24 hours of light and it is absolutely magical. I was totally amazed by the light – the birds would be chirping at 3am.

Bergen has 7 surrounding mountains so hiking is the main activity for international students. In Summer, I often slept on the mountains because of 24 hour light and warmth. It was so much fun.

It is a very attractive city – many trees, lakes and flowers which highlight the colourful buildings. “Bryggen” is the main tourist attraction and a UNESCO world heritage site.

Personal growth

I spent the first 2 months of my exchange alone. I was travelling a lot so didn't make many close friends in Bergen. However, this solidarity gave me great independence and resilience. I was also much more aware of happenings in life as my attention was directed to my surroundings rather than people. I believe travelling solo teaches you an extremely valuable skill of self-reliance.

In the last few months I made some really close friends and the experience shifted to the stereotypical but nonetheless amazingly fun exchange experience with lots of socialising and adventures. I spent very little time on social media as I was always in company and doing activities.

The freedom you feel on exchange is like no other. My friends and I often talk about how we wake up and could literally do whatever we want. I remain so grateful for this freedom and recognise that I am totally privileged to be able to have this experience.

Money

Norway is a very expensive country so I would recommend saving up more money if you come here than if you go to somewhere like Prague or Berlin.

I was fortunate enough to receive an Erasmus+ scholarship which covered all my food, accommodation and partial travel costs. This made an enormous difference to my experience and I don't think it would have been possible without this support.

To save money I did the following:

1. Couchsurfing: Couchsurfing is an app where you find a host in your destination city and send a request asking if you can stay on their couch. The purpose is a cultural exchange but it is also free – saving on accommodation costs make an enormous difference.
2. Hitchhiking: I understand it's not for everyone, but it is a great experience, and of course free. For example, it's very easy to hitchhike in Ireland because there are only a few highways.
3. Blablacar: An app where you share car rides with drivers – the only cost is petrol money which is by far the cheapest form of travel. Plus you get to meet another traveller and share life stories.

Weather

I was exceptionally lucky with the weather. Bergen is renowned for being very rainy, and in 2015 it rained 283 days of the year. Many locals I spoke to would remind me how fortunate I am to have had as little rain as I did. It made travel phenomenally easier.

Accommodation

I lived in Fantoft accommodation – a fairly run down place but the cheapest and most popular student accommodation. 90% of all international students are placed here. I would highly recommend just for this aspect. The biggest bonus of this accommodation was having your own toilet in your room.

University

I found university very relaxed. I took two English classes and only had University one day a week for 4 hours. I had no internal assignments but just 2 100% exams. I think I had an incomparable advantage having English as my native language. The best thing about Bergen University is the digital exams – so so much better than written exams and provide a more accurate depiction of someone's capability as you can edit your own work.

