

My semester abroad at the Nelson Mandela University in Summerstrand (Port

Elizabeth)

Organization and preparation

Nelson Mandela University (NMU) is a partner university of Ostfalia. Nevertheless, the organization surrounding the study abroad semester started for me already in January/February 2022. From applying to NMU to booking my flight, there were many things that I had to plan myself. However, the effort was definitely worth it! If I had any questions, I could always rely on the support of Ms. Anumba from the International Student Office (ISO). The advantage of the organizational effort is that Ostfalia will credit you with some credits for the preparation for the study abroad semester. So, I had to complete four modules at NMU and had a bit more free time during the semester compared to other international students.

Checklist for my preparation:

1. Apply for a mobility window
2. Complete the DAAD language proficiency test
3. Apply to NMU
4. Apply for a scholarship
5. Apply for a visa (as early as possible!)
6. Register for accommodation (with CampusKey)
7. Health insurance
8. Book your flight
9. Choose your modules (to be finalized in South Africa)
10. Participate in NMU's orientation week

Campus Live/Lessons

Most lectures at NMU were still online due to the pandemic. At first, I was sad about this, but after a few weeks, I realized that it was actually very convenient not having to search for the lecture room every time. Around 30,000 people study at NMU, so the campus is quite large. The winter semester runs from mid-July to mid-November. Lectures are once a week, lasting an hour and ten minutes per module, and are structured similarly to what you would expect in Germany. However, the assessment system was different from what I was used to.

Instead of a final exam at the end of the semester, there were several assignments distributed throughout the semester, similar to what you might have experienced in school. I had about 4 smaller assignments per module. This was unusual, but it also helped me to know what I needed to improve on. Grades are given as a percentage. 75% is equivalent to a grade of 1 according to the South African grading system. My lecturers were very friendly and helpful. I learned some interesting things at the university and I highly recommend the modules! I took Introduction to Film Studies (LMCV122), Principles of Preproduction (LMVC272), Television and Video Production (LMCV205), and Afrikaans for Beginners (LABV102).

Travel and Leisure

Since there are many international students living in the CampusKey student dormitory, there's always something going on during the weekends. It's easy to make friends and there are many activities to choose from, such as karaoke nights, surf lessons, festivals, wine tastings, rugby matches, and other events in and around Port Elizabeth. Moreover, the student dormitory organizes many cool and affordable events that you can participate in.

As mentioned before, the winter semester ran from July to November. I booked my return flight for December, so I had some time to travel after the semester. Additionally, there was a recess week in September during which we had time off. I also used many weekends to travel, and I would say that I saw pretty much everything in South Africa that there is to see. South Africa is a very large and sprawling country, and many people fly to get from one place to another. However, I would strongly recommend driving by car - you see much more of the surroundings. We rented a car from Carl (affordable car hire). He originally comes from Germany and rents out his cars to international students every year.

Travel recommendations:

- Garden Route (Jeffreys Bay, St. Francis Bay, Tsitsikamma, Robberg Nature Reserve, Plettenberg, Knynsa, George, Wilderness, Mossel Bay, De Hoop, Cape Agulhas, Hermanus, Bettys Bay, Stellenbosch)
- Kapstadt (Table Mountain, Lions Head, Signal Hill, Simons Town, Cape of good hope, Kirstenbosch, Neighbourgoods Market, DHL Stadium, Waterfront, Zeitz Mokka, Madam Taitou)
- East Cost bzw. Wild Cost

- Coffee Bay
- Lesotho
- Swasiland
- Krüger National Park
- Addo Elephant National Park
- Panorama Route
- Johannesburg
- Pretoria
- Graaf Reinet
- Drakensberge

Crime and culture shock

To be honest, I imagined crime and culture shock to be worse than they actually were. As long as you follow the basic rules (such as not going out alone in the dark), there is not much that can happen to you in my opinion. However, it is always good to be on the safe side and think twice before doing something, as I have witnessed cases where people had things stolen from them because they were too careless.

I found the people in South Africa to be very friendly and accommodating. Many are very relaxed and take their time with everyday tasks. The laid-back attitude of the South Africans also benefits you at university. Some assignments were postponed and there are so-called late submissions, which means that you can submit your assignments a few days later if you are not finished yet. However, you will receive a deduction in grades for that.

Costs

The cost of living in South Africa is partly the same or slightly cheaper than in Germany. Food prices are similar, but eating out is very cheap and often more worthwhile than cooking every day. Clothes, decorative items, etc. are equally priced. I paid around 300€ for my accommodation in the student residence hall. During my exchange, I kept a rough list of my expenses and spent approximately 9,500€ for the entire six months. This includes all costs (tuition fees, flight, visa, vaccinations, rent, petrol, activities, travel, car rental, initial room furnishings, university materials, clothes, etc.).

By the way, with a student visa, you can get many attractions at a discounted price since you are considered a South African citizen rather than a tourist with the visa. For example, in Kruger National Park, I only paid around €8 for entry instead of €25! I should mention that compared to other international students, I lived somewhat frugally. However, I did not have to sacrifice anything, and I spent a lot of money on travel and activities.

If you are considering studying abroad at NMU, go for it! It is worth it, and you will get to know and love the country much better than if you only visit for vacation.

