

Experience report Finland

"There are still scholarships available for a semester abroad in Finland" - I received an email like this in February 2022. I thought why not give it a try. I didn't think I would be the lucky one to get to go abroad. But it happened! A few weeks after my application for a residency scholarship from the *InterAct!* project, I received the approval from Ostfalia University. Now it was time to prepare for a semester at the exchange university TAMK (Tampere University of Applied Sciences) in the cold north, and some time later, I was actually in Finland and the adventure could begin.



At the beginning of August, I found myself at the airport in Helsinki. It was 20 degrees and sunny, which made me sweat a lot with two suitcases. I traveled to Tampere with my two classmates from Ostfalia and met the first tutor who welcomed us. At the university in Tampere, there are tutors who make it easier for exchange students to settle in and provide support for any problems that may arise. She picked up our apartment keys and accompanied us to our apartments in the district of Hervanta.



In the following days, I did some activities such as visiting the island of Viikinsaari or the Milavidas museum, where I could admire the nature and learn about the history of Tampere. Finland is known for its forests and lakes. The term "the land of a thousand lakes" is therefore very appropriate and makes it an ideal holiday destination for nature lovers!

From August 15th to 19th, 2022, there was a so-called Welcome Week. During this week, I had the opportunity to meet other exchange students and discuss important topics for the introduction to the upcoming semester at TAMK. I also got to know the university during this week. I was impressed by the size of the cafeteria, which had multiple food stations offering a variety of options for vegetarians and vegans. There were also gluten-free and lactose-free options available for those with allergies.

A few weeks later, the regular university everyday life began. The courses I chose were all in English and compatible with my own modules in Germany, so I was able to get them credited. The students in the courses were a diverse mix. I met students from Italy, Spain, Albania, China, Lebanon, Finland, and many other countries.

Teachers were addressed by their first names here and the hierarchy, despite a relatively large university, was surprisingly short. If there were any problems or questions, the corresponding people were addressed directly and help of some kind was always expected. The learning units were well divided into theory and practice, either through group work in which the learning was applied or through various excursions in which the knowledge was imparted first-hand. On the one hand, the ability to work in a team was further developed, and on the other hand, the learned material was directly applied. In terms of my choice of modules, I now took soil and groundwater samples from an old landfill site, visited a hydropower plant and a textile company, and conducted experiments in the laboratory.

There were many tasks and group assignments that had to be submitted weekly. There were not exams in every module. Sometimes it was homework or presentations. A new form of examination was the "group exam," for which all students in a course were divided into equal-sized groups (5-6 people) and then worked on an exam with many questions together. Even though it was sometimes extra work to submit all homework on time, the efforts paid off very well with very good grades.

During my free time, various fitness centers were open for students, sports courses were offered, and with the Kide app, tickets for various events for students could be purchased. There were some bar-hopping events, small festivals, and parties. There was also a sauna evening, a hike, and an ice hockey game.



Saunas are a big topic in Finland. There are even said to be more saunas than cars! Although I didn't like going to the sauna in Germany, I learned to appreciate it in Finland. At least once a week, my group of friends went to the sauna at the student dormitory. Saunas were particularly popular in winter. Finnish habits were quickly adopted. So, between sauna sessions, we rolled in the snow or took a dip in the nearest icy lake to swim. Snowball fights and snow angels in bikinis were very popular here.

Thanks to my tutor's birthday, I was even able to attend a Finnish sauna party. Here, Finnish culture was truly noticeable: Finns do not speak before taking a sip of alcohol and are very introverted. After the first alcoholic drinks were consumed, the room began to hum, and an hour later, the sauna and pool became the center of the party. The previously quiet Finns were now fully involved, singing, drinking, and sauning. Of course, beer was taken into the sauna, and not just one bottle of vodka was passed around. Even if the other person doesn't drink, this was a wonderful experience. As with almost every party in Finland, there was an after-party here too, which took place at one of the many clubs in Tampere.

Ice hockey is basically THE Finnish sport! We couldn't resist watching it regularly at the Nokia Arena, a new ice hockey stadium built over the railway tracks. When the temperatures dropped in winter, we naturally tried our hand at playing ice hockey ourselves.



Whether you prefer the city life with fine restaurants, bars, and clubs, or the adventurous life of nature lovers with national parks and beautiful landscapes, Finland and the Tampere region have a lot to offer! We often went swimming in one of the numerous lakes, went canoeing, mushroom picking, and hiking.

The different cities can be easily and relatively cheaply reached by train. I spent a weekend in Rovaniemi, said hello to Santa Claus and petted his reindeers. The northernmost zoo in Finland in Ranua and the Snowcastle in Kemi were also easily accessible by bus and train. Trips from Helsinki to Estonia's capital Tallinn were no problem either. Many students also traveled around in campers and took ferries to Sweden and Norway. It was common to rent small wooden cabins in the forests and by the lakes of Finland to have a cozy weekend getaway for two.



My personal highlight was the Northern Lights that I saw with my best friend in Rovaniemi in northern Finland. The Christmas markets were also incredibly beautiful with many small handmade products and the "Glöcki", Finnish non-alcoholic mulled wine with nuts and raisins.



I found Finnish student life fascinating as well. Most students came to events in their "party overalls", which can be used to identify each student by overall color, sponsors, text on the back representing their university and corresponding field of study. These overalls could be decorated with patches that were collected at various events. The more patches on an overall, the more events the student has attended. Even exchange students could get a party overall and add patches to it. This is a souvenir that will last forever.

For anyone who is drawn to the north, I can warmly recommend Finland and the TAMK campus in Tampere. The exchange here is very pleasant and the tutors are very helpful. The university is already very internationally oriented and therefore well-suited for foreign students. The events are usually well-organized and a lot of fun. The warm days in summer, the colorful autumn, and the winter all showed Finland in all its beauty. The short, and at times -20 degrees Celsius cold days were worth the experience. I also got to know other students and found new great friends for life here.

