

ERASMUS Program

Review: Semester at Yeditepe University

Istanbul, Turkey

Spring Semester 2014

Organization

Due to an integrated semester abroad in the M.A. program International Marketing and Sales at the Munster University of Applied Sciences, I applied for the MBA program at the Yeditepe University in Istanbul. Having passed the internal selection process, my application started to run through an external process at the Yeditepe University in October 2013. Meanwhile, I had to concentrate on a pre-selection of courses.

With the final approval for the semester in Istanbul, I could apply for a Turkish visa in December 2013. This process had to run through very fast since the ERASMUS semester was going to start in January 2014. To be honest, the procedure was complicated and temporary critically as Turkish bureaucracy seems to be usually that way, at least as I learned during my spring semester. However, I was able to take my flight at the end of January 2014 and started finally to get really excited about meeting a completely different culture and new content of studies.

Accommodation

The Yeditepe University provides gender-segregated dorms on campus. If you decide to live in a dorm, be prepared for a relative expensive rent, that you share your room with a randomly mate and that there are no shared kitchen (you can use the commons on campus or nearly located restaurants). Further, visitors are not allowed and due to its location, the dorms are very far away from central places. Hence, long lasting rides to central places have to be included since the traffic in Istanbul is indeed chaotically, but often in a funny way.

Anyways, I decided to live in a shared apartment in Fenerbahce near seaside with some fellows and other ERASMUS students as it turned out after the application. This meant, nevertheless, to search for it really early since central located and at the same time clean rooms or flats are rare over such a period. Luckily, I got the German landlord's contact details from some former fellows who enjoyed their semester in Istanbul, too. The application procedure was very fast and without any problems. Although the rent was relatively expensive, we could enjoy West European standards and a really good relationship to the landlord which turned into a strong friendship.

MBA Program at the Yeditepe University

All ERASMUS Students were warmly welcomed by a first meeting with the deans and coordinators of the university and faculties as well as with future fellows and buddies. The MBA coordinator acquainted us with the structure of the program, and helped us with the specific paperwork at any time. Especially concerning the change of courses during the "Add-and-Drop week" in the beginning, he was a great support. The fellows and buddies organized furthermore

to get student tickets for public transport, registrations of mobile phones and application for the residence permit. Concerning the residence permit, a Turkish mate is a must-have since Turkish officials are not really proficient in English.

We had to adapt to cultural differences and a different understanding of hierarchy and punctuality as well as studies. E.g, MBA courses take place in the evening up to 10pm or probably longer caused by delays or lectures on Saturday from 9-12am. Anyways, during the “Add-and-Drop week” I changed my pre-selection of courses according to the 30 ECTS requirement of my German M.A. program. Hence, my choice led to four marketing related courses. Doing this way, you should not neglect the demanding workload of just four courses. Due to students usually just attend to 2 two lectures and content is adapted accordingly, 30 ECTS on four courses are a heavy issue. That is, weekly assignments and presentations by individuals and groups, mid-terms and final exams, and the participation in the Business Strategy Game from McGraw Hill require a good understanding of self-organization. Lectures were participated by max. 30 students, being all employed. Although being of higher age, these fellows were really open-minded and strong friendships developed which helped to develop my own proficiency in Turkish.

All in all, after two weeks, dropping and adding lectures, and finally signed Learning Agreements I was able to adapt to such conditions and fully enjoy my stay in Istanbul.

Every day, live!

The daily routine was strongly shaped by the MBA program due to assignments and group work during the day and lectures in the evening from 7 to 10pm. Anyways, with regard to some paperwork it was comfortable since this was manageable by day. And at the end, I was able to meet, explore, and live the megacity Istanbul. To be honest, I had no idea what I had to expect when I made my decision to go to Istanbul. However, you have to be careful and also ready for the “journey” Istanbul. Otherwise, you will become overwhelmed by its daily life:

Being so diverse, multifaceted, shaped by its culture and history, and providing such a tremendous amount of activities, Istanbul is a city I was unable to explore in every detail or even to taste all the different, delicious delights within just one semester. Countless points of interests, events, and hidden but the more impressive places shown by “Istanbulus” or recognized by own trips, led me just imagine why this city is always in a rush.

Cars, cabs, dolmuş, busses, honks, people, cultures, sports, clubs, malls, local stores, delights, fish, mussels, dates, couscous, tea, spices, fresh fruit juice and so much more – everywhere, every time. Genius! My recommendation: Just enjoy and taste everything you can, it is worth it!

For example, just imagine you are going to the weekly market on Friday in Kadikoy (Asia) to easily buy some of the best fresh fruits and veggies in your life while avoiding the crowded scenes on Tuesday. There, you also enjoy a typical Gözleme - baked thin pastry filled with spicy flavored spinach and goat cheese. Afterwards, you will take a ferry to get to Kabataş, Europe. A beautiful, wide view on the Ocean, combined with the sight on the Hagia Sofya, the Blue Mosque, the Topkapi Palace and the districts of Beşiktaş, Beyoğlu, or Ortakoy is already really

impressive. But when you can already recognize the delicious aroma of fresh fish from the Galata Bridge, or the famous Kumpir from Beşiktaş, while having a Turkish Çay and spotting the Galata Tower and some fishers doing their best on the Bosphorus, it becomes majestic. Especially when sitting in the sun and waiting for sunsets you are fascinated. After docking, you take the Tünel to Taksim, a two-way metro powered by a ropeway since 1875. From Taksim, globally known for the place of protests and highly secured by police, you will walk along the İstiklal Caddesi. It is the most crowded place in Istanbul. At daytime, a three kilometers shopping option. At night, the central place of nightlife. From there, countless streets lead into winding corners attracting you by restaurants, local shopping stores, fruit juices sellers, restaurants, bars and clubs. Next, you will go to the Marmara Pera Hotel. Walked through the lobby, entered the elevator, pushed the button for the roof bar, you will have a view over all the places you will have seen this day - while enjoying a fresh drink or Çay and smooth modern music. At the end of the day, you will visit the fish restaurant Akin Balık. Sitting near to the Bosphorus, you choose fresh fish you want grilled and combine it with sharing a bottle of Raki in the Turkish way while enjoying the crowded atmosphere.

This idea of spending a day in Istanbul is just one little hint for what the city is providing. Furthermore, if you are willing to learn the language, the Turkish hospitality will be added by so much pleased Turks. They will respect your ambition and show you wonderful, hidden places you never can find by your own.

Anyways, since the political system is criticized especially by the youth, a lot of protests took place during our stay. And as a foreigner you should be very careful not to get involved in such. As soon as you can recognize a protest, just stay away since the police is acting in a very rude way when it comes to protests.

With reference to the stereotype of a high crime rate, I just can say I have never felt being such safe as in Istanbul, although I was also a victim of stereotyping as any of us in the beginning.

Conclusion

In the end, my stay in Istanbul was really impressive. Living and studying there were providing me countless impressions, experiences as well as many new friendships and contacts. The unexplored places and relationships are motivating me to visit Istanbul as often as I can in a year and to improve my proficiency in Turkish. The language is not just interesting to know; as far as I know it becomes crucial to speak such a language since the really high proficient Turkish students are motivated to leave their country and to go international – thus, it can be an advantage in international business.

Nonetheless, the presently traffic situation in Istanbul can annoy you. Especially when going by bus from the central Kadıköy or Fenerbahçe to the University, it can lead to many “clicking-out” moments or comedy situations; same for the Turkish bureaucracy.

However, I can just recommend to anyone who is going out for a semester abroad and wants to meet a different culture as well as the official most beautiful city in the world: Go to Istanbul!