

ERASMUS IN FINLAND

Everything started in January 2020. I signed up for Erasmus in Finland. In May my chosen University – LAB University of Applied Sciences send me the result: Congratulations! You have been selected for a student exchange programme in Lahti. I couldn't believe that. Situation in the world wasn't good because of coronavirus. Many people discouraged me and they told me I will have to stay at home. But University still wanted exchange students so I continued in the process and didn't give up.

On 10th of August, I arrived to Helsinki airport. In 3 hours I got to Lahti and found my flat. The semester started on 24th of August, so I arrived 14 days before, because I had to be in the quarantine. On 24th of August started the orientation week for exchange students. I couldn't wait to meet other exchange students. Because of coronavirus we had this week online. I was here alone so beginnings were really hard. Another not very good news was, that there are just 3 students of nursing – me and 2 girls from the Netherlands. They welcomed us at the University and we had an online tour of the campus. They told us what we need to arrange and wished us good luck to study. At the same time finally I could get out (my quarantine finished). I still remember my first feelings of Finland. When I took the train from airport to Lahti, all the way I had my eyes in the window. During this journey, I saw more trees than ever before. The first time I was in the city, nature, I knew this country was the best choice I could do. When I was in the forest at the first time (10 minutes by my flat) I was just walking with the open mouth and saying: Wow.

Every student got your own teacher who helped us to enroll in the courses. I had selected the courses before arrival in the Learning Agreement, but in the end I had most of the another courses. Some courses have already started or it wasn't for exchange students. My courses were: Anticipating future trends, Basic Nursing Competency, Survival Finnish, Family nursing (Pediatrics), Medicine (Anatomy and Microbiology), Promoting health and wellbeing.

In my 1st year at University, I heard all people who were on Erasmus. Many teachers or students were talking about Finland. And they were very satisfied here. I knew I want to visit those northern states one day. So I said why not? I submitted the application on the last possible day. I thought about it a lot. I was alone, it was for a quite a long time (almost 5 months), my English has never been good. I was scared to handle school (at home and in Finland), to make ends meet, find flat and many, many another problems. But I wanted to improve my English and I think there isn't better way than talk, talk and talk. The next main reason was that I wanted to try clinical practice in the hospital in another country to see how does it works. What they do differently as in the Czech Republic, what is better, how the healthcare works,... And yes of course, I wanted to visit new country and travel, meet new people, see another culture, language.

So many friends asked me: Why Finland? You could choose almost every country, you could go to Mallorca or Hawaii (Yes, maybe it could be more attractive). I have never been in Finland ever before, so I decided after what I heard by other people or read. It was: Scandinavian form of education is one of the best in the world, there is beautiful nature, low crime – safe country, people are very happy here, accommodating to strangers, fair, honest, but cold. Many things works here great, the state supports own inhabitants (students and working people) and people believe and listen to them. It is one of the more expensive countries, but e.g. Oslo is more expensive. What was important to me, almost everyone here speaks English despite the fact that the national language is Finnish (I saw a good possibility to improve my English and communicate in the country). Now I think I can say own opinion.

Honestly, I fell in love with this country. Since I arrived, I can say I felt really good. The Finns never had a problem with me – as a stranger. I was a little bit scared because traveling in this time – coronavirus. There wasn't any problem in the store, on the street or railway station to talk English, every time when I needed to ask something for advice, everyone talked to me in English and they were helpful. Education was a big shock. Firstly, I was surprised that we have so many assignments – some during course and other for every lesson. But in a short time I got used to it. I would start by courses during the semester. In the Czech Republic, we have courses all semester and in the end we have exams. In Finland, we had every course for some time (e.g. on September – October) and after last lesson we had an exam. I think that's more effective, because students remember it and know information to exam. If we have in the Czech Republic 1st 3 lessons of some course on September and 2nd 3 lessons on November, I think that almost students don't remember what we learned few months ago. And many things you have to write, because you forget on exam on January.

What really surprised me was behavior of teachers. I would say in one sentence: they were like our friends who wants to pass on as much information as possible to us. I felt from the lessons that the teachers are happy they can teach students something new and students are pleased they can learn it. I found it strange to title the teacher: Hi and not by their title. And says them by her name – Anna, Sari, not doctor or Mr. Professor. Maybe it also made an impression „friendly communication“. Every single teacher, who taught me in Finland was amazing! They connected theory a lot with practical examples, on the online lessons they played us videos, pictures, send us links where can find more information or they showed us their own procedure via camera. Always answered our questions, never with the feeling that somebody asked wrong question. First time in my life happened to me that teachers said: I don't know. In the Czech Republic sometimes I feel that the teacher don't know answer, but say something because she doesn't want to say I don't know. It made teachers' behavior even more sympathetic to me. The teacher asked us for the answer and when we told it, she told she believe us. Another teacher said she will find the answer for the next lesson and really – next lesson started answer for this question. The teacher praised us in every lesson. And never happened to me that someone didn't do an assignment.

From the beginning I had a lessons that were predominantly online. After when I had some practice lesson I had to be at school. We had materials in the Moodle before every lesson, in schedule there was written topic of every lesson and you could prepare yourself. In some lessons we had to submit an assignment (topic was for next lesson) and on the lesson everybody have some main information about topic. Other students were from the Great Britain, Netherlands, Africa (Kenya, Uganda), Japan, Nepal, Vietnam ...

I enrolled to course „Survival Finnish“ – I wanted to learn some main words and phrases in the Finnish. In this course I met many exchange students from France, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Russia, Lithuania. I was worried because it's hard for me to learn new language and the Finnish looks so difficult. Our teacher was very funny and patient, she taught us main Finnish words by little games in class using videos, papers, drawing, work in pair and every lesson starts „battle“ when we connected by Kahoot and repeated the last lesson in the competition. I started to enjoy Finnish lessons and I was sorry when we had the last lesson. In the end of course we wrote a test and everybody passed it. Some main sentences in Finnish what I learned: Hyvää päivää! Mine nimi on Kristýna. Minun lempinimi on Kika. Minä olen kaksikymmentä. Olen kotoisin Tšekki. Minä puhun tsekkilainen ja englantia. Mitä kuuluu? Kiitos, hyvää. Teacher read us the longest word in the world, which is in the Finnish. But I'm not so far, I'm still beginner :D

Sometimes it was really hard. I had a bad luck. In September, my notebook broke. Unfortunately, my University couldn't lend me, it was one of conditions – have your own notebook. I decided that my parents will buy me a new one and send it to me. I was waiting and it was hard, we had many online lessons and I had to do everything by my phone. I had to write Anatomy exam and I knew it will be problem, because not everything worked on the phone. But fortunately, I wrote about my situation to teacher of this course and she helped me, she told me I can write this exam when I will have a new notebook. I think you can understand my joy when I received a voucher from the post office in Lahti that I can pick up the package. Firstly, I didn't know where to start, so many things to do, but I was so happy I can continue.

From the beginning I traveled mainly near or in Lahti. It was still good weather and I could go on longer walking trips. Autumn was beautiful, many colors, leaves and amazing sunsets. Situation in the Czech Republic wasn't good because of coronavirus, in Finland I think I can say it was really good. We were the best country in the Europe, the least number of infected. No strict measures, only disinfection at the entrance, mask only recommended. But I was scared about my family and friends at home. I watched the situation – was days when we had about 200-300 positive people in Finland per day and at the same time in the Czech Republic it was 15 000 positive people per day.

I met a girl from the Czech Republic who studied at the University of Helsinki. She was here alone too and I later found out that we had exactly the same problems. We met in Helsinki firstly, she showed me the city and I finally talked Czech here. We became friends and traveled sometimes together. We consulted the problems, supported each other and gave each other tips about studying or Finland. In November, we went to a hockey game in Hartwall arena in Helsinki. Czech Republic vs. Finland. It was a huge enjoyment. The Czech team won 2:0.

I was sorry to find out that I would not have an internship in the hospital. The teachers wanted that foreigners should know the basics phrases and words of Finnish and my classmates should have internship from March 2021. In addition, I had school until December so I didn't have much time. In the end I didn't mind. I had a course Basic nursing competency, where we learn things as disinfection, catheterization, nasogastric tube, measure of physiological functions, but this course was very important for me. I learnt some new things, although most things were the same as in the Czech Republic. And learnt English words for this topics. My motivation was much bigger than in the school at home. I knew I need it for the exam and I can use this words for lessons or assignments. I think that some things was better than we learnt in the Czech Republic. So when I come back home, I will use some things I learnt in Finland – how to learn, use more pictures and videos, more self-study, still improve my English and learning new words, and some tips as a nurse.

In conclusion I can say it was one of the best experience of my life. I still can't believe time flies so fast. Those months was full of learning, assignments, fear of what will, can I finish semester, English but also knowledge of a new country, people, travelling, improving my English, learning new language, independence, more confidence, motivation to study and big support by my friends and family who helped me so much.

I had the opportunity to try education in one of the best countries in the world. And I can say I wish this education in the Czech Republic one day too. The way of teaching, teachers' behavior and great using of today's possibilities as internet materials. I wish more teachers open to new possibilities, teach students to learn not for good grades, but self-study and their knowledge and more individually exams. I wish students not to be afraid to ask questions and have a friendly relationship with their teachers.

Also the cooperation of students who learn and fulfill their tasks. I think we have a long way before us yet, but maybe thanks of coronavirus we are on the good way.

I admire the Finns how to respect their country and they are rightfully proud. People take care of their beautiful nature and they are were decent. I wish I could feel so safe in the Czech Republic, not scary about robbery. Don't lock the bike, don't have fences around the house or study in the library or in coffee house and go to toilet and have at the table my bag, wallet, macbook, iphone and nobody steals it.

2 days ago, I had my last online lesson with my teacher from Finland. She asked me what will miss me from Finland at home? I said: everything. Kind people, feel so safety, running in the forest, beautiful nature, education, using English, using Finnish words: Moi! (Hi), Kiitos (thank you) or Hyvää huomenta! (good morning) and snow.

Tomorrow I will come back home. I can't wait to see my family and friends, but at the same time I'm sad. It used to be a „unknown“ country on the map for me where are reindeers and snow. Now it means a lot to me. This country stole my heart. I'm sure I will come back one day. I want to visit Lapland in normal situation, without masks, open country borders and with people I love. I can't wait to come back!

Suomi, Kiitos! □□

20.12.2020

LAHTI





HELSINKI



