

Erfahrungsbericht zum Auslandsstudium

1. Land und Landestypisches

- Compared to Berlin Helsinki is overall colder but sunnier than Berlin. The summer does not get as hot, but it still feels like summer. The winter will be colder, but because of the sun and snow I like the winter much better than in Berlin. The darkness never was an issue for me (the sun only sets about half an hour earlier than in Berlin). Also, the weather can change quite quickly within a day because it is so close to the ocean. For the winter you will need warmer clothes than what would be sufficient for a German winter. But you can also buy that in Helsinki.
- The ocean is really close in most areas in Helsinki. In general Helsinki is very walkable and it is easy to get around by bike. There are also two national parks right outside of Helsinki that are reachable by public transport.

2. Fachliche Betreuung

- The local geography student association is very active and usually has 1-2 tutors specifically for the concerns for exchange students. They contacted me already before there I arrived in Finland, sent a lot of useful information and constantly invited us exchange students to events organized by the student organization. The big orientation week only happens in the winter semester, but you will still get the necessary information if you arrive in the summer semester.
- The academic year is divided in 4 periods (classes for 6 weeks + 1 week exams). There is a longer break between period 2 and 3 (Christmas break). There are also additional intensive periods or intensive courses.

- All courses you can take at the Geography department will be Master level courses, since the Bachelor is completely in Finnish and Swedish. Not all courses are open to exchange students on SISU (the Agnes equivalent at Helsinki University). In most cases you can send the lecturers an email and they will manually add you if there is enough space.
- All courses at the Geography department have 5 ECTS – it varies for other departments. Some courses are not graded (the only grading is pass/fail) – check beforehand if that will be an issue at the HU.

3. Sprachkompetenz

- You will need good English skills to sufficiently participate in the courses.
- You won't need Finnish to manage everyday life and University life, but it certainly helps and I felt more connected to the country and the people the more my Finnish improved. If you plan to take Finnish courses you should register early, because they fill up quite fast. I also recommend participating in the language tandem programs.
- Finland also has Swedish as an official language and in Helsinki almost everything is available in Finnish and Swedish, so if you speak Swedish you have an advantage.

4. Weiterempfehlung

- I would definitely recommend doing an exchange in Helsinki, but of course it depends on what you are looking for. It is a great place to be if you want really good university courses with dedicated teachers, an active student (association) life, if you like winter, rugged coastlines, northern nature and good (interior) design. Helsinki also has a lot of culture to offer (great indie cinemas, museums, film festivals). If you are looking for a cheap

place with an active party and drinking life it is probably not the place for you.

- I also highly recommend staying 2 semesters. Really getting to know a place takes time. Further, Finns are quite reserved and it takes a while for most of them to warm up to you. The city also changes a lot from one season to the next.
- If you come to Helsinki I would advise you to always say yes to invitations even if you are tired – especially in the beginning, because often new things arise from there and it is much easier to get to know Finns if they have seen you around a few times already.

5. Verpflegung an der Hochschule

- There are University Cafeterias all over the city (called Unicafe). Some are big, others quite small. With the student discount a meal costs about 3 Euro (2023/24). This includes a salad, a meal, bread and water. There is always at least one vegan option at every Unicafe. While generally similar, each Unicafe offers different meals – so it is worthwhile to check the Unicafes in the area beforehand to decide where you want to go.
- One Unicafe (Kaivopiha) in the city center is also open in the evening and on Saturdays. I had many days when I was eating twice at an Unicafe because of that.

6. Öffentliche Verkehrsmittel

- With the student discount a monthly pass for public transport in the Helsinki area costs about 40 Euro (2023/24). It is more expensive if you need to include zone C or D as well. A single ticket is about 3 Euro.
- From April to October Helsinki has a bike sharing system. The disruption of bike stations is quite good (although sometimes it

was difficult to find an available bike because it is used so much by the locals) and a 6-month ticket is only 35 Euro. I highly recommend using this as an option in the summer.

7. Wohnen

- Most students get an accommodation with HOAS. Exchange students can also apply to get a flat/room with them. They will send you only one offer and if you don't accept this you won't get another. It is not guaranteed that you will get an offer with them. Local students will get offers first. I met exchange students who never got an offer with them or only 2 weeks before they arrived. So, I highly recommend looking for an alternative beforehand.
- Exchange students usually get an accommodation in the outer city areas. If you want to live in the city center, I would try to find my own living situation through e.g. Facebook groups.
- It will be hard to rent a flat as a foreigner through official channels. For almost all of them you will need the Finnish ID number (EU citizens can only apply for it once they are in Finland) and I also only encountered 12 month contracts.
- Private shared living (especially with strangers) is not as common in Finland as it is in Germany. There is no WG Gesucht equivalent.
- If you don't get an offer through HOAS or if you don't want to accept it the best chance is probably sublet a room/apartment from someone who is also doing Erasmus or an internship. I would also contact the Geography student association (MAO ry), because they might know of places to stay through friends.
- I paid 700 Euro a month for a studio apartment and later 440 for a room in a shared flat – both in the city center. This includes all utilities, internet, washing and communal sauna.

8. Kultur und Freizeit

- Of course Helsinki is smaller than Berlin and Finns won't get tired in telling you how small Helsinki is, but I felt like the city had a lot to offer. It might not jump in your face as much as in Berlin, but there are a lot of really cool and unique places in Helsinki. It has a lot of cute cafes and bars. The clubs can be a hit or miss depending on who is the DJ. The good club scene also tends to be a little underground (but it is possible to get the right connections if you keep your eyes and ears open).
- Helsinki has really good indie cinemas that show great movies that are not the typical blockbuster movies. In my time Helsinki had at least 4 film festivals with a lot of cinemas participating (be careful that you don't miss them – they only last a few days). Movies here are usually in the original language (often English) with Finnish and Swedish subtitles. If a movie is not originally in English it is harder to find a version that is shown with English subtitles but not impossible.
- Helsinki has a lot of great museums. I recommend getting the Museokortti. It is about 70 Euros and with it you get access to almost all museums in Finland for a year.
- If you like spending time in nature, there are many opportunities just outside of Helsinki – a lot of them can be reached by public transport.
- Helsinki (and Finland in general) is great for swimming. There are many dedicated swimming areas all along the coast line.
- There will probably be sauna in the building you will be living in, but I would also check out the many public saunas all across the city. My favorite is Kuluurisauna.

9. Auslandsfinanzierung

- You will definitely need more than the ERASMUS money to afford living in Helsinki. I kept my Berlin student job during my Erasmus

time (but this also meant that there was a lot less time to enjoy the city and participate in activities).

- Rent will probably be between 400 and 800 Euros a month. Groceries are about as expensive as in Germany if you stick to Lidl – a little more if you buy most things at the other supermarkets. Alcohol and eating out is much more expensive than in Germany and there are almost no cheap (& healthy) Fast Food options like getting a Falafel here. I would recommend eating at least once a day at Unicafe for 3 Euros if you need to keep your living costs low.
- If you don't want to worry about money too much in your everyday life and take part in your friends activities (going to a bar, club, cinema, gym,) I would plan with at least 300 Euro additional to what you pay for rent. Also remember that you might need warm cloths that you don't already have.