

Erasmus Report Istanbul 2011/2012

Field of Study: Spatial Planning and Development

What should I know before?

Important now is the visa issue. With a German passport you did not need a visa for staying there until three months (or 90 days). So for many students who did not have a visa it was no problem to travel to a European country in three months to renew this period of time. But now the visa issues have changed since this year. So it is not anymore possible to travel and staying like this without a visa.

Furthermore it would be good if you pay attention of having enough photos of you before you are coming here. You will need them for the transportation card, for the residential permit and quite for any formal papers and assignments.

Which lectures I can suggest and why?

As my department is spatial planning and development I choose primarily Urban and Regional Planning lectures. This department is called in Turkish "Şehir ve Bölge Planlama". The master lectures are in general as I experienced the more interesting than the bachelor lectures. The reason is because the most bachelor lectures tend to be based on a school system. You have to attend at least 70% of the classes; otherwise you will fail the lecture. In addition you have to prepare often kind of homework's and papers. It is common to have a midterm and final exam or presentation. In addition I experienced, that the size of classes are in generally in my department not that crowded. One of the most crowded classes was about 30 students. Furthermore the lectures are in general more practical than theoretical. This is based on presentations, papers and some other kinds of homework. These practical works are important for the final evaluation.

How did I organize the accommodation?

First I found a possibility because I took an intensive language course in Berlin. So my course instructor known a family and she offered me the possibility to contact and stay with them. So I was staying the first two months in a Turkish guest family. But as it was hard for conversations and I am not common anymore to live with a family I decided to search for new opportunities. Craigslist.com is here a good support for finding accommodation. I found my second flat where I am still staying with help of a landlord from two student friends. They offered me to contact him and he has some flats near Taksim. So as Taksim is for architecture students and urban planners on ITÜ sure one of the best places, it was really good to get a flat near Taksim. It is one of the best places because the campus of the faculty is the "Taskişla" Campus near Taksim. The famous "İstiklal Caddesi" starts from that place in which every day two millions pedestrians passing by. The area around those two named spaces is really mixed of all kind of people. So it is perfect to get a good impression as an Erasmus student. The rents in this area are often quite similar to the rents like in Vienna.

How about costs and leisure time?

In Istanbul you can live like a king and you can live like the opposite. But it depends on you and what for you want to spend your time and money. Posh places are here very common, so many students spending their time where you spend the same money like in Vienna. In general it must be said that Istanbul is not a cheap city, it is quite expensive, but you have many possibilities to live like a king with less money. As you decide for the second way you have to search for it, but you will find it time by time. You will notice that many students spending their time in the more expensive places, but it is kind of part of the mentality here.

How about the language, what is good to know?

The knowledge of English in Istanbul and turkey is really different. Even if the people are educated in the high school in English the education level for the language does not fit to our level. You will notice that additionally some students and friends would be scared of using English, reasons for that are different. So you cannot expect that you can get along with everyone in English. Especially in municipalities, post offices, the police for formal issues can even not speak English or just the real basics. So it would be good to get in contact to a turkish friend, who can at least translate. It would be an advantage for you if you can speak and understand some basics in turkish, so in the most cases you will be at least able to avoid some misunderstood. As long as the people know that you are not able to talk in turkish, they will not make you problems, but as long as you show your effort to understand them with your basics in turkish.

Summary

My experiences that I made are great. If you want to learn about a different culture, about different mentalities, new people, other problems and issues in a society away from our understanding and expectations you really should think about turkey. In turkey you have the advantage the people are generally more open minded.

I learned for myself about a new definition of limits and distances and about reliability and care. There is not a right or a wrong way, it is just a way and behavior in which you grow up and in which you are educated and finally get used to it. It depends how much time and efforts you want to spend into getting not only vacation but also into human interactions. The most Erasmus students prefer to stick together in the groups of their or similar nationalities. It is of course a good base for not standing on your own, but it involves you and limits you in your time for the locals.

For Istanbul you should decide for one year not for one semester. It is quite impossible to study, learn about people, learn about the country and culture and have some vacation in this short period. Maybe you will get along with studying and vacation, but you are limited to learning and experiencing other issues I mentioned before.

Especially Istanbul offers you Orient and Occident. Istanbul is a melting pot of religions, cultures and people. In some key issues it is the extremely opposite from Vienna.