

## MY ISTANBUL EXPERIENCE

Summer semester 2016 starts on 8<sup>th</sup> of February. This was one of the most detailed information I had before I booked my flight to Istanbul. In general information from Marmara University was sent out short in time in comparison to other receiving universities. With the help of the homepage I could figure out the offered courses as well as the location of my campus. Be aware, Marmara University has 15 campuses around Istanbul. Most information I could get from the Facebook Group from [Marmara University International Office](#). I decided to stay for the first days in a hostel and search from there for a flat for the upcoming six months. In Istanbul it is very easy to find a flat and it for me it was perfect, as I haven't decided for a concrete district yet. After exploring the city with hostel flat mates and getting to know other exchange students via the ESN network, I decided to stay in Cihangir – a lovely artistic district with lots of fancy shops and cute cafes. It is a little bit more expensive than other places, but it is perfectly located close to Taksim (nightlife & shopping street), Kabatas (ferry to Asia) and Karaköy (ferry to Asia & fancy place to hang out with friends night times). Furthermore I decided to start a professional language course at Dilmer language school to quickly get to know Turkish. And I need to admit: this was one of the best decisions. After six months I am now on a B1 Level and able to talk to people in a simple language & understand their simple language. And, be warned, Turkish is a structured and very logical language that uses often an illustrative language – very alluring and still keeps me studying Turkish even when I am back. Besides searching a flat and deciding for the language school, I kept myself busy in the beginning with organizing documents for Erasmus. The learning agreement needed to be changed, as only with the internal university system BYS the really happening courses of this semester could be seen. Furthermore lots of things for the residence permit need to be organized, like visiting the tax office, getting a mobile phone number, getting health insurance, etc. As all ERASMUS students are confronted with this task, it was easy to solve and the international office also gave detailed information. It was perfect to do this directly in the beginning, as courses started two weeks after the official start. ESN offers lots of social events to get to know others easily, whether while doing sightseeing, participating in sport events or partying with others.

Getting to know people as foreigner is pretty easy in Istanbul. Turkish people are very outgoing, curious and talkative. According my experience it was especially the interest in their culture, displayed by my Turkish intents, which made them getting in contact with me. Having spontaneous a “cay” with somebody you just met on the street always gives the opportunity to learn something about the person, about the culture or just share some interesting slices of life. Also when bargaining, people love if you share a little bit of your life with them and also listen to them – and be sure, you will get a much better price in the end. To find this in Istanbul, the city that is so much developed and so westernized with its malls and career-driven people, is possible. Just walk away from the main tourist spots and keep your eyes open. On the other hand, it is also possible to have a pure Erasmus, international life. There are so many exchange students, expats and tourists around, that it is easy to live a life with all other languages except Turkish. Some bars in Istanbul are known for their international flair, where bartenders approach you

automatically in English. I loved Istanbul for having both sides – the other culture, which was unknown for me before, the Turkish language, and customs that are so diverse but also the international student life, where I could celebrate away my feelings of homesickness.

My time in Istanbul unfortunately was also affected by the terrorist attacks in Turkey that recently happen. Luckily, nobody I knew was affected directly, but still some days in the city were super strange. Streets that normally are so crowded were after the terrorist attacks simply empty. Turkish friends told me to stay at home and everybody had information from a friend of a friend, where the next terrorist attack will happen. On the other hand, after a few days people decided that being feared and staying at home is not a solution and will not change anything. Therefore quickly life came back to the streets and life continued. I really hope that the situation will calm down and a peaceful solution for the ISIS and PKK situation will be found soon. The city, the country and the people are simply too amazing to be destroyed by the terrorist attacks.

Now I want to give a few insights in my Istanbul's favorites. I really love Turkish breakfast "kahvalti", which is a big, sweet and salty brunch where you share on a big table lots of things, from pekmez (tahine with grape moulase), to feta in honey, to kahvalti sos (tomato dip with walnuts), nutella with cherry marmalade, olives, cucumber and tomatoes, menemen (Turkish scrambled eggs) and gözleme (Turkish pancake filled with spinach and feta). Famous for breakfast is the kahvalti sokak in Besiktas, straight after the Besiktas eagle. But also the tiny cafes in Kadiköy or Cihangir offer delicious breakfast. Furthermore I love to spend time in Kadiköy (Asian side), where you can enjoy the seaside at Modapark and watch sometimes even dolphins. Here the sunsets are super beautiful and at day time you can enjoy fresh air & sun. In Kadiköy there are hundreds of small cafes and shops, and each time I was wandering through the streets, I discovered a new spot.

Furthermore in summer times I love to hang around at the four princess islands – a city escape with an easy one hour ride. Whether I just wanted to enjoy the calmness of the islands, or to go swimming or cycling, this was my favorite spot. Each island is different and everywhere you can find something special. Büyükada is beautiful for renting a bicycle and exploring the islands and getting the best views on Istanbul. Heybeliada I loved for wandering around the little shops and going to my secret spot for swimming.

Also Cihangir was nice, which is inbetween the bosphorus and the Istiklal. Here, lots of tiny shops and cafes can be found that are furnished with lots of little details, displaying the love of the owners for their shops. If you just climb up the hill, you come to the super crowded Istiklal Caddesi, the main shopping street of Istanbul. Honestly, I did not like the street too much in the end, as I could not stand the crowds any longer. But I remember that I was super impressed in the beginning by this street, especially at night times when the street is full of lights by shops and advertisements.

On Sundays I love to go to the Tarlabasi Market, it is a huge market where you can find everything what you can imagine, from fruits and vegetables, to clothes, to household ware. It is

not touristy at all and you can meet lots of locals and have a chat while drinking a cay with them. On the other hand I also loved to wander around at the touristy area of Sultanahmet & Eminönü. Here the famous Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace, Basilica Cystern, Spice Market and Grand Bazaar can be found. Everybody speaks at least four languages and it is super touristy. The sights itself a simply out of pure beauty. Especially if you consider the history behind them, it is purely fascinating what Istanbul has to offer.

Besides experiencing Istanbul's city live, I also studied. I took five courses, crediting for 30 ECTS. The university was close to the Atatürk airport in Bahcelievler, taking me almost one hour to get there. My courses where from Tuesday to Thursday, ensuring each week a long weekend. Tuesday to Thursday were quiet busy as we had besides the regular classes group works to do. We organized ourselves and split work so it was absolutely manageable. I consider myself as lucky, as I was the only Erasmus student in the classes I took. Therefore I quickly connected with my class mates and could improve also my Turkish skills. Generally classes in Turkey are different to them in Germany. Students don't ask questions and simply follow the professors' slides. Interaction between professor and students is more formal. I also missed the structured way of presenting; it seemed rather like a collection out of different theories which do not belong together. The English proficiency of professors was good, but rather in writing than in speaking. Often they their explanations in Turkish and in the end gave a little summary in English. Still, if I asked, I always got a super English explanation in the end as well. The courses I took varied a lot in the requirements and the learning output. I had courses where I really had to study for and where I did not want to miss any of the classes. On the other hand I also had courses that were interesting, but where I knew I would get good grades in the end, whatever I do. Also interesting was the availability of professors. Whenever writing an e-mail I could be sure to get a response within two hours. The time of exams and lecture was kept pretty flexible, meaning spontaneous postponements are normal as long as everybody agrees. On the campus was a mensa, where you can get a menu for only 1.5TL, the cheapest mensa menu ever. Quality of the food is a different point to be considered. Also a little kiosk is on this campus where you can get cay, coffe, icecream and little snacks. Compared to the other campuses Bahcelievler has nothing to offer, unfortunately.

After university I went home to my flatmates. I changed my flat once during my time in Istanbul, because I decided to move together with friends. This was a perfect decision, as we were kind of a little family in Istanbul. My Erasmus time in Istanbul not only gave me the credit points needed to complete my Masters in International Marketing & Sales, but also gave me new friends, new language skills and a more open perspective to the different religions. I could develop myself with regards to adapting to different circumstances, managing teamworks with lots of different ethnicities and build up my patience. I am really lucky that I had the opportunity to spend the last six months in this beautiful city and hope that lots of people have the chance to experience Istanbul and its people.

Thank you Erasmus for making it possible.