

Exchange semester Istanbul

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi

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General Information

I studied from the 28th of September '15 till the 12th of January '16 at the *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi* (Bosphorus University), in Istanbul. The Boğaziçi University is a famous, well-known university in Turkey and recognized as the best public university in Turkey. The top 1% of high school students are only allowed to study at the Boğaziçi University. The University is located in 'Bebek', one of the most beautiful and best neighborhoods in Istanbul. The campus is divided into two parts, the North campus and the South campus. The North campus is nice, but less spectacular compared with the South campus. The picture at the front page of this report is a picture of the South campus. When you walk down the hill to this campus you can enjoy the beautiful view from the Bosphorus river, the Bosphorus bridge and the Asian side:



Istanbul is definitely one of the best and biggest cities I have ever visited. With an estimated population of 15 million people is Istanbul recognized as the 5th biggest city of the world (in terms of population within city limits), so it is definitely worth it to study here for 4 months. Even after this period I didn't visited all the parts of Istanbul, so there is no possibility you get bored during this semester!

Preparation

Before leaving there are a couple of things you have to do. First of all, the application at the Boğaziçi University. You simply have to fill in the forms on the internet and send it to the institution. You will receive before the start of the semester your student number and password in order to fill in these forms and upload the requested documents. Among these documents the Boğaziçi University requires a proof of English language. The most common tests to 'proof' your English level is the TOEFL test and the IELTS test. I did the TOEFL test at their test center in Amsterdam (97/120). The test is not that hard and since you don't need a really high score to get accepted for this university, I think you shouldn't worry about it.

Secondly, the Erasmus+ Grant. In order to receive the Erasmus+ Grant you also need to fill in some forms and let signed by your exchange coordinator. Please note that you enter the correct dates, because the grant will be determined based on these dates.

Thirdly, your visa. Before leaving it is important to buy a tourist visa so you are allowed to enter the country. Via the government site of Turkey it is really easy to get an E-visa (approximately €20,-). You also need to hand in a copy of your visa, among a few other documents, during the application of your residence permit. Please bring your passport with you as well, because the migration department in Turkey does not accept National Identity cards when you apply for a residence permit!

Fourthly, your plane ticket. Because we travelled late in the tourist season the plane ticket to Istanbul was really cheap. I only paid €60 for a one way ticket to Istanbul Atatürk airport. There are two airports in Istanbul: the *Atatürk Airport*, which is located at the European side of Istanbul and the *Sabiha Gökçen Airport*, which is located at the Asian side. You can easily travel from both airports by bus to the center of Istanbul.

Lastly, housing. Before you leave to Istanbul it is smart to orientate for housing possibilities. It is of course possible to live in the dormitories near the campus but I don't recommend it. It is expensive, you are not allowed to receive visitors after 1p.m., you are not allowed to drink alcohol and since the dormitories are located near the university you are forced to take a cab if you want to go to the clubs near Taksim square. However, the rooms are clean, it is an easy solution and it is a good way to meet other international students, so decide yourself. Personally, I preferred to stay more in the center of Istanbul near *Taksim* square. I lived in *Cihangir* with two other Erasmus students/friends who I met during the pre-departure drink at the EUR. Cihangir is a really nice and cozy neighborhood close to Taksim square, supermarkets and the metro station. A useful website to find houses is *craigslist* or you can join various Facebook groups where houses are offered to exchange students.



(1) My neighborhood during late December



(2) Me at the Sultan Ahmed mosque

Arrival

I arrived the 26th of August and the orientation day was scheduled on the 11th of September. However, the start of the semester was on the 28th of September, so I had plenty of time to travel across Turkey, to do some sightseeing in Istanbul and to find housing. I recommend to attend the orientation day because they will give you a lot of information about the university, about Istanbul and how to apply for the courses and for your residence permit. Besides that, it is a great opportunity to meet your fellow exchange students who are also going to study at the Boğaziçi University this semester. After the orientation day the university organized a drink and during that drink I met a lot of new friends. I also recommend to go to the introduction parties or trips organized by the ESN (Erasmus Student Network) or other student organizations to get in touch with your fellow exchange students. For example, I went to Cappadocia with my roommates organized by the ESN. During this trip I met a lot of new people and it is a good way to visit all the parts of Turkey.



(3) my view during the balloon flight in Cappadocia

During the first week of the semester you can pick up your student card and your travel card at the exchange office. You need to show your student card if you want to enter the campus or library (because of security reasons) and you can put money on this card if you want to grab a meal at the canteen. You can travel cheaply with your personal travel card by bus, metro, tram or ferry, because of the student discount. Before you receive your personal travel card you can also buy an anonymous travel card at one of the ticket machines for only 10TL (approx. €3). The last couple of years the government invested a lot in the infrastructure, so everything is easily accessible via public transportation.

Courses

During this exchange semester you have to choose at least two courses from your department. The other courses, in order to collect your required credits, can you choose freely. I chose three economic courses (Topics in Banking & Finance, Urban economics and Growth & Development) and one language course (Turkish for Foreigners I). Topics in Banking & Finance was my favorite course, because it gave me insight into the Turkish banking sector, the professor was really good and I'm interested in the banking sector. Urban economics was a fine and easy course. You could already collect 60% of your final grade with assignments and a presentation. However, I don't recommend Growth & Development. During this course you have to read a lot of papers about growth theories and the history of how countries developed over the past years. But for your final grade you could choose to do an exam or to write a term paper. I really recommend to do the Turkish language course. It is an easy course and it is nice to get familiar with the language of your host country. Don't expect that you can speak Turkish fluently after this course, but at least you can order some food and recognize some words.

Finances

Because of the favorable exchange rate during my stay in Istanbul (about €1/3,2TL) it was cheap live in Istanbul. On average you pay 20TL in a restaurant for descent meal. Besides that, you can also choose to eat at the university canteen where you only pay 1,5TL for a lunch or meal. If you want to cook by yourself or buy some groceries you can easily go to the supermarket. The three biggest supermarkets in Istanbul are the SOK, Carrefour and Migros. Out of these three supermarkets the SOK is the cheapest one. However, alcohol is highly taxed in Turkey so unfortunately you pay the same prices compared to Holland. For housing in Istanbul the price varies greatly, depending on where you want to stay. For example, I stayed in the center of Istanbul near Taksim square so I paid relatively more compared to other students who lived in the neighborhoods Şişli, Beşiktaş or Osmanbey. I paid about €400 per month (bills included) for my shared apartment and private bedroom. Sightseeing in Istanbul is mainly free for students, because you can get a museum card which allows you to enter almost all the touristic hotspots for free or against huge discount. Traveling across Turkey is also not that expensive. For a domestic flight from Istanbul to Antalya, from Antalya to Izmir and from Izmir back to Istanbul I paid €120. During this trip I stayed in hostels or apartments booked via Airbnb (approx. €15 per night). In total I spend about €900-€1000 per month including housing expenses, trips, food and nightlife.

Daily life

My daily life was 'slightly' different compared to Holland. Because Istanbul never sleeps there is always something you can do. Of course I recommend to travel across Turkey or maybe outside of Turkey and to do some sightseeing. But mainly I hanged out with friends, went to the university for a lecture or went to the gym. I also went a lot of times to the shisha lounge to smoke the best shisha's of the world, drink some tea (called *çay* in Turkish) and to play backgammon (a famous game in Turkey played by local people). I also recommend to go to a football match of one of the biggest football clubs in Turkey (Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray or Beşiktaş). The atmosphere during the matches are amazing and it is not too expensive. I also played every Monday evening football with some friends. You can easily rent a court and play 6 vs. 6. Across Istanbul there are also great restaurant to have breakfast, lunch or dinner. I really recommend to grab at least once a traditional Turkish breakfast! And if you want to relax you can easily go to a *hamam*, but since it is expensive and mainly for tourists I didn't went very often.



(4) At Atatürk stadium during a match of Galatasaray SK.

Thank you for ready! I hope you have a wonderful time in Istanbul and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me or send an email to sander.ruudvandam@gmail.com.