

Could you please introduce yourself?

My name is Luca Littmann and I am 20 years old. I am studying International Information Management (IIM) in the 5th semester. I spent my semester abroad in Trondheim at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and I am happy to be able to report something about it here.

How was your application phase?

Everything was very easy because the semester abroad is obligatory in IIM studies; the 5th semester is reserved for it. Moreover, the NTNU is a partner university of the University of Hildesheim. Norway is not part of the EU though, but is still a member of the Erasmus+ program, so there were no major organizational problems.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, it was at the beginning unsure whether students were even allowed to enter the country, but fortunately the borders reopened shortly before the start of the semester.

Why did you decide to study abroad for a semester? And what are the benefits of a semester abroad?

For IIM studies, I have the choice between an internship or a semester abroad. It was clear to me that I wanted to study abroad, since I got in touch with people from many different countries and got to know Norway much better than you could on vacation. I also planned to learn a foreign language in the course of my studies.

Why did you choose this exact country?

I didn't know much about Norway before I went there for my semester abroad. When I started planning my semester abroad, I read through old interviews. The more I read about it, the more I got the feeling that Norway was a perfect fit for me, because I like to spend time outside, especially in the winter, and there was a lot to do in relation with nature: campfires, hiking, etc.

Why did you choose this university? And what were your expectations?

At first, I actually wanted to go to Høgskolen i Østfold in Halden, but this university was not available for my major in information science and the NTNU was the only possible partner university in Norway. Then I started to find out more about Trondheim and found more and more things that I thought were great about the city. I was hoping to spend a lot of time out there and meet people from all sorts of countries. I also wanted to have a real student life without Corona, as I had only experienced a single semester in Hildesheim before the pandemic.

How were your first days abroad?

My flatmate picked me up from the airport. After that, while shopping, I was confronted with Norwegian prices for the first time. But you get used to it quickly and stop converting everything into euros, that doesn't make it cheaper. It took me the first two days to get there mentally.

Above all, I had to deal with bureaucratic things. I was lucky that I was greeted by warm temperatures and a bright sun, which are really rare for Trondheim. I really settled in from the first meeting with other Erasmus students, with whom I spent a lot of time with later. In the days that followed, there was a campus tour and city tour organized by the NTNU. Unfortunately, we did not have a proper introductory week because of the pandemic.

Have you had a culture shock?

I wouldn't speak of culture shock. In most things Norwegians are similar to us.

At first, I was a little unsure whether to greet strangers or not. But I quickly learned that you don't greet them and that it is best to pretend not to see them (not only in the city, but also in my quiet residential area). The idea is simply not to disturb other people. In addition, there is less hierarchy: in Norway everyone speaks on familiar terms with each other, so the lecturers are also addressed by first name. It was strange at first, but this makes it easier to ask questions, for example. It wasn't a culture shock, I found it very pleasant.

Did you learn the language beforehand or only in the country?

Before my semester abroad in Hildesheim, I attended a Norwegian course in Volkshochschule. It was free because exchange students can get a voucher from the International Office. I also attended another language course at the university in Trondheim.

Have you improved your language skills?

Yes, definitely, because I was in the NTNU language course. I also lived in a shared flat with a Norwegian person.

I have also watched a lot of Norwegian series and Norwegian television. In Norway there are a lot of dialects that play a much more important role than in Germany. There is also no such thing as "standard Norwegian", so it is not always easy to use the skills and phrases that you've learned from the courses in real life. In addition, practically everyone can speak English, so that you often do not even get to know it. Nevertheless, of course, one hears and reads the language all the time.

Did you have a lot of contact with other exchange students?

Yes, there were some introductory events for us exchange students and someone had already created a Discord server and a WhatsApp group after the first online meeting, so that it was easier for us to meet up. The corona situation in Norway was less tense than in Germany, so meetings in larger groups weren't a problem.

Did you have a lot of contact with local students?

Yes, I got to know a lot of local students. It is not difficult to get in touch with Norwegians when you go to events that are not only meant for exchange students. For example, there was an AktivCampus week with sports to try out. Something else that there is much more than here are quiz evenings. In addition, my flatmate was Norwegian and once we went to a meeting of the Norsk Målungdom together. This is a political youth organization promoting dialects and Nynorsk (written language).

Did you take the opportunity to speak Norwegian?

Sometimes I was speaking Norwegian with my flatmate, and even though we usually spoke German or English out of convenience on a daily basis, I learned a lot of words from him. And at the meeting of the Norsk Målungdom, I spoke to Norwegians from different regions, which was a real jump in at the deep end because of the dialects.

How was your everyday university life there compared to the University of Hildesheim?

At the NTNU I had to take fewer courses than at Hildesheim University because almost all of them give 7.5 credits. Many lectures had assignments during the semester. Self-study based on literature plays a more important role there than here, as the books are sometimes not just additional material, but some lecturers ask about the content of the exams. At the end of the semester, the on-site exams are taken in a special building with large halls. Unfortunately, I cannot say much about the exact process, as I got sick for a long time in the middle of my semester abroad and therefore had to cancel many courses.

How much are the fees that the host university charges you? What does it include (accommodation, semester ticket, etc.)?

The university does not charge any fees. There is no semester ticket from the university, but you can get a ticket for 6 months from the bus company. If you are lucky, the university will arrange a room in a dormitory run by the Studentenwerk, which is the cheapest

accommodation at around € 450 a month, but it was unlikely that you could get one of these rooms.

What were the COVID-19 rules like at the host university?

You could enter the university. Initially, it was recommended to wear a mask in the hallways. In the beginning, you had to keep a little distance inside the rooms and check in with a QR code at your seat, but everything was abolished in the course of the semester.

How did you like studying during the Covid-19 period and the online courses at our partner university?

My Norwegian course and one other lecture took place on-site. My other two lectures were online. The online lectures were either live and recorded, or there were videos uploaded. There were no problems with it because the NTNU offered many lectures online even before the pandemic. Overall, I thought it was nice to have two face-to-face events, but the uploaded courses were also useful for traveling and spending free time.

How was your living situation?

I lived in a shared apartment with a Norwegian student. The apartment was in a quiet residential area a little outside the center, but since Trondheim has a good bus network, it was easy to get to the university, the city center and all the important places. I liked it. My room costs around NOK 6,250 (= around € 625), which was a bit more expensive than the others, but I was happy with it, because otherwise I only had relatively dubious offers. Looking for an apartment was the most difficult part of planning the semester abroad, as due to Corona almost all dormitory rooms had been given to Norwegian students and most landlords on the private market only rent them for at least one year. I found my room through a post on Facebook.

Has the time spent there changed you?

Yes. I am now more willing to do things on my own, even if no one else wants to come with me. I know that I can live alone in another country and have taken a lot of Norway into my heart. I never thought that I could feel so at home in another place so quickly. What I unfortunately also had to learn from the time I was sick: involuntarily having to ask for help from people whom I have only known for a short time. All of this has changed me and I learned a lot, even if of course, I would have preferred to have done it without the illness.

Do you see Germany with a different eye after your semester abroad?

A little bit. I notice much more the bureaucracy and the slowness of digitization here. And at first, I thought it was funny how everyone in Germany always complained that it was so dark

in Germany in autumn. On the other hand, I was happy to see how much longer we can have daylight here. I hope that more people will get vaccinated because I've seen what is possible again with a high vaccination rate.

What fascinated you the most?

The northern lights. I have seen them a total of four times. One of these was during a weekend that I spent with other exchange students in a hut in the middle of nature, without electricity or running water. In the evening we sat outside by the campfire while the northern lights danced across the sky for hours above us. I will never forget that day.

What is the cost of living?

It depends on one's way of life. Groceries are significantly more expensive than in Germany. For example: A ready-made pizza from the freezer costs around € 8. You should not go out to eat too often, and the university cafeteria and cafés are too expensive to eat there regularly. But if you're careful while shopping and cook for yourself regularly, it is okay.

What is your favorite place in Trondheim?

There are many ... There's a small forest above my apartment with a vantage point from which you can see the lights of the whole city in the dark. That was one of my favorite places.

What is your favorite food from Norway?

My typical-Norwegian favorite food is Brunost (brown cheese), which gets its color and its taste from the fact that the milk sugar is caramelized during production. The flavor we get is exactly in the middle between goat cheese and caramel. I liked it on pancakes or waffles, e.g., together with jam.

Would you repeat your studies abroad and why?

The first months - yes, 100%. All of the "best time of my life" talk that I didn't really believe before is true. I would prefer to do without the month after that, when I was sick, the doctors didn't find out anything and I unfortunately had to go back to Germany.

What's unforgettable from your stay in Norway?

The northern lights, the friends (especially the Norwegians) I met there, the beauty of nature. How happy you can be in a hut where you have almost nothing and every comfort like a warm fireplace or sauna has to be worked out by chopping wood. Our adventure with a long search for drinking water also taught me how unimportant most of what we normally worry about is. The view from the mountains, the glistening sun on the fjord on my first day, the first snow, the sunsets. Let's be honest - I won't forget any of this!

What do you recommend to students who would also like to spend a semester abroad in Trondheim?

Definitely take part in at least one cabin trip! You can rent huts in the area around Trondheim from the student sports club NTNUI for little money. And: eating out on top of the television tower. It turns very slowly, eating out is expensive as always, but not more expensive than downstairs, and the view is worth it. It is best in the evening so that you can see the sunset.