

ERASMUS+ AND US

Michaela Maroušková from the Czech Republic and Yusuf Bakir from Turkey have some things in common: both are 23 years old, neither was afraid and both decided not only to travel to, but also to study in a country they did not know. Thanks to the ERASMUS+ educational programme, Michaela, a student of the Faculty of Economics, UWB, spent one semester in Finland at the HAMK University of Applied Sciences in Hämeenlinna. Yusuf came from Turkey to Pilsen to turn his Erasmus stay into an internship and the internship into regular study at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering. For other students, Michaela and Yusuf have the same message: Go ahead! We asked them ten questions.



**Michaela
Maroušková**

1. I first learnt of Erasmus...

... from older friends and acquaintances who were already at university when I was still at secondary school. I got to know more about Erasmus only when I was at university thanks to a number of events related to this topic.

2. Why Finland?

For me, the primary goal was to improve my knowledge of a foreign language – English. However, since I only applied for an Erasmus stay in my follow-up studies, I could not choose a university in England, as the offer only included Bachelor fields. When I was reading the offers of other universities, I came across Finland. Finland – a country where one of the most difficult languages in the world is spoken, but most of the population can speak English very well. I realized that Finland was a big challenge, especially when days last six hours and temperatures are around 20 degrees below zero. I was also convinced by the fact that Finnish education is considered one of the best in the world.

3. What did I do in Hämeenlinna?

Well, I was studying! Hämeenlinna is sort of half-Pilsen. The campus is also far from the city centre, but the city transport there is by no means as pleasant as in Pilsen – 3.70 € for one trip changes your mind. There was no other

solution for me than to walk. On the other hand, having a sauna right on the premises and free accommodation was not unpleasant. I spent most of my time on preparation for school or with a bunch of "Erasmers".

4. The University of Applied Sciences of Häme is...

... one of the best universities I've ever seen. The aim of teachers was not to let us lie in books, but to find out how and where to get the right information. As the name Applied Sciences suggests, the study is more focused on the practical side of the field you are currently studying. Teaching was based on projects for specific companies: we visited many companies in person. Overall, I was really very excited by the teaching system.

5. Hämeenlinna is...

... a city located between three larger Finnish cities: Helsinki, Tampere and Turku, where there are more attractions and offers for leisure activities. You can get everywhere by train and bus. The local ice-hockey team won the highest Finnish competition this year, so I sometimes felt like I was in Pilsen.

6. The biggest difference between the Czech Republic and Finland?

Definitely in people. Finns are real introverts. They won't smile and start talking to you. But as soon as they find a reason for conversation and find out that they can trust you, they're open and very helpful. Everyone knows English or knows the basics of English at least, so you can easily talk even to retired people. This is certainly due to the fact that they do not have dubbing on television and all films are in the original version with Finnish subtitles.

7. Your best Erasmus experience?

Lapland. Through a student organization, we went there for a week during the spring break, saw the northern lights, drove a dog sled, visited a family reindeer farm, had

a sauna in Norway followed by a bath in the Arctic Ocean and tried Arctic challenges: to drill a hole in ice on a lake and fish, make fire without matches and hitchhike in snowshoes at night. Just Finland as it should be!

8. The biggest Erasmus-related problem?

You may laugh, but probably the broken heating! It was not pleasant to heat the oven in the kitchen for several days when it was -20 degrees outside.

9. Any funny Erasmus story?

Four girls, one French, one Spanish, one Finnish and me, we went for a small trip that included Norway, Sweden and Finland. We had made a reservation for a ferry from Sweden to Finland, but when we arrived at the counter and showed the reservation number, the man at the counter told us we were late. We looked at each other in horror, as we were in the port two hours earlier than the scheduled departure time. Eventually, it turned out that we were there a month earlier! Fortunately, we got a ferry for the same price and arrived back in Finland.

10. Message for other students:

What everyone says: If it is only a little possible, be sure to go somewhere! You have your whole life ahead of you, so when else could you go abroad for a few months? You will become independent, gain countless experiences, get to know a new culture and new people and, most importantly, get another bullet in your CV! ●



**YUSUF
BAKIR**

1. I first learnt of Erasmus...

... from my roommate. I was studying on a Bachelor programme in Turkey, he had been away on Erasmus and his experiences, which I had firsthand, had a big impact on me.

2. Why Pilsen?

It was Pilsen where my roommate had been on an Erasmus stay. It must be said that we have Efes Pilsen beer in Turkey, which made Pilsner beer a real legend for me. I simply had to try and drink it.

3. What do I do in Pilsen?

I had originally planned to spend an Erasmus stay here, but then things changed unexpectedly. The combination of being happy here, good relationships with my teachers and a nice portion of good luck led me to first take up an internship and, eventually, to stay as a full-time student.

4. The University of West Bohemia is...

... a pleasant place. First it was a challenge for me, but thanks to kind and helpful teachers, it has become such a pleasant place to be at. One of its big advantages is that it is in Pilsen.

5. Pilsen is...

... a small city with beautiful nature.

6. The biggest difference between Turkey and the Czech Republic?

Compared to big Turkish cities, there is a slower lifestyle. The Czech Republic is also well located in the centre of Europe, thanks to which I have had the opportunity to easily visit neighbouring countries such as Poland and Germany.

7. Your best Erasmus experience?

For me, this includes every encounter with new people and listening to their crazy stories about how they live in their homes.

8. The biggest Erasmus-related problem?

Certainly, the language barrier and the realization that English may not be enough to solve everyday problems.

9. Any funny Erasmus story?

I tried to do ice skating. In Turkey, ice skating is not nearly as popular as here and I am more of a 'sea man', so I had had no experience and, above all, no idea how my ice skating was going to be entertaining for my friends and painful and cold for me. Despite a lot of trials, failures and crashes, when I was already giving up skating and questioning all my life decisions, I now remember that day as a day full of laughter and fun.

10. Message for other students:

I would tell students considering Erasmus+ to pursue this idea. Although the paperwork is sometimes creepy, the adventure is really worth it. ●