

Personal experience report from my semester abroad at Halmstad University (Sweden)

Study program: ERM Bachelor

Preparation phase

The preparation for my ERASMUS in the winter semester of 2018/2019 was quite simple. From all the partner universities in our faculty, the modules in Halmstad were the most interesting for me. After visiting all the information events organised and getting admitted by the BTU, I applied both at the university and a national Swedish website (but this will be explained well in the process). The ERASMUS coordinator of the university was also helpful to answer any questions. I applied for an “Urlaubssemester” at Cottbus in order to avoid paying for fees for the semester ticket.

Although I was planning to prepare by self-learning a bit of Swedish before moving to Halmstad, I did not manage to achieve this due to time pressure. Be aware however, that Swedes speak English very well and that it is not necessary to learn the language to survive in everyday situations.

Before the semester starts, there is a two-week introduction phase called Nolningen, which I really recommend. It helps you get used to your new environment, get to know exchange students and locals. It involves a lot of group activities and parties and will be a time you will never forget.

Accommodation

What is great in Halmstad is, that every exchange student is guaranteed a place in one of the three student dorms (if you apply on time). “HSK Fastigheter” is responsible for these matters and allows you to carry out a survey in the application process, so they have a better idea of what kind of dorm room you wish to stay in. The price ranges from 190-390 euros and there are single / double rooms with shared kitchens, shared apartments or single / double rooms with an own kitchen. I ended up staying in a shared room with a kitchen in “Vallen” for 260 euros a month. It was a small room with a bunk bed, two desks and a fully equipped kitchen, as well as a bathroom (see pictures below). It took time to get used to having little personal space, but a double room is significantly cheaper, and I did not spend a lot of time in my room anyway. I also had a nice roommate which made some tough times less lonely. The dorm was around 3km away from the university (maximum 15 minutes by bike). The bike paths in Sweden are perfect and allow you to reach everywhere fast and safe, even in winter. Most of the exchange students live in “Kräsbaret”.



The university organises a free pick-up service for exchange students from the Halmstad airport or train station, so you don't have to worry about how to get to your accommodation with all your luggage.

Studies in Halmstad

Both the BTU and the university in Halmstad have similar sizes – quite small and familiar. The university system at Halmstad is very different however, compared to the BTU. The semester is split into two halves and then you usually carry out 15 credits for each. The modules have less content and there are less lectures, however every module will involve some kind of group work project and presentation, which will either involve you deepening the knowledge of a topic you're interested in or the application of knowledge gained in the lectures. All my classes also required me to prepare for lectures by reading articles beforehand and there were seminars at least every two weeks. The classes in the environmental faculty are usually not big and involve interaction, which was nice. Although the content was not especially challenging and was sometimes unorganized, I enjoyed many opportunities to apply the knowledge we gained. This was only from my perspective however, since I enjoyed the content of the lectures and felt like I would not have had the opportunity to learn these subjects in Cottbus. Every class also involved at least one excursion. What I enjoyed about the environmental faculty classes was also, that we were in classes together with Swedes. We got to know Swedish people in that way and carried out group work with them. The classes in the business faculty were usually just full of exchange students.

Since I am very keen in learning new languages, I took a Swedish course which was very beneficial for me. It is less theoretical and more practical, involving many speaking exercises for fast application in real life. I recommend this class to everyone. There is also a 5-week Swedish summer course before the semester begins.

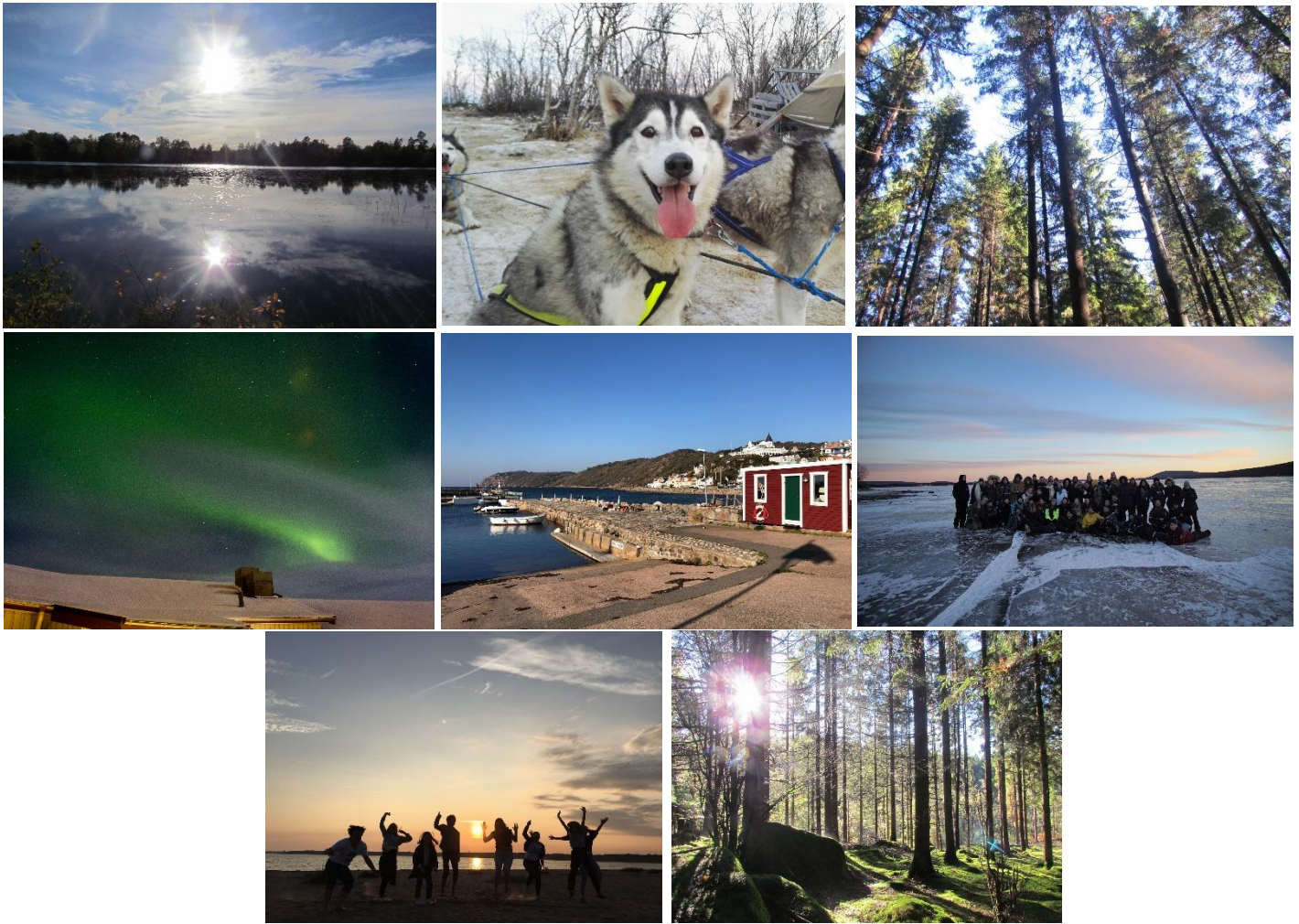
I additionally chose the modules Conservation Biology (15 credits), which I can recommend, as well as Sustainable Rural Environment (7.5 credits), which gave me some insights into interesting fields like biogas and the Swedish Environmental Goals for instance, yet I would not recommend it as much. It is not challenging and very superficial at times.

Everyday life and free time activities

Halmstad is a small and cute town located by the ocean. It has a good location, being only one hour away from Gothenburg and around two hours apart from Malmö. Many students did trips to these cities, as well as Oslo, Stockholm, Lund, Helsingborg, Copenhagen or national parks in the centre of Sweden. Along the west coast there are also various small and cute fishing villages to visit, like Bastad or the region of Kullaberg for instance. The Student Union organises two excursions to north of Sweden (Lapland), for a price of 395 euros. I can really recommend that trip.

Halmstad is known for having the most beautiful beach in Sweden, Tylosand, and is surrounded by many beautiful lakes and forests around (see pictures below). Most exchange students buy themselves a second-hand bike, which makes it easier for you to get around the city explore the surroundings. I enjoyed the Swedish nature with my friends by going to the forest almost every weekend. At the start of the semester, the weather was still warm, so we went to the beach a lot, which is very close, to enjoy the sunset with some barbeques or fires.

There are additionally many opportunities to carry out sports at the university.



Before coming to Halmstad, you need to be aware that Sweden is an expensive country. After spending some time there however, you will have a better idea of where to find cheap supermarkets or loopholes. For instance, there are, like everywhere in Sweden, many affordable second-hand stores, which is an example for a cheap alternative available. The city has many bars and restaurants to offer, yet these are in majority very expensive, so cooking becomes a very common free time activity. I only went out to eat properly a small number of times. Any alcohol above 4% needs to be bought in a special alcohol store Systembolaget, which is also significantly more expensive, but still a lot cheaper than to go into a bar. There are however student bars and clubs that have affordable prices (Hjärter 6, Smålands, Ölfiket). Due to this, an stay in Sweden will not be a “typical” exchange semester of having big parties every day, but there are still many things to do, as I mentioned above.

Overall, I had a magnificent time in Sweden, and I hope my report was useful.