

Exchange Report

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Introduction

In this report i will document my stay in Tallinn. I will describe my different experiences with my host university and the estonian city life in general.

I personally chose to study abroad for a semester, because i wanted a new experience. I wanted to know what a student's life in another country was like, and wanted to feel it on my own body. To gain another perspective on my life in Denmark, and to meet new and exciting people.

Study program and courses

I am studying computer science at KEA in Denmark. My fourth semester, the spring semester of 2019, i chose to study abroad at Taltech in Tallinn, Estonia.

I had six different courses:

Governance and Management of Cyber Security

This course described the different security frameworks that institutions use and implement to heighten their level of data security. Furthermore the exam was a group project where we had to develop a complete list of necessary security measures for a given business process.

Introduction to Cyber Security

This course described the different aspects of general cyber security. These aspects included Cryptography (and a detailed explanation of some the most used symmetric and asymmetric algorithms + message digest algorithms), detailed risk analysis methods and alternatives and legal aspects of cyber security including the GDPR.

Cryptography

This course described the different algorithms and methods used in the field of Cryptography. During this course we made our own simplified implementations of some of the most used cryptographic algorithms, both symmetric and asymmetric. Also the concepts of for example the secure TLS connection was included in the curriculum.

Windows Administration

In this course we learned some of the basic skills of a windows system administrator. We set up three virtual machines, and learned how to manage the different protocols and systems for example DHCP, Active Directory and Group policy enforcing.

Java Technologies

This course described the most popular frameworks used to develop Java Web applications such as Spring and Maven. The basic concepts of setting up a backend REST API was described, and the exam was a project including the development of exactly such a system.

Fundamentals of Python

This course covered the basics of python. We were taught to use some of the most implemented libraries such as Matplotlib and Panda.

Academic Experience

1. How helpful was the receiving school in the process of choosing classes and settling you in?

The school was very helpful, but i think that was necessary, since the whole process was done through their own IT system, and getting credentials required a visit to IT support. The actual classes were a bit difficult to choose from, because some of them had no listed prerequisites even though a lot was clearly needed. I didn't submit my choice until after the first week (maybe two), because i needed to attend at least one lesson of each class to find out if it was gonna be possible to complete it.

2. What classes/study experiences did you find the most rewarding? Why?

The windows administration class was actually the most rewarding for me, even though it was not the topic i was looking forward to the most. This was because while all the security courses were my primary priority, these courses were mostly theoretical. The whole lesson of Windows administration was practical, in the sense that we spent all the time setting up and managing systems.

3. What classes/study experiences did you find least relevant or least valuable to you? Why?

The least valuable was the fundamentals of python. The teacher was not really that skilled, and it was clear that his understanding of the different libraries was very superficial. Furthermore the amount of lessons in this course, made it impossible to learn very much because the course was so short.

4. What classes would you advice other KEA students going to the receiving school to choose or not to choose?

If you are really bad at focusing on a speaker without a break for hours in a row, don't choose any classes with Valdo Praust. While it is very clear that he has a lot of knowledge and experience, and just generally knows what he is talking about, it can be very hard to focus on what he is saying after a while.

Even though i did not go there, the classes in the sports centre was widely recommended among my fellow students.

Cultural/Personal Experience

1. What challenges did you experience culturally while being abroad?

How helpful was the receiving school in this process?

I didn't take the estonian language course because i felt with 30 points i already had enough classes, so the language was just impossible. But most service minded places the staff spoke english, at least to a degree where the most common requests could be carried out without problems.

When you live in Estonia for so long you need to fill out a residence form, and hand it in to the nearest government office. During this process the school was very helpful, and even filled out an example on the big projector screen during a presentation and waited for everyone to follow along with their own info. You should also apply for an estonian id, if for nothing else then because it grants you free access to the public transport in Tallinn, if you connect it the green transport card.

2. What was the best cultural/personal experience during your studies abroad?

The European Study Nation (ESN) department of Tallinn and also the Taltech department, arranged so many wonderful events that really brought a lot of unforgettable moments into everyone's semester. For example there was an international dinner, were a lot of the students volunteered to make food from their home country, so at the event you could try homemade dishes from more than 15 different nations.

I had so many great experiences with parties and trips abroad with my new friends, that it is simply impossible to choose a single one as the best.

3. What advice would you give other KEA students going to study abroad at the receiving school?

It's really worth it to go to as many events as possible at least in the start of the semester, even if you are tired, to meet new and interesting people that you can get to know better over the following months.

If you can try and avoid taking classes early on Thursday, because for some reason everyone goes out on Wednesday. And i mean everyone, also the ones with classes on Thursday, as me for example.

Also the water is perfectly drinkable in Estonia, it just tastes like a swimming pool. So either get used to it, or reserve some space in your fridge for store bought water.

Practical Experience

1. How was the application process? What did KEA help you with? What help did you receive from your school abroad?

I personally think that the application process was complicated. Not necessarily difficult, just complicated because there are so many steps and different deadlines. The mobility coordinator was very helpful, and answered all my questions when i wrote an email, and even answered my phone call on a weekend because a deadline was approaching. From Taltech i also recieved help, primarily with updating my learning agreement and using their own system to choose courses.

2. Did you have any practical difficulties settling down in at your destination? How helpful was the receiving school in this process?

Not really no. I lived really close to the university, less than a three minute walk. As i described earlier in the personal experience, it was required to fill out some residence forms and the school was very helpful in this matter.

3. Where did you live? Was it difficult to find accommodation? Was it expensive?

I lived at Academic Hostel at Akadeemia Tee 11/1. This is practically on the university campus so i did not have a long commute. It was not difficult to find this hostel, since Taltech gave out the information about possible accommodations. The room i lived in, i shared with my danish classmate. We live two people in one room, and share kitchen and bathroom with one other room. Every person pays 220 Euros per month, which is about 1600 danish crowns. All in all i would say it's very cheap, and my Erasmus grant covered more than all my rent.

4. What kind of expenses did you have in general? Did you spend more or less money than you budgeted with?

Estonian prices doesn't really vary that much from danish prices. I would say that generally grocery shopping is cheaper, but alcohol (which for me is very relevant) was mostly more expensive than in Denmark.

Even though i would say i party a lot in Denmark, the amount of parties and just social events with or without beer was a little more than anticipated and became a larger cost than what i expected. But my biggest unplanned expenses down here, was definitely all the trips abroad that i did. I have during my semester visited Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia. Even though you can take the bus to many places here for less than 20 Euros (5 to Latvia if you are lucky) still the amount of trips ended up costing a lot. So i spend a little more than i anticipated, but all in all it was worth it.