

ERASMUS+ report, Oslo National Academy of the Arts (Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo), winter semester 2021-22

Preparations

For my ERASMUS semester in 2021, I had to submit an application to my university in Bremen six months in advance. Only after I was accepted from Bremen did I have permission to apply for an ERASMUS place at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo, KHiO). The application required a CV, a portfolio, a letter of motivation and a letter of recommendation. The process was more involved than I expected. Luckily, Andrea Rauschenbusch and Samuel Nyholm provided close support with the application. At the beginning of April I was able to send all my documents to Oslo and just a month later I received an acceptance letter from the KHiO.

Unfortunately, my semester abroad was not yet certain. Due to the Corona pandemic, it was not clear for a long time whether I would be able to enter Norway. It wasn't until mid-June that Norway's entry regulations were relaxed, making my semester abroad possible.

Since the semester in Oslo starts in August, I had to rush to make all the preparations. The most difficult part was finding an apartment. My original plan was to move into one of the student dormitories run by the student organisation SiO. Unfortunately, I did not receive any response to my application because demand was very high that year. So I started looking for a room on the private housing market. I contacted all the affordable offers for shared rooms that I could find via the websites finn.no and hybel.no, as well as via Facebook. It wasn't until a week before my trip to Norway that I was finally able to secure a room in Oslo.

Getting there

At the beginning of August the time had finally come: I took the Flixbus from Hamburg to Oslo. The journey, which was originally supposed to take 14 1/2 hours, ended up taking 18 hours because we had to go through extensive inspections at every border. Nevertheless, in my opinion it was worth taking the bus instead of flying. Seeing the distance you cover on a trip always helps me to slowly adjust to a new place and increase my anticipation.

Studies

In mid-August, studies at the Kunsthøgskolen began with the first introductory events. My highlight was my department's two-day "Pengstart", where all of the students in the Faculty of Graphic Design and Illustration were thrown into one room and worked on a project. Since I was the only exchange student in the department, I got to know many of my fellow Norwegian students and teachers over these two days. It was really nice how open-minded, warm and helpful everyone was.

Teaching at University is quite different from that of the University of the Arts in Bremen. It is much more school-like. Each semester, the Graphic Design and Illustration Department accepts around 10-15 students who complete their entire course of study as a class. The courses are not freely selectable but are almost completely predetermined. My class had a total of three practical courses and one theory course for the semester. In the first block of the semester there was a large illustration course in which we were supposed to illustrate our own picture book. Afterwards there was a woodcut workshop and at the end of the semester we had a large graphic design

course that involved designing three books. The theory course took place once a week throughout the semester. The language of the courses in the bachelor's degree is generally Norwegian.

But I always got by well, even though I do not speak Norwegian. Most teachers (unfortunately not all) switch to English when they know that there are exchange students in the class. The practical thing is that in Norway almost everyone speaks English very well. Nevertheless, it still frustrated me from time to time that I couldn't understand things, which motivated me to learn a little Norwegian. Since many students wanted to learn Norwegian, the KHiO organised a language course for us that took place once a week.

Accommodation

For the first few months of my stay in Oslo, I lived in a 7 square metre, shared room that cost an stunning 6200 NOK (620€) per month. On top of that, I had a few roommates whose sexist views and unusual behaviour patterns downright frightened me. For this reason, I moved out again after two months with another roommate. Luckily we had the opportunity to moved into a beautiful, old artist's villa. There we shared a large apartment-like room for which we each paid 4000NOK (400€) per month.

Life in Oslo

I really enjoyed life in Oslo. I was particularly excited about the close proximity to nature. Oslo is located directly on the Oslofjord and you can sail by the ferry to various islands in under half an hour. You can also get to lakes and hiking areas in no time. What I didn't know before my arrival is that Oslo is very hilly, which means that you have a beautiful view of the entire city from many places. I was also surprised by the beautiful weather in Oslo. The sun shone surprisingly often and it hardly rained. Even in winter, when it was -10 degrees outside, we almost always had bright sunshine and a beautiful sunset.

Of course, there were also a few things that I didn't like about living in Norway. Above all, the high prices! If you go out for pizza, you have to expect to pay 20 euros for the pizza and a glass of wine can cost over 100 NOK (10€). Norway also has an alcohol culture that takes a lot of getting used to. Alcohol can only be bought in supermarkets until 8 p.m., and on weekends only until 6 p.m. For wine and hard liquor you even have to go to separate specialist shops with even more limited opening hours, so-called Vinomonopolets. So you always have to plan well in advance when going out to part.

Traveling in Norway

I enjoyed using my free time to travel around Norway. In the summer I drove to Bergen by car. A route that is highly recommended. I also went to the Lofoten, a group of islands in the north of Norway, twice. Especially in winter, the Lofoten Islands offer a view that I have never seen before: snow-covered mountains in front of the Atlantic, icy beaches... and if you're lucky, a moose runs into your path. For anyone who likes to go on an outdoor vacation, I recommend BUA: BUA is a national non-profit organisation that loans out outdoor and sports equipment for a week free of charge. For example, they have camping equipment, but also skis, kayaks or stand up paddle boards.

Conclusion

I would 100% choose to spend a semester abroad in Oslo again. The people I met, the atmosphere at the KHiO and the many beautiful places in Norway made me feel very comfortable and I would like to go back to Norway very soon. Maybe for the MA...